

VULNERABLE TO POSSIBILITIES
A JOURNEY OF SELF-KNOWING THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines one man's experience of becoming an adult educator. Pausing to reflect after twenty-six years of teaching others how to teach, I set out to excavate the foundations of my professional practice, to crack open such questions as *How did I become this teacher?* and *How does my lived experience inform my professional practice?*

Zooming between the personal and the professional, I layer autobiographical memories, critical incidents, narrative poetry, photographs, collages, and fictional dialogues into a multi-voiced narrative. Declining the security of traditional research tools (such as testing, measuring, classifying, generalizing, and theorizing), I turn instead to the Zen notion of Beginner's Mind, an approach that opens me to many possibilities. Rummaging amongst the messy fragments of lived experience, I encounter the slipperiness of language and the subjectivity of interpretation. I roam widely in the literature and invite colleagues to read and respond to work-in-progress.

In due course I find that whole-hearted writing fosters self-transformation and that exposing such work to others triggers conversations about identity and integrity. I now present an open text—one that invites readers to locate their own stories between the lines, interrogate their own teacher persona, and awaken to their own experience.

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For my parents
Hildegard Grein (1916-1946)
and Cornelius Renner (1911-1970),
without whom ...

PREFACE

In 1943, the same year I was born, the Dutch artist M.C. Escher creates “Reptiles” and describes it as follows:

Amid of objects, a drawing book lies open, and the drawing on view is a mosaic of reptilian figures in three contrasting shades. Evidently one of them has tired of lying flat and rigid amongst his fellows, so he puts one plastic-looking leg over the edge of the book, wrenches himself free and launches out into real life.



Figure 1: M.C. Escher, *Reptiles*, lithograph (1943)

He climbs up the back of a book on zoology and works his laborious way up the slippery slope of a setsquare to the highest point of his existence. Then after a quick snort, tired but fulfilled, he goes downhill again, via an ashtray, to the level surface, to that flat drawing paper, and ... rejoins his erstwhile friends, taking up once more his function as an element of surface-division. (1967, p.12)

This is a gift I have, simple, simple;
 a foolish extravagant spirit,
 full of forms, figures, shapes, objects,
 apprehensions, motions, revolutions.

Holofernes, a schoolmaster
 Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*
 Act iv, Scene ii

Dear Reader:

Welcome to my doctoral thesis. For many years now, my professional home has been in faculty and staff development; my roles those of self-employed trainer on instructional and facilitating skills, and author/publisher of how-to books in the same field. Three years ago, after three decades of telling and showing others how to teach, I decided to join a doctoral program designed for practitioners. I came to survey the bedrock of my practice and to dig among the roots of my working philosophy, driven by such questions as *How did I become this teacher?* and *How does my lived experience inform my professional practice?*

The resulting narrative study is more than a collection of tales. To be considered a *Meisterstück*—a master piece in the mediaeval tradition, worthy of high merit and admission to the practice of a craft—it aims to shed light on the intimately personal side of professional development, one that rarely comes under the loupe of academic investigation. Situated at

the intersection of academy and praxis¹, it sets out to excavate personal memories, ruminate on their meaning, and—through the interweaving of other voices—arrive at a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of what it means to become a person and a teacher.

You will notice several features that make this work non-traditional. For one thing, the four or five chapters so customary in thesis writing are missing. For another, it is written in the first person singular and employs an array of poetic, metaphoric, and narrative forms of expression. It proceeds chronologically—as a writing project and as a life-history record. Fashioned on a five-stage model of “hermeneutic motion” (Krall, 1988, see also Appendix I), its literary structure could be described as consisting of “beginning, muddle, and resolution” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 2).

Elliot Eisner would locate this study at the “new frontier” of qualitative research in education, anthropology, sociology, and psychology (1997, p. 262). Genealogically, it belongs to the *family* qualitative research, *genus* naturalistic inquiry, *species* personal narrative, *sub-species* evocative narrative. Its close cousins are known by such *common names* as self-study, life history research, critical autobiography, autoethnography, and narrative self-examination².

The practice of adult education has long been guided by the mantra of Learning From Experience. Eduard Lindeman who—influenced by John Dewey—helped lay the foundation

¹ I use the word not in its Marxist adaptation, but as it arises from Greek *pràxis*, meaning deed, act, action, application; practice as distinguished from theory.

for the study of adult education in North America, states that “[t]he resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience ... [it] is the adult learner’s living textbook” (1926, pp. 9-10). Generations of educators and trainers—myself included—were inducted into Malcolm Knowles’ school of andragogy³, which claimed that “to an adult, his experience *is* him ... establishes his self-identity” (1970, p. 44) and challenged us to “tap the experience of the learners and involve them in analyzing their experience” (1973, p. 56). According to Hans Georg Gadamer, our past influences us in “everything we want, hope for, and fear in the future” and only as we are “possessed” by our past are we “opened to the new, the different, the true” (1976, pp. 8-11). Yet university-based research has been slow to acknowledge the legitimacy and importance of personal history as a way of understanding the adult educator’s world⁴.

Wilhelm Dilthey—one of the founders of modern hermeneutics, the interpretive study of texts—writes that “the final goal of the hermeneutic procedure is to understand the author better than he understood himself” (in Denzin, 1988, p. 257). This casts the researcher in the role of contortionist, writing while watching himself write, not unlike the artist drawing his hands in another Escher lithograph.

² For a thorough survey of this field, see Ellis & Bochner (2000).

³ A term popularized by Malcolm Knowles to distinguish the education of adults from *pedagogy*, the education of children. For an historical analysis of andragogy, see Pratt (1993).

⁴ Much work has been done in the adjacent field of K-12 teacher education. For a summary, see Cole & Knowles (2000).

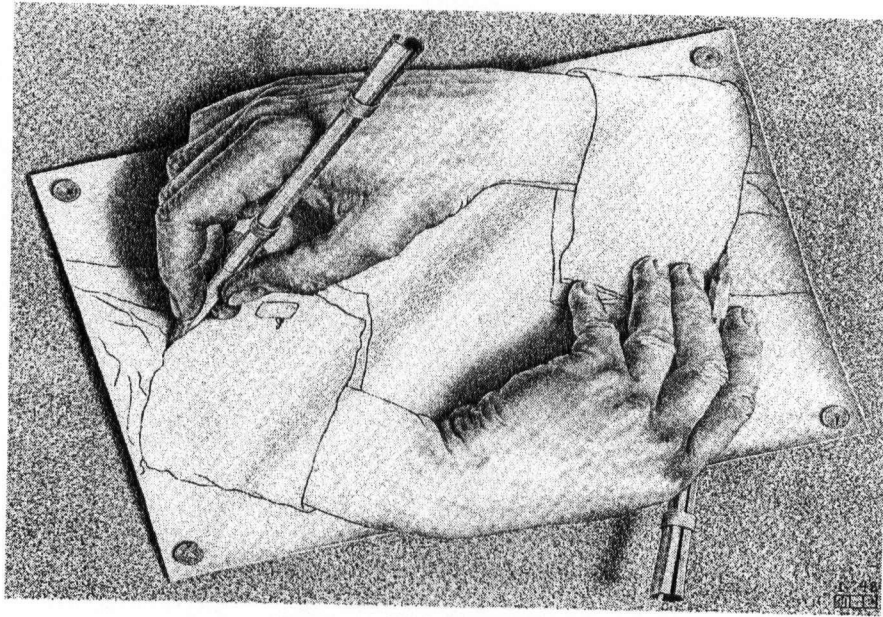


Figure 1: M.C. Escher, *Drawing Hands* (1948)

Interesting exercise, but so what? For this study to make a contribution to the practice of teacher training in adult education, it aims to accomplish three things: enrich the author's understanding of how he became a teacher; assist others (such as researchers, program planners, and fellow teachers) in understanding the intrapersonal aspects of professional development; and reach out to its readers—inviting them to engage with the text, ask their own questions, reflect on their own practice.

Now, a cautionary note. “To write vulnerably is to open a Pandora’s box. Who can say what comes flying out?” (Behar, 1996, p. 9). Vulnerable, says the dictionary, is *that which may be wounded (literally and figuratively), exposed to damage by criticism*. Doing such work does not mean “that anything personal goes; ... the exposure of the self ... has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a

decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake” (Behar, p. 14). This points to risks—more for the writer than for the reader as both engage in a “dance” or “game” (Gergen, 1988, p. 49), quite possibly transforming each other’s ideas through continual revelations and interpretations. In Marcel Proust’s words,

every reader is while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer’s work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offer to the reader to enable him to discern what, without the [text], he would perhaps never have perceived himself. (in Gunn, 1982, p. 90)

My hope is that the act of writing and reading vulnerably—undertaken with courage and deliberation—will awake us to the possibilities of self-understanding. I invite you now to partake of this text. May you begin to perceive your own story amidst the sounds, colours, and flavours that lie before you.



A few procedural comments before we set sail.


Gendered language. Rather than resorting to gender-neutral conventions—such as writing *she* or *he* alternately, joining pronouns as in *he/she*, or avoiding gender-specific words altogether—I’ll endeavor to follow some simple rules. Whenever I refer to myself and my story, I’ll use *he*. However, the customary use of masculine language as representative for all—as in *man* and *mankind* for *humans* or *people*—is no longer appropriate. Refusing

to re-write someone else's work or to insert the annoying "sic" notation, I'll instead select quotations in ways that by-pass what might offend today's readers. Exceptions will be made when such editing would do injustice to the integrity of an "old" piece of writing, e.g., the Proust quote on the previous page.

Referencing and spelling. Bibliographical referencing follows the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide (Amato, 1995). I deviate from other APA conventions in that I use footnotes and frequently switch from the customary "Times New Roman" font to graphically represent different voices. Cited authors are initially introduced by their full names; thereafter only last names are shown. Canadian/British spelling prevails, unless a quotation uses the American. Dictionary definitions throughout are from *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (1997).

Personal names. Occasionally, voices and actions are credited to real people. If their identity is obvious, their real names will be used. Examples are those belonging to my relatives, public figures, certain teachers and research advisors. All other personal names are fictitious.

"First" readers. Aside from my three advisors, several colleagues have read all or parts of this text at various stages of its evolution. Strictly speaking, it's the writer who is a text's first reader, but these valiant peers were the first "outsiders" to read it. Busy people all, generous and kind, impatient with things "too academic," they are representative of the educational practitioners who will—ultimately—judge the usefulness of my work.

Collectively, they represent 200 years of teaching experience and advanced education in such disciplines as nursing, biology, business administration, adult education, organizational development, theology, counselling, and English literature. I've taken the liberty of interweaving some of their words with my own. For the convenience of subsequent readers—and to honour the First Readers' voices—they are set in a different font and tagged with the  symbol. For a brief introduction to these readers, please turn to Appendix II.



The text proper begins with a meeting that occurred near the conclusion of this research project. It is lunch time during a two-day conference, when Peter catches up with Dr. Lieblich⁵, visiting speaker on qualitative research and autoethnography. They briefly chat about their prior correspondence, then wander away from the crowd. Finding sunny seats on the granite steps leading from Green College to the formal gardens, they open their packed lunches and—conscious of the limited time available—commence their conversation.

Peter: Thank you, professor, for this opportunity to talk about my research project. I can see how busy you are—and how many people want to have their picture taken with you.

Dr. Lieblich [smiles]: Not at all. And call me L.B., please.

Peter [hesitates]: If you insist ... L.B. As I said in my email, I'm approaching the end of writing a narrative exploration of my teaching practice.

L.B.: Indeed. I had a quick look at the excerpts posted on your website and I tell you this, Peter: I'm impressed. I found myself drawn into your work; saw myself represented on many pages.

Peter: Thanks, L.B. That means a lot, coming from you. If I may, I'd like to segue to an area I know very little about ... and on which you've written extensively. My question is this: How do I position my work as academic research? I know this will be raised by readers of my work—especially by the examiners during the thesis defense.

L.B. [smiles knowingly]: I'm not sure what methodology courses you've taken—very few, judging by your expression. Broadly speaking, educational research fits along a continuum, with qualitative (or interpretive) methods at one end and quantitative (causal) methods at the other. You're familiar with that picture?

Peter: Yes ... and I try not to see them as polarities ... as I did in the early days of graduate studies. It seems that all educational research fits somewhere along the continuum and it's not uncommon for a project to have qualitative and quantitative components.

L.B.: Right. Just to make sure we're using the same language: how would you define the two extremes?

Peter: Well ... I think quantitative researchers are mainly interested in measuring relationships among variables; they're concerned with hypothesis testing, prediction and control, and with random sampling. Their stance is essentially a deductive one: they want to know something about a lot of people and they typically do that by examining a sample and

⁵ This fictionalized exchange is based on notes taken during Carolyn Ellis' workshop on "Writing ethnography" at the UBC School of Nursing on May 2000 and her chapter, with Art Bochner, on "Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, pp. 733-768).

generalizing from that to a larger population. The qualitative researcher's objective, on the other hand, is to describe and to understand how subjects (participants) see the world. Their stance is inductive: qualitative research attempts to make the strange familiar or the familiar strange. The most appropriate use of qualitative methods, I think, is in situations when we want to know a lot about a small unit ... as small as a $N=1$ in my study, for example.

L.B.: That's a pretty good summary. You know, educational researchers have come a long way in blurring the boundaries between methodology camps. Still, there are people—both inside the academy and in the wider population—who were raised to believe that “real” research means quantitative methods ... you know, in the scientific tradition of physics, biology, mathematics, and so on. To them, any research that doesn't involve statistical methods, objective instruments, and theory testing is little more than muddleheaded anecdotalism. Then there are researchers from the liberal arts tradition—sociology, anthropology, and ethnography, for example—who use methods that involve asking, watching, and living with people; who use interviews, documents, life history, and their own lives as instruments. Feminist writers have led the movement of legitimizing the autobiographical voice in the research literature. The focus in the qualitative tradition is more on theory building than theory testing; more on discovery than explanation. Anything else, they might view as simpleminded empiricism.

Peter: Their fundamental assumptions differ too, don't they? Qualitative researchers start with the assumption that knowledge is created ... constructed in interaction ... and quantitative researchers that knowledge is “out there” to be found and discovered ... and that reality is measurable.

L.B.: Essentially, yes. Jerome Bruner once made a distinction between paradigmatic and narrative modes of knowing (Eisner, 1997, p. 264). The former seeks truth; the latter truthlike observations. ... [stops in mid-sentence] ... You know, I'm uncomfortable with us tying methods to people. How about we rephrase our descriptions to say that methods, not researchers, are situated along a continuum.

Peter: I like that. It allows for a more open dialogue, doesn't lock people into defensive postures. After all, and I'll show my naïveté here, we all share a wish to understand our humanity.

L.B.: Nothing wrong with a dose of naïveté to keep us from going stale. It's important to keep the currents of curiosity and inquiry flowing. We all benefit from people like you and your colleagues in the Ed.D. program ... temporary visitors to the academy ... asking simple and important questions. You remind us of the essential purpose of all research: to understand the world we live in and describe the ways in which we do so.

Peter: Sounds pretty muddleheaded to me [both laugh].

L.B.: There's more! Let's dip down a layer and examine qualitative methodology's own art-science continuum. At the science end we have what I call realist approaches: you've heard of "grounded theory," have you? This approach is mainly aimed at the conceptualization of data and the generalizability, verifiability, replicability of the data and theories. Researchers here have a good appetite for abstraction, facts, and rigour; their emphasis is on finding what's there, on uncovering general principles, if you wish. Coding and classifying is everything. At the art end we have impressionistic or interpretive approaches, drawing data from stories which emphasize writing, multi-voiced texts, one-of-a-kind, expressive, creative

sources. There's a hunger here for concrete details, for meaning, and for specific (as compared to general) experiences.

Peter: So, even in the qualitative realm there are some who wish to tease out scientific truths and others who're more interested in examining the texture, the fiber.

L.B.: Yes, both aim to understand and describe a phenomenon; they just go about it differently. Each of the approaches asks different questions and must be judged differently—this I think comes close to the questions you're concerned with. At the science end, the questions are: How do we know? What does it mean from the researcher's point of view? The researcher tries to represent a situation through facts and relative neutrality. Such work is judged on criteria which the author has created, and on proper use of a methodological process. At the art, or what I call the impressionistic end, research questions are framed differently. There one typically asks: How do we live? What's it like to suffer, survive, cope? Or, in your instance, how did you become *this teacher*? Instead of the researcher's, it's the subject's point of view that takes centre stage. The aim is not to represent, but to evoke: instead of taking the reader for granted, the interpretive researcher works to build relationships among author, text, and reader. And you, in this research project, assume extra duties: you're both researcher and subject, researcher and researched.

Peter: Do you think I'm taking on too much?

L.B.: [smiles] Not that I can see. From an autoethnographer's perspective, I'd say that you'll be playing a central role in creating socially constructed knowledge—as all knowledge is. Tanice Foltz and Sara Griffin point out that by beginning with your experience as a person in a particular situation, you're making yourself vulnerable (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 301).

“Some field-workers report self-transformation through the research experience; others

describe their work as a 'journey' of self-discovery" (p. 302). The title of your work hints at both: vulnerability and self-discovery.

Peter: I see my work fitting toward the latter end of the continuum. I say this because I'm interested in showing the complexity, the messiness, the ambivalent nature of lived experience. Instead of telling (as I've done for most of my teaching life), I aim to point through stories, dialogue, episodes, and anecdotes ...

L.B.: Yes, you don't offer answers, you pose questions! Your writing draws readers in, inviting them to ask their own questions, recall their own stories, seek their own interpretations. Just as a pebble tossed into the pond creates expanding ripples, so does this work generate multiple dialogues: the reader with himself, with others, and with other texts.

Peter: That's what I'm hoping for.

L.B.: Also ... you're doing this in your voice, not a borrowed one. I like how you play with different forms of expressions which would not be acceptable in traditional research circles: you use poetic narrative, metaphors, anecdotes, journal entries, reminiscences, photographs and collages, fictional conversations, and so on. And you make good use of the words of others, allowing them to come in at just the right moment—here to support and there to problematize your work. This makes for interesting—and unpredictable—writing. And points to another characteristic of this kind of research: it will be judged on literary not scientific standards. To be ranked as good research, personal narrative must be well written—engaging and evocative.

Peter: I resist pigeon-holing my work on this continuum. Although I'm clearly situated near the interpretive end, I also borrow from the realist one. For instance, although I'm concerned

with my own story, aren't I also seeking some degree of generalizability by asking my peers for input?

L.B.: Yes, you do ask for and incorporate others' reactions into your document. But, to me, you do this in order to locate your story in a broader context, not to prove or disprove a theory, not to predict or generalize. You seek to show how one man's story can also be "a story of our times," as Art Frank⁶ says. You make no claims, for instance, about This is what the text means, or, This is how one becomes a teacher, or, This is the effect of early schooling on a mature teacher's perspective. Instead you open your story to multiple interpretations. You invite each reader to become a co-researcher and a co-writer of a universal story. As you interweave other voices into your text, both retain their own weight, their own meaning, while contributing to a synergy. Your text's complexity is amplified with each reading and telling, with each re-reading and re-telling.

Peter: So, writing itself is a process of inquiry?

L.B. [emphatically]: You bet! I tell my students that often I don't know what I'm writing until I write ... that I don't know what I'm researching until I research. Take, for instance, your grade two story of the spilled chocolate soup. As you say yourself, you aren't sure exactly what happened. Did you not get fed at all that day? Was there really no more soup? Were you being punished? How did others experience the event? Since I wasn't there and you have aged by fifty years, we'll never know exactly what happened. A more scientifically inclined researcher would now exclude this data from analysis. But how important is it to

⁶ At the 6th Annual Qualitative Health Research Conference, Banff, AB, April 6-8, 2000. Frank is professor of sociology at the University of Calgary. Among his publications is *The wounded storyteller*, a study of personal illness narratives.

have the *exact* details? Narrative inquiry is concerned with a different set of questions! It aims to raise fundamental issues which, in this instance, might be phrased like this: How does this story open up communication between us? What does it evoke? How does it cause the reader to reflect on his or her own experience? Yes, there is order “out there” (or at least we may wish for it), but life is also messy and complex. And your research shows that beautifully.

Peter: Won't some readers question the accuracy of my story? Won't they argue, with Robert Atkinson, that “a text that acts as an agent of self-discovery or self-creation”—as mine clearly does—“cannot be an academic text?” (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745).

L.B.: They'd be correct if you were to claim, as Betty Freidan⁷ does, that “obviously everything I wrote is true.” I don't hear you asking “Does my story reflect my past accurately?” but instead “What are the consequences of this story? What kind of teacher did I become, based on the lived experience described here? How might telling this story impact the way I practice my craft in the future?”

Peter [excitedly]: Stephen Brookfield, whose writing triggered my quest towards a reflective practice, suggests that “through personal self-reflection we become aware of paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasonings that frame how we work” (1995, p. 29). That's why I embarked on this ... to learn more about the beliefs and assumptions that undergird my practice. Our autobiographies are among the “most important sources of insight into teaching,” writes Brookfield (p. 31). William Randall goes as far as to say that an understanding of one's personal identity is “impossible (not to mention, inconceivable) ...

⁷ Defending against charges of misrepresentation in her autobiography “Life so far” (*National Post*, June 9, 2000, B5).

without the autobiographical imperative" (1997, p. 209); "no story, no person," he claims (p. 212).

L.B.: You took those words to be your marching orders?

Peter: Exactly. And as I reflect on my response to them, I realize that I've been writing more than one story. There's my own narrative and there's another one, co-written with my readers. Makes me think that this text will always be unfinished, will continue to evolve.

L.B.: Exactly. And don't forget about another text, one written "in the spaces," what we might call a text of omissions. It's about the stories you aren't telling, or unable to tell, unwilling to reveal.

Peter: You're right. I made a list of about thirty anecdotes I wanted to include, but ended up using only about ten. There are other people who shaped me. I'm thinking of my maternal granddad who inoculated me with the belief that, at the core, I was *ein guter Junge*, a worthy boy; a vocational school teacher who awarded me a book prize for diligence; my father who gave me his work ethic and skeptical outlook on the world; a stranger who helped a seventeen-year old excel at a culinary show; a chief purser who kept an eye on me while I grappled with sea- and homesickness; three men—all European—who helped me get started as a teacher in Canada ... so many more stories ...

L.B.: ... and many choices to make ... you see what's happening as you approach the end of this project? The text is speaking back to you, interrogating you ...

Peter: ... making me its first reader ...

L.B. [after a silent moment]: I realize our time is limited today, Peter ... but I wonder what it's been like for you to read evocative texts written by others?

Peter [lights up]: Funny you should ask. Just this moment I flashed back to a book that's been sitting at the edge of my desk for a few weeks—not part of my immediate work, but hovering at the periphery. In a “critical autobiography” David Jackson (1990) challenges and deconstructs the isolating individualism of growing up masculine. Similar to the bare-nakedness of Thomas Merton's personal journals (which I'll get to later), this text brings me face-to-face with my own stash of stories about sexuality, male/female relationships, family patterns, loneliness, aging, and so on. It points the way to yet another layer of excavation of my chaotic flux of experience. It beckons me to interrogate my “interlocking web of oppression: sexism, heterosexism, racism” (Jackson, 1990, p. 263). In short, reading another man's text, so full of courage and vulnerability, invites, challenges, and encourages me.

L.B.: A powerful example of one narrative opening space for another.

Peter [After a moment's silence]: I'd like to steer our conversation to another, related topic. I'm concerned ... anxious ... about being examined, you know, what's referred to as the “thesis defense”.

L.B.: I think I understand your apprehension. I'm told that at Teachers College [Columbia University], in a program similar to yours, they've re-named the event a “thesis celebration.” Sounds much less adversarial, don't you agree? But back to your concern. What troubles you, specifically?

Peter: Someone's going to ask: Why personal narrative? Why not more traditional investigative tools, like questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups ... followed by a discussion of findings and recommendations?

L.B.: Well ... I suggest you don't worry about *defending*. Instead, why not relate a story about your recent experience as a novice researcher. And tell it in a way you know so well: let the natural logic of the process speak for itself.

Peter [pauses ... then, as if addressing an imaginary examiner]: You raise an important point. In order to explain my choice of research method, we need to start with the official requirements for this degree. The goal of the program is to "engage [participants] in scholarly discourse about understanding, critiquing, and improving practice." It calls for a thesis based on "applied research related to students' practice" to be presented in "a document of the kind commonly used in the field ... or any other relevant innovative undertaking." I began the thesis process by asking questions of myself. For instance: What is your practice? Answer: I teach others how to teach, through train-the-trainer and faculty development workshops and self-published books. Next I asked: How might you go about understanding and improving such a practice? Answer ... [he hesitates] ... well, it didn't run quite as linearly. After all, this was turning into an interrogation of the very essence of my self-as-teacher, my livelihood, my professional reason for being. This wasn't something I'd ever done in thirty years in the teaching business. One expedient route open to me was that of survey research in which I'd ask a sample of colleagues about their evolution. But a chance conversation with Dr. Andres, who teaches survey methods, put a halt to that. "I thought your program was supposed to be an innovative one," she remarked, "survey-based research is pretty conventional." Well, I couldn't be seen doing conventional research, could I? "You might want to go and see Carl Leggo, over in Language & Literacy. He's doing work that may be of interest to you." Once I'd met with Carl, I began asking a string of questions that would eventually drive this investigation: How did I come by the beliefs and

assumptions that guide my practice? How does my lived experience inform the way I teach—and presume to tell others how to teach? How did I become what others describe as a “nurturing and caring” teacher? Once posed, these questions wouldn’t go away. They took on ethical and political dimensions: if I was to continue in the business of telling others how to be good teachers I’d have to first be clear on my own teaching persona. And, if good teaching goes “beyond technique” and arises from a teacher’s “identity and integrity” as Parker Palmer (1998, p. 10) claims, then I would have little choice but to locate my research in a thorough exploration of the stories that make up my teacher persona.

L.B.: Good, good. You’re drawing on your own experience to show why a narrative approach was called for. Perhaps you could say a bit about the characteristics of narrative methods that attracted you.

Peter: Sure. I was drawn to narrative approaches, especially to what Art [Bochner] calls “evocative narrative” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744); for reasons that link them to my ideals of good teaching. First, authors of evocative narrative usually write in the first person, making themselves the subject of research. This cuts through the traditional separation of researcher and researched. And so it is with teaching: the teacher presents himself as a vulnerable human being; teacher and student become co-learners, engaged in a shared undertaking. Second, evocative narrative typically focuses on a single case, thus breaching traditional research concerns from “generalization across cases to generalization within a case,” as Geertz (1973b) puts it. And so it is with teaching: a good teacher engages each student as a complex individual and, in turn, makes his own complexity and transparency available to the student. Each of their encounters becomes a miniature case study of “good” teaching. Third, much of teaching and learning is conveyed in story form; teachers explain in

story form; student describe their experience that way; and many of us store, process, and recall significant learning as stories.

L.B.: [checking the time]: Gosh, I must be off, get ready for my next presentation. It's been a real pleasure ...

Peter: ... already? I'm not done with you yet [both laugh].

L.B.: This might be a good point, Peter, to invite your readers to join in. Why not take them back through your writing journey? Let them find out how you went about framing and answering some of your own questions.

Peter: Thank you, Dr. Lieblich. I'll do that.

L.B.: And suggest they take off their shoes and buckle up. It'll be *some* ride!

[Both laugh]



13 January 2000 (at the starting point of my writing journey). To say that I'm afraid may be too strong, more like: hesitating to take up pen and paper or put fingers to keyboard. Frozen, seized up, gun-shy. Now in the third year of the Ed.D. program, I've been in the "research phase" for nine months. By now I've drafted at least five proposals, each ending with a hopeful Now I've found the Way; each containing such optimistic phrases as The purpose of this study is ... or, This study is informed by That I couldn't even pronounce, never mind define many of the words (such as "phenomenology" and "hermeneutics") didn't stop me—although I did feel a bit of a fake. Then, a couple of weeks ago, something

changed. Dan, my research supervisor⁸, who had previously given me a long rein, finally said it was time (for him? for me?) to take charge of this process. My proposals were just too "theoretical," not at all what my "practical" program demanded. The committee met again and this time we invited the program chairman to explain the nature of an Ed.D. thesis. Surely now we'd get going.

All through the meeting I sit, uncomfortable, reminded of previous hearings, examinations, and interrogations. I feel small, tongue-tied, not an equal member of this committee, certainly not a mature student. They must think I'm stupid! I barely utter a question and even my talent to be funny in awkward moments fails me today. I wait for them to tell me what to do. Why won't they?

I remember a dusty summer day; couldn't have been much older than twelve, eleven maybe. My father had reappeared; distant hero riding into town on his Vespa. This day he took me on a long ride. We parked outside a red-brick building, just inside a cast-iron picket fence. Wait here, he told me. After a while, I was called in: no introduction, a few questions, you can go now. I remember feeling shy, but unafraid. Also embarrassed at seeing my adored *Vati*, cap in hand, making ingratiating noises to a man in a suit. On the trip home, he tells me that this had been my "go" at entering the high school stream of the educational system. (Working class children typically went to grade eight and then off to learn a trade.) This school, he explained, occasionally took "late entries" but had rejected us/me this day. Case closed. No words to calm dashed hopes. No mention

⁸ My research supervisory committee comprises three professors in the faculty of education: Dan Pratt (adult education), Rita Irwin (curriculum studies), and Carl Leggo (language and literacy studies); Dan and Carl share the role of research supervisor.

of father's hurt pride. Merely a silent conveying that—somehow—we hadn't measured up.

Rita asks question after question and I reply as best as I can. Dan holds back. Carl sits in silence, nods, finally speaks. My heart picks up tempo in excitement as I listen to him lay out his vision for my work. Soon Rita and Dan join in: "That sounds interesting," they say, easily grasping what Carl says and relating it to their own teaching lives. "That's what we want you to do." Except that's not how they put it. They don't tell me what to do, they don't hand out an assignment. Instead, they suggest, propose, indicate. What's got them all excited is Carl's proposal for me to write "ruminations of an adult educator." Dan suggests I might want to include two or three colleagues in a conversation, but not till later. Rita warns that this will be "messy" work. And then they send me away to do what (they believe) I can do.

Soon relief is displaced—again—by uncertainty and self-doubt. Where do I start? How does this work? Do I have what it takes? Who'll care to read about my ordinary life? How can the telling of one man's story constitute academic research? How will I ever meet their expectations? Should I really be in this program? My head spins, my writing hand goes numb. The dictionary is of little help: **ru'min|ate** v. **1.** Chew the cud. **2.** Meditate, muse, ponder, (*over, about, of, on*). As if through a thick fog, I can barely spot Eisner's navigational aid:

Narrative relates to the telling of stories and to the sharing of experience. To the extent that experience itself can be conceived of as the primary medium of education,

stories are among the most useful means for sharing what you have experienced.

Narrative—which means a telling—makes it possible for [readers] to have access not only to our own lives ... but also to the lives of others. Narrative, when well crafted, is a spur to imagination ... [through which] empathic forms of understanding are advanced. (1997, p. 264)

Inserted later. Florence Krall explains that students engaging in personal history research are "invariably filled with uncertainty and questions [such as] 'How can anything that interests me personally be valued academically by others?' [and] 'Do I actually have anything to say?'" (1988, p. 469). The loneliness of the novice researcher is real and painful.



During the fall term of the previous year: I'm enrolled in a collage-making course at a local art school. Other than a course on "carving in stone" this is my first experience as an art student. I like this teacher: she's articulate and well organized. Each class begins with a step-by-step demonstration of a collage technique. We then work on individual projects, looking for ways to incorporate each new technique. I'm having fun ... until, in Week Three, when my beginner's luck runs out. There's just too much information, too many techniques, too little formal training to draw on. Not knowing how to proceed I become nauseous, feeling lost and alone ... in tears. My notes that night:

Brown papered tables
beeswax, paint, and glue sticks
scissors, cutters
everyone busy

teacher explaining
so much fun

now
I stand
paralyzed
stupid EMPTY hot & cold small helpless
can't get going
stuck

I don't even know how to imitate
such simple instruction
tears
barely
little man
boy, drowning
would please someone come to my rescue?
show me
point
but not scold
hear me
no advice
just compassion
suffer with me
understand how it feels
not to know
respect this incompetence
honour this realization
that I, who usually knows everything
have hit on "empty"

When the instructor comes to my table, I speak up. No faking now, no pretending, no clever comments to make her smile. I say that I'm lost, need help. She listens intently and then, against her stated policy of not interfering with people's artwork, offers very specific instructions. Why not add more texture here, some cloth perhaps, she offers ... and extend the colour scheme ... dry-brushed acrylic paint, magenta perhaps? And see how you can shift the focus ... remember what I said about the Golden Sections. Then she lets me go, gently, to find my own way, recover my footing.



27 January 2000. To move this project along, I join Carl Leggo's course "EDCI 565b: Narrative & Educational Research." I want to be near him for encouragement, inspiration, support. One night he asks us to "write about a recent experience during which you learned something. Take half an hour. When you're done, look back at what you've written and ask: is there something else that I've learned? Then come back and, in groups of three, read to each other." Reflecting on the collage-making experience, I make this list:

- adult learners are vulnerable;
- new information can threaten even the most confident;
- recreational learning is as serious as academic learning;
- competence in one field does not automatically transfer to another;
- unfamiliar learning tasks bring out old memories (of abuse, ridicule);
- confused students need to be heard, uncritically... and only then are they open for instruction.

From this I conclude that "not knowing scares me". After a brief exchange with classmates, I expand this to say that "not knowing is a precondition to learning". Posed like this, "not knowing" shifts from the familiar "you're stupid for not knowing" to "you have to first acknowledge not-knowing in order to be ready for masterly instruction". How many times have I told my own students this ... now, perhaps for the first time consciously, I find myself constructing personal knowledge. "The only learning which significantly influences

behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning,” writes Carl Rogers (1961, p. 276), “[and it] cannot be directly communicated to another.”



Also last fall: I participated in Valerie Janesick’s “journal writing as a qualitative research technique” workshop⁹, where she tells us about the “YaYa Box,” a thing borrowed from art therapy. Making such a box can serve to “represent a person’s innermost self on the inside of the box and the ... outward self on the outside of the box” (Janesick, 1998, p. 50). I immediately began scheming ways of using this activity in an upcoming workshop; so typical of me, always borrowing, tinkering, adapting, improvising. Barely back home, I made my own box, then used Valerie’s sequence of questions (p. 50) to dig for meaning:

1. How did you approach the project?

In chaos, without formal planning, spontaneously, grabbing for objects as I found them, experimenting on the fly, impatiently cutting straight lines with a dull X-acto knife (only to find that they weren’t straight). Letting the process teach me what to do, letting the emerging box tell its own story. Stepping back every so often, leaving the room while the glue was setting, making a cup of tea and returning after 20 minutes for another stab. That’s me when I’m following a scent: stab, jab, shove, punch, dance, cut. Fully immersed, excited, stimulated. (When I cleaned up later, I noticed that I’d been wearing my “good” black vest instead of my old art clothes; that I’d used five different brushes to apply glue; that the paint

had dried on my best brush; that the floor was littered with cuttings and sticky bits). Looking back, all this creativity must have come from somewhere. I didn't just stick things on to see what they'd tell me to do next. In fact, I gave expression to thoughts that I had carried around for some time: about the outer me: seemingly competent, charming, humorous, warm, popular—but also enigmatic, private, inaccessible. About the inner me: child-like, naked, small, disguised.

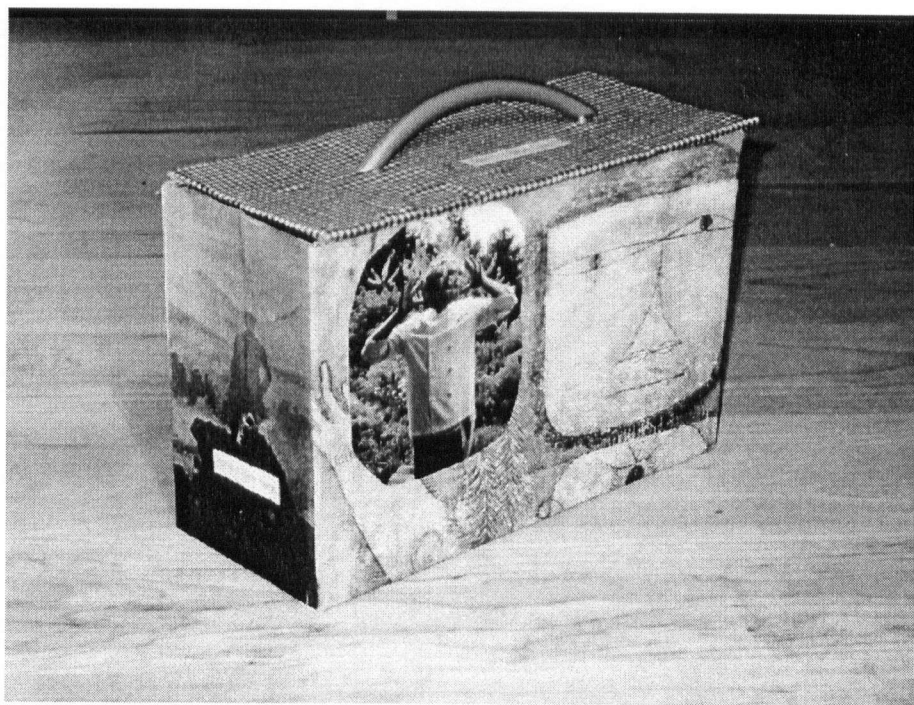


Figure 3: Collage Box, exterior view

2. Describe your box

Size and proportion of a lunch box. The top comes off like a coffin lid, is clad in black-and-white checkered cloth from old chef's pants, with a pewter-like, arched handle. One of the long sides is plastered with torn images from a course announcement and a past students'

⁹ During the "Advances in Qualitative Methods" Conference, Edmonton, February, 1999.

evaluation, both describing me in glowing terms as an extraordinary teacher. Also a clip from my brochure describing my professional services and a group photo from a recent workshop. A row of felt-tipped markers shows the trainer's tools. Side two is taken up by an abstract image of a male face by Paul Klee: eyes wide in bewilderment ... into one of the man's outstretched arm I've glued a photo of myself wearing a chef's jacket and holding a home-baked round of bread to cover my face like a mask. One short side is covered with the black-and-white photocopy of *Wanderer Above the Mist* by Kaspar David Friederich.

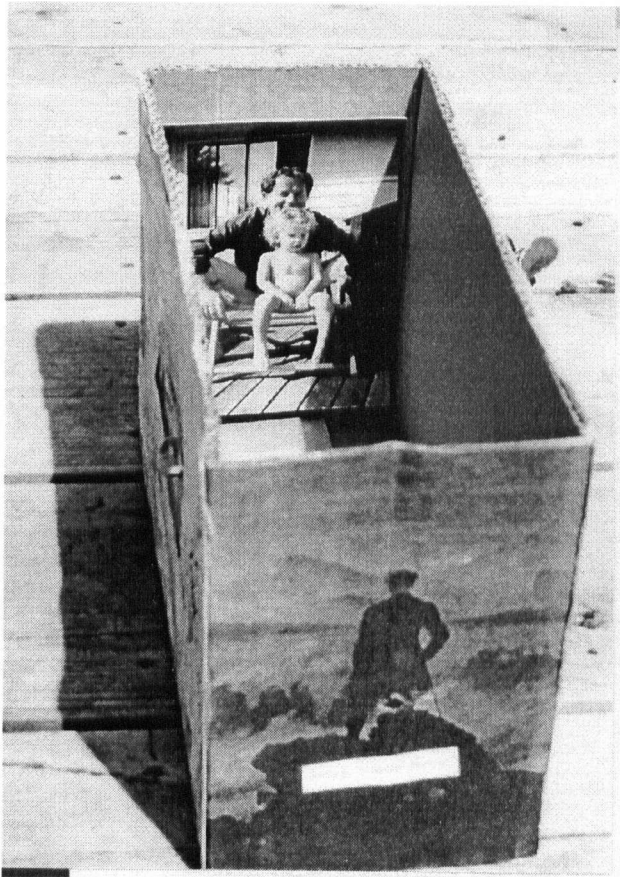


Figure 4: Collage Box, exterior view

Just below the wanderer's greatcoat a tiny hole invites the viewer to glimpse at another photo inside the box. It shows myself, sitting on a deck chair, looking straight at the camera, relaxed and grinning. On my lap, between spread legs, sits a boy: age four, naked, curly

blond hair, also looking straight on in curiosity. The fourth side of the box remains untreated, in progress.

3. *What do the images represent?*

Item / image	Purpose / interpretation/ meaning
Handle on top, tied down with a decorative string	shows my longing for things European; adds a finishing touch; creates the problem that people will want to lift the lid and look inside (which I'd rather they didn't).
Covering made from chef's pants	commemorates my apprenticeship at age 14-17 and the damage that can be done when a master abuses his privilege and instills feelings of unworthiness. Viewing this draped lid as a coffin lid holds its own story.
Clippings re workshops & people's feedback	offers a glimpse at my public activities over the last three years; shows how clients and participants think of my abilities (this surprises me as I'm not good at blowing my horn; I expect the next bit of feedback to be negative).
Glass bead on my face in group photo	draws attention to me in the midst of workshop participants; first among equals (except for the spiffy bow-tie).
Kaspar David Friederich image of man staring into distance	echoes my own feelings in the "afternoon of life" (C.G. Jung) as I look back on life with some nostalgia, curiosity, and a desire to tally up.
Paul Klee image of man's face	shows a face that's both young and old, a bit spooked and also wise, serious and playful, concrete and abstract..
Photo of me hiding behind bread	shows my playful side, my interest in creating simple things that bring pleasure, and my European roots; my fondness for hand-made bread.
Photo inside with naked boy	the boy is me and the man is the boy; the boy in the picture looks so innocent—he knows little about not-

	knowing; he reminds me that I won't ever be a father.
Heart-shaped cut-out to let light in	the sentimentality that a heart represents; also the heart of me; the centre of innocence, of play, of joy, of being loved.
Otherwise empty box	if I were to place other things in here, they would obstruct the view through the pinhole; also, I'm reluctant to disclose any more—this may change: this box is, after all, a box-in-progress

4. *What issues about your role as researcher confronted you as you began and implemented the project?*

I am reluctant to give others access to my inner self. I hesitate to take credit for and draw attention to my abilities. I fear being “found out” for not being as competent as others see/expect me. I tend to experiment in a helter-skelter fashion, relying mostly on intuition and spur-of-the-moment insights and inspirations. I am uncomfortable with not knowing. If I let myself experience this not-knowing long enough, if I'm patient, then pretty exciting and creative things emerge. I enjoy learning through experimentation, tinkering, cobbling. I'm still haunted by childhood conditioning of not being good or smart enough. Yet I also know how to persevere, not to give up, and work hard.

5. *What was the most difficult part of this activity for you?*

Mostly getting started. I had to undergo the experience of not knowing where and how to start, live through several starts and stops, and suffer the disadvantages of not having a plan. In this regard, the activity reminds me of the way I've been conducting the entire thesis

process: jumping from one idea to another, giving some up too early, clinging to others for too long. In the process I may have wasted some time. Yet the way I'm now proceeding (as I always do ... eventually) works for me. I need to suffer a bit, wallow in some self-pity, experience stuck-ness before I re-emerge. Once I get going, I can ride the energy, motivated by the thing itself.

Inserted later. John Dewey talks of the learner/researcher who "hugs himself in his isolation and fights against disclosure," relishes "schemes of self-pity" and digs in with defiant exclamation of "Here I stand and cannot otherwise" (1958, p. 199).



Slow down. This is important and necessary work. It crosses borders—back and forth, like it or not—between the personal and professional, the private and public you.

In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical that we know about the person the teacher is. ... By tracing this person's life over time, it becomes possible to view the changes and underlying forces which influence that person at work—to estimate the part that teaching plays within the overall life of the teacher. (Goodson, 1980, p. 69)

As I sit with my box and note its dark interior, back-lit by the heart-shaped cut-out and viewed through a 3-mm diameter pinhole, I am reminded of a story from the Sufi tradition about an ordinary event in the life of Nasrudin, a wise fool:

One night a stranger comes across Nasrudin on his hands and knees in the road outside his house and asks what he is doing. Searching for a dropped key, Nasrudin replies. Offering to help, the stranger asks the question of all such helpers: where did you last see that key? To which Nasrudin points towards the house and replies, over there, in the house. But why, asks the puzzled stranger, are you searching for it out here, on the road? Isn't that obvious, replies an exasperated Nasrudin ... this is where the light is! (Hunt, 1997, p. 1)

It is of course easier to *look* for a lost item in the light, but the place to actually *find* it is where it was last seen. This requires a trip back into the dark house, into the shadows of lived experience. How much of me today, especially me the teacher, is informed by schooling, family background, and other early experiences? The collage activity draws attention to experiences that are thirty and forty years old. Take, for instance, the reference to my apprenticeship saga. It all began half-way through grade eight. I was living with a sort of foster family for a year. One day I came home from school to find father's letter announcing his choice of vocation for me. It was normal for him to decide without consulting me, customary for a working-class father, consistent with our family tradition. Except for my paternal grandfather, who had owned a millinery store, the men on my father's side—according to our ancestral chart as far back as 1623—have all been labourers, artisans, and skilled workers. Dad himself apprenticed as a blacksmith and joined the army during the Depression, advancing to sergeant-major, stable master, and riding instructor.



Figure 5: My dad, instructing (ca. 1936)

similar juncture: "When he was twenty he had defied his blacksmith father and left the village to work in the north His father cursed him and they never spoke again" (1996, p. 22). Imagine. My family membership cancelled as if it were a magazine subscription. No wonder that "inclusion and exclusion" became strong factors in shaping my philosophy and practice as an educator.

My father was adamant about the need for us "common folk" to strive and better ourselves. And to be proud of hard-earned achievements. He used to stand over me, slapping the back of his right hand into the palm of the left, emphasizing his basic rule for "making it." You need to collect documents to prove that you're worthy, he'd say. (And here is his

Inserted later. Twelve years after receiving that letter, when I was twenty-three and had just, against my father's wish, left small-town Germany for *Amerika*, received another letter. This time: "Sir, you're no longer my son. You are disowned. Never cross the threshold of my house, ever again." Basta! no negotiation, no discussion of possible ways to get past a son's arrogance and a father's disappointment. Annie Proulx, in *Accordion Crimes*, begins her tale of a Sicilian family at a strikingly

son, five decades later, about to collect another parchment to prove, once and for all [?], his standing in the world). In his letter, he went on to explain the reasons for choosing a culinary career. Nothing to do with talent or preferences, his thinking was entirely practical (you'll always have something to eat), traditional (one of your uncles was an army cook before freezing to death in Russia), and long-range (they'll always need cooks, regardless of wars and depressions). I was soon bundled off to a residential pre-apprenticeship school: thirty-odd lads, ranging in age from thirteen to twenty-one, making me the youngest at thirteen. Housed six to a room, we underwent boot camp in the dining room, kitchen, housekeeping, and reception over a period of six months.

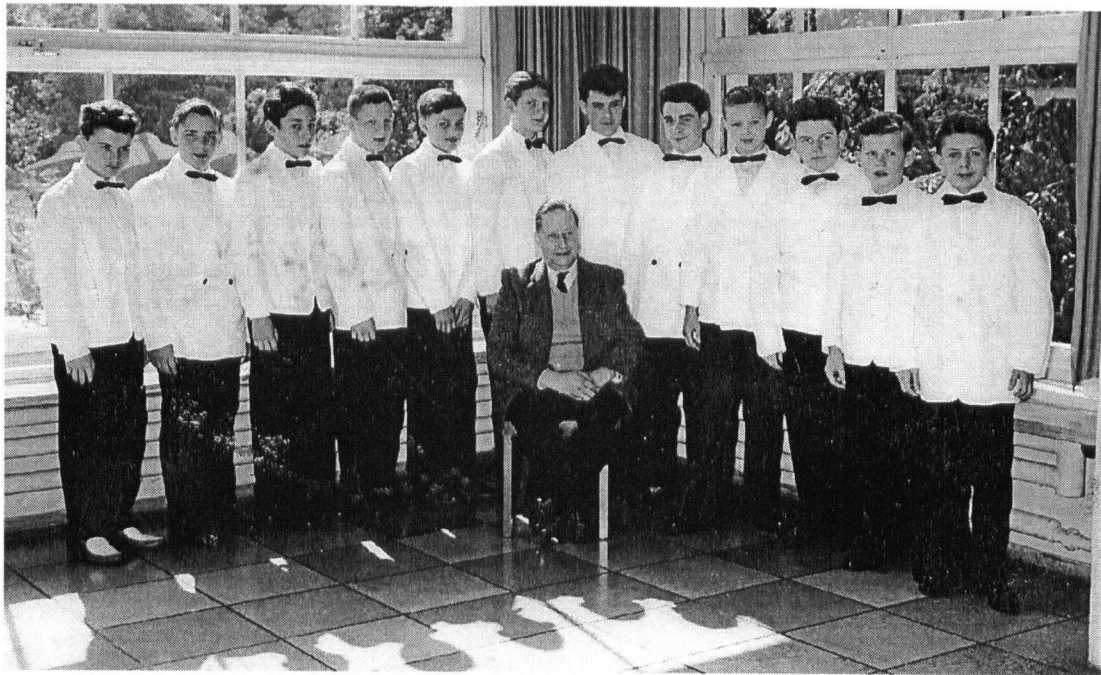


Figure 6: Hotel school students

One Saturday morning, with most of the other boys away for the weekend, I was called down to help the head chef prepare a directors' dinner. I remember the thrill of being asked to work alongside a real chef, not as one of a horde of novices. He showed me

different ways of cutting vegetables and how to pronounce my first words of kitchen French: *julienne*, *brunoise* for cuts of vegetables, *mirepoix* to make stock, *Espagnole*, a basic sauce. Later he set me up in a cold cellar, making ice-cream in a hand-cranked tub immersed in a salty brine. Throughout the day, instructions were given matter-of-factly—without allusions to my ineptness. I felt valued as a colleague and future member of the guild.

Why did what happened that day make such a lasting impression? What did I learn? For one thing, that treating learners with respect may cause them to rise beyond their limits. For another, that people learn better—even under hardship and discomfort—when they are treated *as if* they are capable of learning. In contrast, the three-year apprenticeship that followed taught me little about *haute cuisine*, but plenty about working long hours and being obedient. It put a damper on natural curiosity (do what you're told; don't ask impertinent questions) and made me fear and loathe my teachers. The experience caused me to assume that learning and teaching involve an adversary relationship.

six days at work,
starting at 8 and ending at 10
down the basement
start the fire, shovel coals
line up the Chef's knives
set the table for the older cooks
apprentices get what's left over

each boy two uniforms
meant to last the year
white for a day
dirty and smelly the next
embarrassed
he wears his inside out
next to his skin, stinking

Chef! has no other name
except, silently: tyrant, enemy, asshole
who hits and kicks

each in turn
 just to be fair
 tells us daily
 we'll never amount to anything
 trained to agree with whatever
 nonsense he spews forth: Yes, Chef!
 there are six of us
 two boys in each of three years
 aged 14 to 17 so young
 one more scared than the next
 acting tough
 teasing each other
 like rats in a maze
 biting each other
 gnawing own wrists
 all the while
 assuming
 this is normal

...

one day, desperate to get out
 boy sneaks a knife
 for severing meat
 bones from joints
 honed and sharpened to a long curve
 super-sharp, nine centimeters long
 black handle, hard to hold
 meant for a bigger hand

down the cellar
 where we usually
 skin rabbits
 and disembowel deer
 catching the blood to thicken the sauce

against a cellar door, eye level
 left hand, palm up
 fingers lightly curved, claw-like
 tip of the knife into the soft palm
 how resilient the skin is;
 how it resists the incision;
 elastic, absorbing

with such a bad cut
 better to send him home
 four... rare ... days ... of
 breathing without fear and
 playing with dad's ponies
 but that's another story.

These events remain deeply imbedded in my body memory. What's remarkable about them, vivid as they are to this day, is that of all possible vocations I later became a teacher. And, more puzzling yet, that I became *the kind of* teacher people say I am.



Toshio Odate, in a book on the Japanese tradition of woodworking, tells stories from his own training. Here he relates an apprenticeship story which one of his teachers told him:

During my apprenticeship, it was common for my master, an impatient man, to correct me when I made a mistake by hitting me with whatever was at hand (often a hammer). Now, as I look back, these incidents strike me as having great symbolic value. An apprentice, after all, is like a hot iron, needing to be shaped ... by the hands and tools of the master. (1984/1998, p. 59)

The thought of a master's ill treatment as symbolic value had never occurred to me. Considering such a possibility now turns upside down my previous telling and interpreting. Listening to my own dad's tales—first as blacksmith's, then butcher's apprentice, and later as a soldier—must have made me think that such rough treatment was “manly,” something to be endured en route to becoming a man. As a child of the time, I considered the treatment unfair but normal—a rite of passage—leading to the future entitlement to treat my own apprentices in a like manner.

About ten years ago, a therapist encouraged me to re-interpret these events as evidence of “abuse” and to cast myself as “victim”. For several years after that, this

interpretation provided me with a home, a label, an explanation for my peculiar ways. And now what? Now a far-away woodworker suggests a “symbolic” re-interpretation. To humour him, I re-tell my apprenticeship story in my master’s voice. Chef speaks, for the very first time, in a gentle voice, weariness mixed with regret: *That was my job, back then, to toughen you kids for the world. To teach you to survive, to strive, to be ready for anything. Working in kitchens is hard work and you boys were so young, so naïve. The only way I could think to show you my care was to be a tough bastard, a man’s man, someone you’d hate and want to fight back. Hitting you kids was just part of it: that’s how I got to be who I was. Everybody hit their kids in those days. That’s all I knew. That’s what I thought was the best way to make you into something, prepare you for life.* Against his confession, old memories persist—lodged in my fibers, pounded there by callous hands raised in rage:

Can't do anything right
you good for nothing
why do I bother

fetch potatoes
skin dead rabbits
scrub the freezer floor

I give you all I've got
kicks, shouts, lewd talk
so that

one day
you'll be a man like me

Bochner¹⁰ alerts us to the dangers inherent in any attempt at interpreting “old” stories from the vantage point of “modern” sensibilities. I imagine that, back then, my master would not have been accused of “child abuse,” only respected as a strict *Erzieher* (raiser of

¹⁰ During a workshop on “Stories as research/stories as healing,” University of British Columbia, May 5, 2000.

children); his dependence on alcohol and fits of rage viewed as part of an age-old male privilege.



Krall's hermeneutic motion. "The movement from introspection to self-understanding through the written word is difficult to achieve," writes Krall (1988, p. 468). She offers a process of "hermeneutic motion" which I'll use to structure this project. It consists of five elements: venturing, remembering, comprehending, embodying, and restoring. It anticipates the research journey as beginning with students who are "uncritical in orientation" and "naïve to the extent of their practical knowledge" (p. 467; for a summary of the elements, please turn to Appendix I).

The initial motion is about **venturing**, about entering into a disciplined writing regimen that is difficult for students without previous experience. My committee asked me to ruminate on the process of becoming a teacher, but didn't give me a formula to go with it. They told me that after years of telling others how to teach, it was my turn now to reflect, to construct a pedagogy of self. But how am I to do this? Nothing I've done to this date, so it seems, has prepared me for such a task. Writing doesn't come easy for me. It's more like "staring at a blank piece of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead" as Gene Fowler puts it. In one of my draft proposals I'd wanted to investigate "reflective practice" by teaching a group about reflection, observe them, gather their impressions, write it all up, and make recommendations. No! said the committee, no more how-to writing for you, no more

telling others what to do. Do your own critical reflection: experience it, think about, live it, understand it.

Brookfield challenges us to develop our own reflexivity—that is, question the beliefs and assumptions that guide our *own* practice—before engaging others in such activities. He warns of educators presenting themselves “as critically reflective gurus who have to release learners from the chains of their distorted meaning perspectives. This approach is arrogant and alienating” (1990, p. 181). Guilty as charged! “Reflective practice” has been part of my trendy bag of tricks for a couple of years. I’ve given workshops entitled *Becoming a reflective practitioner* and been hired as keynote presenter during a faculty retreat. For all anyone knows, I’m an expert. Just prior to one such workshop I wrote:

What's it with you
 always feet first
 learning by doing
 just because you got excited
 about autobiography, narrative, and life stories
 Off you go
 selling your name to strangers:
 how about a workshop on critical reflection?
 Time draws near
 almost got cancelled
 off the hook
 yikes! but not quite

Another moment of truth
 have flipchart, will travel
 confident and handsome
 no sign of the imposter
 hardly a lesson plan
 but in my daring heart
 I know
 where this is going, but
 brought lots of handouts

just in case

... etc.

I went to conduct my first *Reflective Practitioner* workshop with little more than a rough notion of what it meant to be “reflective”. Sure, I’d done some reading, attended Brookfield’s workshop, even borrowed several of his activities (Brookfield, 1995). Throughout both days of the course I felt “on the spot”, found myself reaching deep into my bag of tricks to see us through, what a way to live! Participants’ feedback ranked the workshop as a success (8.5 for Satisfaction, 9.0 for Enjoyment). But when I woke up the morning after, I was left with (the usual) nagging questions: What qualifies me to teach a given course? Where does my authority come from? How ethical is it to “learn as we teach” as Seneca said two millennia ago? Bernard Glassman and Rick Fields offer an unexpected take:

Most of us think we have to become experts before we can do anything. We read all kinds of books, go to seminars, seek out ‘expert’ advice, and so on. The Zen cook’s approach to learning is very different. It is not the way of the expert but the way of the beginner. The proper attitude to have when you’re learning something is called Beginner’s Mind. One of the best examples of Beginner’s Mind is a baby learning to walk. Babies don’t read books about walking or go to walking seminars. They just stand up, take a step, and fall down. Then they do it all over again. They might get frustrated or angry when they fall, but they don’t get discouraged. (1996, p. 42)

When I get scared, I turn on myself, call myself dumb, incompetent, and pretentious; in short, become unsupportive and abusive. I hold myself responsible as if I was supposed to

know something I had no reason to know. Where did I learn to behave like this? Who taught me? What experiences shaped such unfortunate truths? My thoughts return to my chef's apprenticeship. From age fourteen to seventeen, six pubescent males were fed a daily diet of being called "stupid" and "useless" for not knowing the very things they were in training for. Back then, the best I could do was resolve never to be caught looking "dumb" again. I learned to be good at "pretending to know". This led to some interesting (and scary) moments as learner and as teacher. Several examples from my formal schooling come to mind: being accepted as a "special student" at Cornell University¹¹ with only a grade eight education; graduating *with distinction* from the University of Surrey (UK) in courses for which I had only the barest prerequisites; accepting an appointment to teach hotel management at a college (BCIT), knowing that I was barely qualified; gaining entry to four separate university programs (adult education, counselling psychology, curriculum & instruction, and liberal studies) without a baccalaureate; successfully completing summer courses in medieval church history without the required reading knowledge of Latin; et cetera. In my work, I can find similar examples of things I taught with the barest of qualifications, including assertiveness for women; instructional skills for prison guards; counselling skills for police officers; customer relations for ferry employees; constructive criticism for social workers; supervisory skills for in-flight supervisors; credit course on wine appreciation; workshops on training techniques, facilitation skills, communication skills, reflective practice, life story writing, and so on.

¹¹ School of Hotel Management. I was unable to pursue the offer as I was being chased by US military service.



Krall's hermeneutic motion. The next stage is that of **remembering**, recalling meaningful events from the past that have shaped my becoming this particular person and teacher. But "re-membering is antithetical" to graduate students whose previous schooling taught them to "dis-member content in order to master it, to respect the word of outside authority, and to ignore or devalue ideas that come from their own minds and feelings that come from their own hearts," writes Krall (1988, p. 470). How well does that describe my own experience? Don't I tell stories from my experience when I stand before a group, don't I self-disclose and encourage (demand) similar behavior in return? Yes, but. Most of my stories are told for a purpose, to make an instructional point, to create a certain mood, to help construct what participants describe as a "safe environment". But they are also part of my *shtick*, my act, my road show. There I stand (or, more likely, perch at a table's edge) telling tales from the trenches. Anyone watching would, quite justifiably, describe my utterances as sincere and appropriate. They'd see someone who tells personal stories with confidence, who thinks deeply about his practice, and who can guide others to do likewise.

But come and watch me when the tables are reversed! Be a fly on the wall when I meet with the committee or tête-à-tête with an advisor. You'd see me squirming and paling. When I speak, I do so haltingly, in broken sentences, with a voice that frequently breaks and a mind that seems to continually run out of steam. I feel incompetent, desperately looking for directions. I stumble and stutter; have yet to challenge an advisor's statement or suggestion. There it is: When I am the teacher I act convincingly and confidently. When I am a student I

hesitate and am tongue-tied. Krall offers comforting words in saying that student-researchers are invariably filled with uncertainty, question the academic legitimacy of life history research, and doubt the educational value of their own stories (1988, p. 470). Viewed from that perspective, self-doubt and insecurity take on the mantle of respectability. Apparently it is natural and appropriate to feel the way I do.



How does one go about reconstructing one's history? How does one profit from rummaging among the half-remembered and long-forgotten? How accurate are such recollections? What's fabricated and what is true? How much does one tell in a public document? When is reflection no more than unburdening, confession without interpretation? Krall describes her students' initial writing as "too literal and tediously chronological" (1988, p. 470); she encourages them to go back to their experience and "stand at its center in an attempt to convey its essence rather than the event". David Tripp suggests *critical incidents* as a way in/to events or situations that mark a significant turning point or change in one's life. According to Tripp, this includes "commonplace events that occur in the everyday life [of the researcher,] rendered critical by the author by being seen as indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures" (1994, p. 69). Brookfield points to critical incidents as "incontrovertible sources of data" representing "existential realities" and recommends their use for the movement from the specific to the general (1990, p. 180). There is no requirement to "appear profound," he continues, "no need to espouse

conventional pedagogic wisdom ... and no requirement to speak in academically impeccable jargon" (p.184). He must have seen me coming.

Personal stories are problematic sources of information, in that they are mere fragments, often emotionally charged and uncorroborated (Tripp, 1994, p. 66). A good example is the three-stage shift in the way I've interpreted the apprenticeship experience: from (1) it is normal, to (2) I was abused, and (3) it has symbolic value. Intuition tells me that if certain stories stick amidst thousands of life events, then they probably hold something unresolved, something containing valuable insights. Alfred Adler suggests that "there are no chance memories" (in Nachmias, 1998, p. 79), that we remember what's important to construct our life story. I began my personal research by recollecting memorable incidents. The list quickly grew to thirty in a couple of days. The stories fell roughly into two groups: one about me the teacher, the other about me the learner (pupil, apprentice, student). I then read through them a couple of times—listening and feeling as I went. Which holds most energy? What themes emerge? Which story draws, which repels me? Which do I dismiss, which avoid?



During a workshop at Teachers College/Columbia University, Brookfield gave us an exercise to "examine a critical thinking episode in your own life and to interpret its significance for your development as a learner and teacher". He also gave us a series of

prompts to assist us in working through the incident. Written here as a question-and-answer exchange, the conversation unfolds as follows:

Stephen Brookfield: What circumstances or situation triggered your critical thinking?

Peter: Selecting Dan as my research supervisor. When he was first suggested to me, I resisted. I put the decision aside, not wanting to deal with it. Several things kept me from exploring the possibility. I had recently dropped from his course, finding it “over my head”. This left me feeling dumb and incompetent. Dan and I had known each other for twenty years, since I last took a course for the diploma in adult education. Since then we had had infrequent contact, but always positive. Dan had used one of my books as a text in his course. Still, I think I was *afraid* of him, experiencing a case of “imposter syndrome” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 123). I was attracted to Dan as a role model, as I admire his energy when he teaches (his face gets red), his thoroughness, his clarity of speech (he speaks in such “camera-ready” sentences), his dedication to teaching, his notion of “making demand for work” which has influenced the way I engage my own students. Could I live up to such a high standard?

Stephen: As you worked your way through the episode, what resources (human and material) did you find to be most useful to you?

Peter: I relied mostly on internal resources. I decided to confront the ghosts of inadequacy and fear. They are the legacy of the way I learned to define myself during my early years. I also had the opportunity to explain Dan’s style to a fellow student who had bad-mouthed him. This caused me to re-assess my perceptions/opinion of him.

Stephen: What barriers and hindrances did you encounter during the episode? And when you encountered these, how did you work through them?

Peter: By defending Dan in his absence, I realized how much I respected and liked him. In fact, I defended Dan's reputation to myself. Consequently, I decided to face the issue (my fears) by facing Dan. I signed up for his next course and we began corresponding by email. I made an effort to get to know this person, rather than this projection. We went for a walk in Nitobe Gardens one day, spoke of personal matters, his arthritis, his years as a student of the martial arts, his life as a professor, our thoughts on the decline of "the art of letter writing", our shared need for tranquillity and nature. I mentioned my apprehension regarding this new relationship and we agreed to take this dance slowly. We resolved to become co-learners!

Stephen: What happened as a result of the episode? Was it worthwhile? Did you gain any self-knowledge as a result?

Peter: I'm less intimidated, more confident in my relationship with Dan. Looking back on my notes two years later, I realize that this "switch" also applies to my attitude to the doctoral program in general. Dan and I continue to exchange email messages, have co-taught a summer course, and frequently talk to each other with mutual respect and liking.

Stephen: What would you say in conclusion?

Peter: This episode helped me by shifting my commitment to the doctoral program and, more importantly, to my personal and professional growth. As part of this turnaround I began to embrace the "demon" instead of running from it. This experience has given me new confidence. I have noticed similar shifts (from resistance to embracing) in other situations. Look at how I handled the "moment of truth" in the collage-making course. And how after nine months of floundering, I leveled with my advisors and admitted that I needed their help.

Naming the demon—and being fortunate enough to be listened to by caring teachers—has lead to this amazing writing journey.

📖 Rick: The recounting of your dialogue with Dan in the Nitobe Gardens said a great deal to me about the relationship and about Dan's wisdom and skill [I know him only by reputation, not personally]. It reminded me of the appreciative approach to executive coaching taken by Bill [Bergquist, an educator we both admire], and [his] constant encouragement to take the process out of the office - go for a walk - perch in the bleachers or sit in the park, speak to the "objective correlative" (my phrase, not Bill's) rather than to each other. That in turn reminded me of the Eastern approach used by Warren Zeigler in his Envisioning the Future workshop (here in Vancouver several years ago). After "imaging" individually, then recording our images privately, we had conversations in pairs, sitting side-by-side,, not making eye contact, with one person speaking and the other taking in what was spoken as an empty vessel, providing a place/space for the other to speak/articulate/explore her/his images - very powerful!!



Krall (1988, p. 470) helps student-researchers to get past writing in a “tediously chronological” manner. I risk , but I shall disregard her advice this once. Since this document will be read by people who don’t know me, I think a point-by-point *Lebenslauf* (“curriculum vitae” or “run of a life”) might serve as program notes.

- Born in 1943, Hildesheim, Germany (older brother Gerhard 3½ years ahead of me; for the last 30 years has been working as self-employed artist/designer)
- 1946 mother and new-born sister die during childbirth
- 1946 father returns brain-injured; four of his brothers have “fallen” in the war

- 1946-48 father remarries twice in quick succession
- 1948-55 Peter attends elementary school (grade 1-7)
- 1949 First Communion
- 1950 half-brother Kurt born (who went on to be the first person in the family to graduate from high school and university/medical school)
- 1956 Peter leaves home at age 12, lives with a foster family, and graduates from grade 8 in another city
- 1956 six months, residential pre-apprenticeship school
- 1957 cook's apprenticeship abruptly ended after three month trial period when the chef is found to be an alcoholic and incompetent
- 1958-61 three year cook's apprenticeship (lives in the master's house)
- 1960 father remarries for the fourth time
- 1961 passes State examination to attain journeyman status
- 1961-63 two year apprenticeship as innkeeper (management trainee)
- 1961 earns silver medal at provincial culinary art show
- 1963 passes examination to attain qualification as innkeeper
- 1961-63 completes correspondence study and diploma, hotel management school
- 1963 seven months as steward on S.S. Hanseatic, a German ocean liner
- 1964 works for one year with restaurant chain; begins as assistant, promoted to shift leader by age twenty-one
- 1965 spends small inheritance on ten week immersion course to learn English in Bournemouth, England
- 1965 works for five months as steward on M.S. Kungsholm, a Swedish cruise ship
- 1965 leaves Germany to avoid military service; emigrates to USA
- 1965-66 works for one year as assistant hotel manager, Princeton, NJ
- 1965 attends summer school at Cornell University (hotel management)
- 1965 receives letter from father: "you are disowned; no longer my son"
- 1966 leaves USA to avoid "selective service" (Armed Forces); emigrates to Canada,

- 1966-67 works for one year as desk clerk in Toronto; takes night school classes at Ryerson Polytechnic
- 1967-68 moves to Vancouver; completes final of two years in diploma program (hotel management, British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT))
- 1967 receives offer to join faculty upon graduation
- 1968-69 in preparation for teaching appointment, completes year-long program in hotel management, graduates *with distinction*, University of Surrey, London, England
- 1969-72 returns to Canada, works for three years as full-time instructor (hotel and restaurant management, BCIT)
- 1970 father dies
- 1971 Peter marries; marriage to last one year
- 1971-74 completes part-time diploma (adult education, UBC)
- 1973-74 travels to Europe to manage friend's restaurant in Wales
- 1973-76 completes part-time diploma (counselling psychology, UBC)
- 1974 hangs out shingle as "training consultant"
- 1974-78 works as continuing education instructor (hospitality management, BCIT)
- 1975 self-publishes first book, *Hotel Front Office Procedures*; later sells rights to VanNostrand, New York; book is still earning royalties in 3rd edition
- 1977 self-publishes *The instructor's survival kit* which eventually sold over 40,000 copies
- 1981-84 completes part-time studies leading to M.Ed. (curriculum & instruction, SFU)
- 1986 publishes *The (quick) instructional planner*
- 1987 moves to Galiano Island
- 1990 co-authors and publishes *In search of solutions: 50 ways to guide your problem-solving groups*
- 1991 (approx.) Named Trainer of the Year, B.C. Society for Training & Development
- 1993 revises/expands *The instructor's survival kit* into *The art of teaching adults*; book is selected a finalist for the Benjamin Franklin Award at the ABA Convention
- 1994-96 becomes part-time student, M.A. program (liberal studies), SFU; spends summer term studying medieval history, Christchurch College, Oxford; withdraws from the

degree after completing two-thirds of the course work, unable to cope with the volume and sophistication of assigned readings.



Figure 7: Tutorial at Christchurch College Oxford

- 1996 elected to two-year term as director of local community association
- 1997 joins inaugural cohort, Ed.D. program (educational leadership & policy), UBC; achieves candidacy status in 1999; thesis now in progress with graduation planned for Spring 2001
- 1999 marks thirty years as teacher of adults and twenty-five as self-employed trainer and facilitator
- 1999 sets up SFU bursary in deceased parents' name for graduate students in education.

Even in its synoptic presentation, this bird's eye view points to several themes and issues, some visible only between the lines. In contrast to a conventional c.v. with its chronology of schooling and employment, it offers glimpses at events of personal significance, such as deaths, births, marriages, illness, immigration.

📖 Rachel: Your time line grabbed my attention ... the compact, emotionless detailing of a life. So much between the lines! The facts are there, but how do you interpret them? I've done this often with my own life, just to see what it looks like, and marvelled at the countries visited, the jobs done, the people I have known. So what is the meaning of it all? Who have I loved? Who has loved me? What good have I done? How many lessons until I learn?

Peter grew up in a working-class family in post-war Germany; both family and society provided little stability (shaping his values around frugality, shame, and class-consciousness). His formal schooling ended at grade eight, but continues to be a driving force to this day (shaping his mixed attitudes of envy and resentment for 'educated' people, and his drive to 'better himself'). His relationships with men in authority (father, apprentice-master, teachers, military, academic advisors, friends) may be of significance; key women lurk in the shadows (mother died early, three stepmothers, one short marriage, string of relationships leading to a solitary life style).

📖 Rachel again: Some descriptions of your early years were heartbreaking ... I could see the little boy and the young man, all alone. Any mother would connect with this! I think of all the years I have devoted to the nurturing of my boys. I hope it has been enough. I love them beyond words and life. My older son, Adam, was diagnosed with bone cancer when he was 15. We fought through the treatment. Relapse at 18 and more chemo, surgery. I prayed that God (with whom I am not on very familiar terms) would take me instead of him. I thought of the tiny, perfect creature he was when born and the devastation wrought on his body before he even had a chance to live. He survived with a wonky arm and a valiant spirit. Even now, 5 years later, I struggle with letting him go. What I've learned about pain! Sleep deprivation, constant tears, pounding heart, loss of concentration. I felt alone, despite the support of good friends, utterly alone.

This made me think about the role of mothers. Mine was a product of her times, raising her daughters to be good wives and to please men. I can remember her giving me magazines about teen grooming, weight control, how to attract a boy. Unfortunately, I was a chubby, shy girl with bad skin and glasses! How would I ever get a boyfriend? Never did. Spent a lonely adolescence reading and studying, so my grades were great, but I still have trouble believing myself attractive, whatever people say. My God, the damage, all in the name of good intentions.

Authoring four books and successfully self-publishing three of them provides steady income (but does not keep him from thinking that he “cannot write”). Poor role models notwithstanding, he eventually becomes an adult educator and trainer-of-trainers who consistently gets high ratings and repeat business for his work. Without the benefits of a high school or undergraduate education, he worms his way into several post-secondary institutions in the USA, Canada, and England. In spite of being “successful” in Canada since at least 1980, he longs for Europe (repeated stays in France, Italy, Wales, and England). He prefers to live alone in a small island community; his work with professional groups takes him all over the country. There he creates what a friend calls “sequential monogamous relationships”: parachuting in, staying for a while, building a “family,” departing. He seems to need to “prove himself” (while his friends, colleagues, and workshop participants continue to laud his intelligence, sense of humor, and capabilities). He is curious (and restless) about many things, a veritable poster boy for the Life-long Learning Movement (taking courses on bread baking, stone carving, rock climbing, French language, medieval history, personal growth, wilderness survival, meditation, facilitation techniques ... and experimenting with gardening, *faux* painting, distance running, community service,

carpentry, cello playing, and poetry writing). “Ancora Imparo – still, I am learning” is his motto, borrowed from Michelangelo.



Figure 8: Still I am learning (Sienna, 1999)



How am I doing? What am I doing? How do I feel as I write and write? In emails to friends I talk about having come “unstuck”. I hesitate to say more for fear of “scaring it away”. What is “it”? It is the flow of words that seems to come from deep inside of me. I hesitate to analyze them, afraid of interfering with the energy; I’m in awe of something that seems beyond comprehension. Even writing these words means coming closer, examining, analyzing. Hard to put my finger on it, but it feels as if I’ve come upon a secret, something behind closed doors, in a cave, primeval. Maybe it’s the core of me, the energy that pushes me forward, that makes me get up every morning, make porridge, put on the kettle, shove

out the cat, look at myself in the mirror. Perhaps it's the "thing" which keeps me alive, lends me the charm and humor which touches others, lends me the talents to design and deliver workshops others call exceptional; the gumption to publish books and become a doctoral student; the perseverance when depression threatens to choke me; the compassion to give comfort to friends; the love to write poems to my estranged brother; the push to lace up the running shoes in the wet and windy darkness; the courage to admit I need help. I sometimes find myself writing from an inner place, from which words come tumbling out as if bypassing my critical brain. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls this phenomenon "being in flow":

While in "flow", we are too involved to be concerned with failure. Some people describe it as a feeling of total control: but actually we are not in control, it's just that the issue does not even come up. If it did, we would not be concentrating totally, because our attention would be split between what we did and the feeling of control. The reason that failure is not an issue is that in flow it is clear what has to be done, and our skills are potentially adequate to the challenges. (1996, p. 112)

The term *narrative research* is used as an umbrella to categorize what I'm doing here. *Life story research* examines a life or a segment of life as reported by the individual in question. The life story turns research subject into the researcher and author. This subject-as-author, writes Norman Denzin, is given authority over the life and story being written about; he is "everywhere and nowhere ... always present in personal name and signified in the words [used] ... but the author is not in those words ... they are only signs of the author, the self and the life in question" (1989, p. 42). Atkinson positions life story as a means to

become fully aware, fully conscious to reclaim our birthright. Life story (or life history) research has a rich tradition in several fields, such as psychotherapy, sociology, anthropology, history, social work, gerontology, and literature. In education, writes Atkinson, "the whole question of what it is to teach and what it is to learn is being reconceived" and personal narratives "can tell educators ... how [they] have found their own centers ... [and] clearly illustrate the primacy, in both individual lives and educational practice, of the quest for life's meaning and the role of caring" (1998, p. 16-17). Alex Nelson uses "autobiographical learning" to describe a process in which "the person develops a sense of personal autonomy and authority in their life. This awareness accompanies a critical review of how their values, feelings, ideas and imagination have given shape to their life" (1994, p. 391). Reading these quotes impacts me in three ways. First, it encourages me to proceed. Others have gone before, they have paved the way, demonstrated the legitimacy of lived experiences as a data source, and have gone a long way toward calming critics who view such research as unscientific, self-serving, and solipsistic. Second, it validates my work as essential. Essential as a pre-condition to becoming a critically reflective practitioner and teacher of other teachers. Essential also to helping me clarify and understand through "radical honesty" (Blanton, 1994), by daring to tell the truth, transcend illusions, lift masks, and dismantle defenses. Third, it throws me off. Reading these well-crafted articles makes me dizzy (can I ever know and say such things?) and unsure about borrowing others' language (is that dishonest or pretentious?). This dizziness is real, an I'm-about-to-faint sensation. By now several instances of me feeling dizzy have surfaced: overwhelmed in the collage course, dropping Dan's course, withdrawing from the SFU program, feeling tongue-

ted in research committee meetings. It seems that I feel abandoned (by whom?), or that I give up (what?: authority, legitimacy, control?).

To acknowledge that “I don’t know something” is difficult for me. It runs counter to early admonitions to “strive and succeed” in a hostile world. Yet when I give in to not-knowing, when I cease pretending to know, defenses come down and fresh strength floods in. *Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it* (Luke 17:33). In *Grace unfolding*, Greg Johanson and Ron Kurtz write:

When something is mysterious, it doesn’t quite have a name. For instance, we may experience a slight sense of uneasiness in our chest. If we can resist analyzing this to purge it of its uncontrollable namelessness, it may lead us to fuller understanding. Simply befriending the uneasiness—not trying change it in any way, allowing it to emerge more fully—leads, perhaps, to our experience saying yes to the words ‘fear of conflict’. These words are not imposed by our minds, they arise from the mysterious region of not-knowing. (1991, p. 4)



I haven’t said much about being a teacher: how I first became one, what my experiences have been, what I like and what I dislike about it, how I feel before, during, and after a course, what participants say about being taught by me, what my colleagues see and say, and so on. Not to worry, I am circling the topic, like a distressed aircraft coming in for a landing, dumping fuel prior to touch-down. Like a bird-watcher, crawling through the

underbrush, checking the site, looking for tell-tale signs of winged presence. My writing to this point has aimed to create a context and to assemble memories, impressions, and possibilities. Traditional stories follow certain patterns, such as birth, life, death, rebirth (as in the life story of Jesus); preparation, separation, initiation, return (the classic hero's journey). Elsewhere, we find fairy-tale beginning, middle, and ending; the operatic overture, confusion, more confusion, surprise ending. I'm seeking as many beginnings, ways-in, as I can locate. As Ralph Blum (1993, p. 102) suggests, when in deep water, become a diver.

☞ Bernhard: "When in deep water, become a diver". Vivid image for someone like me who is heading to Florida's gulf coast for an Advanced Open Water Diving course: wreck diving, deep diving, underwater navigation ... Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" comes to mind. Many of her lines may fit, and the style is narrative, quite similar to yours. Here is the first stanza:

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body armor of black rubber
and absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone...



2 February 2000. Knock me over with a feather. Last night I walked into Carl's class brimming with confidence. The previous class had stimulated me beyond expectation and resulted in a stream of writing. In one activity, Carl asked us to record our reactions to a controversial newspaper article; then join in small groups for discussion. As I listened to what others had "heard" in the article, I realized how little I understood about literary criticism. Immediately—and by habit—I turned against myself, bombarding myself with missiles of doubt: Are you bright enough? Do you belong here? Or are you still trying to jump your own shadow, trying to bluff your way through? I left class discouraged, diminished, disillusioned ... with Doubt as my companion.



sage a. & n. 1. a. Wise, discreet, judicious, having the wisdom of experience, or indicating profound wisdom. **2. n.** Profoundly wise man (often iron.).

Enter the Sage: What happened? I saw you coming out of Carl's class, looking despondent. You went in all excited ... what happened?

Peter: Whole bunch of little things ...

Sage: How about some specifics?

Peter: I went in all revved up. I arrived early and found the room in a mess. Furniture every which way, pop bottles and snack food wrappers on the table tops, a real mess. I straightened out the tables in a U-shape and cleaned the table tops. Then Carl came and lamented how

disgusting the mess was: little did he know how much I cared about him having a decent room to start in.

Sage: And ... ?

Peter: No recognition of my contribution and ..

Sage: Hold it. Back up. How could Carl have known?

Peter: You're right, he had no way of knowing. It's about something else. It's about Carl not noticing me. When I joined his class late, he did not introduce me as a latecomer, as one of his students.

Sage: And that's important to you?

Peter: Yup! It's about [hesitates] inclusion and exclusion. When I teach, I pay special attention to including latecomers, encourage people to use each others' names, and so on.

Sage: So, you came to this course with high hopes of being one of Carl's treasured apprentices and discovered that you have to share him with twenty others. Is that it?

Peter: Could be. When he's in his teacher's persona, he seems removed ... from me. As if he becomes the performer and I one of many onlookers.

Sage: Performer?

Peter: Well, the way he gathers his hair and tucks it in one side of his head ... how he moves around as if on stage ... how he jokes—about asking our opinions on the evening's agenda but pursuing his own, for instance. How he tells his stories—but cuts others short when they begin to tell theirs. How he gives the impression of creating an “us” in the room—but all comments flow through him.

Sage: So what? Even if what you say is true—and remember: it's your own blend of facts and conjecture—why does this matter so? And, since Carl isn't here to speak for himself, let's concentrate on you. What is it that irks you?

Peter [blushing]: Right ... I've put Carl on a pedestal. You should hear me describe him to others: how wonderful he is, how supportive, how non-traditional, how creative, and so on. I went to his course to get a dose of that creativity, of that energy.

Sage: And .. what are you getting?

Peter: I'm getting some of that, all right. But I'm also running into ... me ... and I don't like it one bit.

Sage: Come again?

Peter: I see myself in Carl—myself the teacher filtered through the eyes and emotions of a student. And I'm being highly critical. I don't want Carl to be like me.

Sage: Slow down. One step at a time. You say you see yourself in Carl as in a mirror. And what you see—namely yourself—doesn't measure up to your standards?

Peter: Right. It's not the first time. A similar thing occurred when I went to New York to study with Stephen Brookfield and to England with Ed Brown. I'd found Stephen's books a great inspiration and expected him to be ... well ... super-teacher. And Ed I'd "known" for twenty years for his *Tassajara Bread Book* and now I was intrigued by him as a Zen priest. But when I met them, both seemed distant, not the supermen I expected.

Sage: They turned out to be mere mortals. And that presented a problem for you because ...?

Peter [gesticulating excitedly]: ... because that's how I behave! Now it's out ... I know that I distance myself from my participants: I behave one way in front of the class and another when I talk to them in person. Carl, Stephen, Ed (and Dan) are my teacher-heroes, my self-

selected masters. I come to learn from them and expect them to be perfect ... and find ... that they are not.

Sage: Thomas Carlyle wrote that it "is a thing forever changing, this of Hero-worship; different in each age, difficult to do well in any age" (in Knox, 1998, p. 115). In fact, the ancient Greeks preferred their heroes (and their gods) to have some human frailties. But I digress. Did you say learn ... and perfect?

Peter: Yes, I realize what I'm saying. I claim to want to learn from them, but find myself critiquing them ... and myself. Can you see why this confuses me? I cast them in certain roles and when they don't measure up, when they act in their idiosyncratic ways, I get pissed off.

Sage: But you do more, it seems. You also think about it, afterwards. Like right now. You question their performance and then look at yours. You question the congruence between what a teacher writes and how he acts. You're making links between what you see in others and how you, yourself, behave when you're teaching. Strikes me that you're engaged in what Donald Schön would call "reflection-on-action" (1987, p. 26). You're engaged in problematizing your own teaching behavior.

Peter: Is that what Carl meant when he said for me to interrogate my practice? Is that what I'm doing? Maybe these masters are continually teaching me ...

Sage: Now you're thinking! Another thing: I'd like you to look again at what you said about events in Carl's class. Ask yourself how he serves as your mirror ... and what you are seeing about yourself as teacher?

Peter: When I get in front of a group I am on stage. I fuss about my appearance (for the last few years my bow ties have become part of my costume, setting me apart, making me look

different, artistic, European). I sit at the edge of a table, tell tales about life, about teaching, about being a learner—use myself as central character. I routinely hold forth on learner-centered teaching and the beauty of building learning communities.

Sage: Lots to excavate here ... for now let's follow the vein of who occupies centre stage. What happens in your work?

Peter: I typically start off with "me" and then, gradually, shift away from centre-stage, inviting (nudging, cajoling, shoving) the participants into the limelight. By the end of a typical three-day workshop, it's they who are doing the work, it's me who fades into the background. They begin to tell their stories, try things out and internalize what's going on in the room. My role becomes that of stage manager, no longer the lead actor.

Sage: And in Carl's courses ... based on your knowledge of his ways?

Peter: The same. He gets us started, tells stories, reads poems, stands in the spotlight. But he's already begun to shift the focus ... away from him ... over to us. We're asked to share things in every class in small groups; the next two classes are dedicated to us, individually, reading aloud. Seems I misjudged (him).

Sage: Yes, perhaps you were just a tad preoccupied. Now, are we done?

Peter: Almost ... I enjoyed this. Two things stick out: one, a teacher's initial behavior is not necessarily indicative of what's to come. Don't judge too soon. Keep an open mind. There may be method in his madness. Second, why not enjoy the opportunity to use other teachers as mirrors? Look at what you see. But remember that what you see a) may not be what you expect, and b) may be a reflection, or projection, of your own expectations.

Sage: OK, OK, enough with the insights. Anything else? You seem reluctant to leave.

Peter: Yes, there's something still nagging at me. What will Carl make of this writing? I mean, how will he react to my comments about his teaching? How will it affect our relationship?

Sage: In others words: can you trust Carl with your raw stuff?

Peter: Yes.

Sage: What do you think? What do you know about Carl?

Peter: That he encourages me to write like this, that he knows about the messiness of narrative ... and that he can take care of himself.

Sage: Absolutely! How about we stop here? I leave you with these words by Cheryl Hunt:

I realize I am the only person who already owns the key to understanding why I have initially interpreted and reacted to a situation ... but in order to find it I will have to look in the shadows in my own mind. (1997, p. 1)

📖 My tale of reacting to Carl's classroom persona brings back memories for Bernhard. He writes: Oh yes: "a teacher's initial behavior is not indicative of what's to come." An unpleasant student of mine earlier this year could not take what she saw, left, and flashed a nasty e-mail message across the screen of the computer lab where I was teaching: "Mr. Satan sucks". Poor child!



Curious to see what themes have emerged, I scan the first fifty pages to trawl for words and phrases that demand attention. Here they are, arranged alphabetically:

abused
afraid
analyze

faking
floundering
found out

small
spooked
spur of the moment

authority
 being loved
 better yourself
 bewildered
 bounce
 chaos
 child-like
 clarity
 collegial
 compassion
 confidence
 courage
 curious
 darkness
 depressed
 dizzy
 drawn to the dark
 drift
 drowning
 encouragement
 excited
 expectations
 experimenting

handsome
 heart
 helter-skelter
 hidden
 high standards
 impatient
 imposter
 incompetence
 intuition
 joking
 joy
 lack of confidence
 lacking conviction
 legitimate
 life-long learner
 little (person)
 nostalgia
 not knowing
 optimistic
 paralyzed
 pretending
 prove himself
 respect

starts and stops
 stimulated
 strive
 stumble
 stupid
 stutter
 suffer
 tears
 threaten
 tongue-tied
 too complicated
 trials and errors
 uncomfortable
 unsure
 unworthy
 victim
 wise
 work hard

Re-arranged in poetic form, they begin to tell an interesting story:

abused, afraid, no further need to analyze
 take authority, be loved
 better yourself?
 why be bewildered
 bounce in chaos, child-like
 as clarity emerges
 collegial compassion abounds
 and confidence arises

courage, dear heart
 let your curious mind
 explore feared darkness
 familiar dizziness, depressed and drawn to the dark
 now drifting, saved from drowning
 with encouragement
 excite
 raise expectations and begin
 ex pe ri men ta tion

no need to fake, just be
 prepared to flounder
 fear not to be found
 out
 let your handsome heart guide
 the helter-skelter ride
 from hidden enclaves

become impatient with high standards
 let imposters speak
 with all incompetence and intuition
 joke, joy, proclaim your lack of
 confidence, conviction
 legitimately be
 a life-long learner

tend to the little person
 always
 let him weep nostalgically
 not-knowing be his battle cry
 now optimism thaws paralysis
 no more pretending
 no more proving self to others

respect the solid core of self
 spooked easily
 now trust
 spurs of moments, starts and stops
 striving and stumbling
 stuttering stupidly

suffer the tears
 be not threatened
 and be tongue-tied
 if you wish

complicated days
 many tries, loads of errors
 uncomfortable never sure
 beware the ancient habits
 calling you unsure, unworthy
 casting you the victim

there!
 let all this hard work be
 in support of growing wise

As I write this poetic narrative, I see myself stepping aside so as not to impede the flow. Words come forth, through me, as if dictated by another. Yet they are mine: typed as quickly as my fingers are able, with hands that hours earlier pounded the desk in desperation, causing cups to bounce and cold tea to spill. Writing like this travels along a conduit leading directly to ... where? My heart?



Sage: Hi, me again! I've come to interrogate ... not you personally, but this text you're creating.

Peter: Sure. What do you want to know? I've been open and straightforward.

Sage: No need to be defensive, Peter. What I'd like us to try is to explore aspects you have *not* written about; aspects of your lived experience that have been left off the pages. In reading your text, I was struck by repeated mention of feeling dumb, incompetent, and so on. Yet the person who sits before me seems capable and bright. Your course participants describe you as knowing your stuff; they also comment on your warmth and creativity. Past clients unhesitatingly recommend your services to others. Which makes me ask you: What is it about teaching you enjoy, do well, feel proud of?

Peter [twitches in discomfort]: Good point. I did sort of get hung up on talking about the dark side of becoming a teacher. As if "ruminating" were "confessing" as in "confessing sins" in the religious sense or "crimes" as in criminal surrender. The English word "confession" misses the complexity of *confessiones* which St. Augustine must have

intended, writes Gary Wills (1999, p. xiv). *Confiteri* means, etymologically, to corroborate, to testify. In this sense, I'm confessing to the joy in teaching and my sense of privilege at being able to help others learn. And I confess that I get scared before a new course or class; stage fright I guess. I read that Lawrence Olivier routinely vomited before going on. It used to be, until about two years ago, that I'd have sleepless nights before a session, I'd toss and turn, rehearse various (negative) possibilities, have nightmares and conjure up catastrophic expectations. More recently, this has changed: I'm calmer now, sleep better the night before, no longer over-prepare.

Sage: What brought about this change?

Peter: I think I've become more confident recently, more sure of myself. After all—it finally sank in—I must have given hundreds of workshops over the last twenty-five years ... and of those, no more than two or three bombed.

Sage: Bombed ... say more ...

Peter: Well, I clearly remember three events for which I shouldn't have billed the client. I didn't do a good job, either because I was not sufficiently tuned in to the group or because I over-stretched myself and taught on a subject I wasn't qualified in. I still feel bad about those situations; still avoid or fear to meet anyone associated with those organizations.

Sage: How recent are these events?

Peter: The earliest would have been about sixteen and another fourteen years ago. Lots of water under the bridge since then, but still ...

Sage: ... so what about all the other times, when things went well. Why do you think they went as well as they did?

Peter: Well, for one thing, participants describe my workshops as stimulating and entertaining. Rarely a dull moment. People get involved and find themselves participating even if normally they'd rather sit back and remain passive. I am able to make people laugh: not that I tell jokes, no, but I have a knack for situational humour. It arises from what goes on in class, an example I give, or a story I tell.

Sage: What else?

Peter: I'd say my strength lies in the way I offer myself as a transparent individual. I describe myself as model, tell participants to observe me critically, watch what I do and how I do it. Routinely I ask them to describe "what did you see me do?" and together we deconstruct my "performance". By going first I make it easier for them to observe, name, and then try out new or unfamiliar behaviors. Opening my behavior to critical observation also helps help build my credibility as role model.

Sage: What else?

Peter: Participants regularly report not only that they enjoyed a course with me, that they felt comfortable and safe ... but also that they felt challenged to look at their own practice, to examine their own strengths, uncover aspects they wanted to work on.

Sage: Good. Let's look at one of the critical incidents you alluded to. Let's be guided by David Tripp's assertion that life history research yields best results *not* when aiming to "produce holistic biographies, but through piecemeal examination" of events that help to "uncover professionally formative experiences" (1994, p. 65). Could you recall one or two such experiences that are memorable for you?

Peter: Sure. One incident comes to mind immediately. I have long seen it as one of the stepping stones, or roadside markers, on my way to becoming an accomplished teacher.

Sage: And as you do so, be mindful of Krall's suggestion to place yourself at the centre of the story and "convey its essence rather than the event". The intent, after Gadamer, is to recall what stands out and to get at its essence, to open and keep open possibilities (1988, p. 470).

Peter: There's one incident that's stuck with me for over twenty years:

Picture a motel in a meeting room set up like a wedding banquet, U-shaped table formation, white tablecloths, view over the parking lot to one side, a folding dividing wall (to 'screen' us from applauding Rotarians at lunch time) on the other. The date, somewhere in the early 80's. I'm here to do a 5-day train-the-trainer workshop for corrections officers. Due to the short notice (I'm a stand-in for a no-show instructor), I know little to nothing about their background, why they signed up, and what training has to do with prisons. Half of the participants are in gray-green uniform; all but two of sixteen are men. I feel intimidated, out of place, ill prepared. But I also like the idea of working for Public Service Commission of Canada (good for the résumé; more work, perhaps?) and come fully equipped with the arrogance and inflated self-confidence of the novice-entrepreneur. I can do this. I am a recent UBC graduate in adult education. I know my stuff.

I lead them through some warm-up game (doesn't quite work), then proceed to dazzle them with my borrowed knowledge of Bloom's taxonomy, Maslow's hierarchy, and Gagné's domains of learning. The more I talk, the less they seem to listen. More and more, they lean back in their chair, arms across their chests, faces tuned-out. The more funny stories about teaching I dish out, the less they seem amused. And, all the while, my confidence sinks and my anxiety rises. I'm sweating, speak faster, skip transparencies.

By Wednesday morning, I am at my wit's end. The last two days (and nights) have been increasingly hellish. We are not connecting. They don't seem to care for my regurgitated theories (which I'm not all that clear on myself). All they seem to want is to be able to teach someone to load a revolver, frisk an inmate, toss a cell. I hate those

uniforms, dislike their macho humour and innuendoes, disapprove of their preoccupation. With the exception of a couple of 'living unit officers' in the group (social work types considered softies by the others), I have no-one on my side. That's right, we are on opposite sides, it's them against me.

STOP!!! One hour into Wednesday morning, I cease lecturing, halt in my tracks. Remembering whatever Carl Rogers may have taught me about empathy, self-disclosure, and congruency, I come clean. This isn't working for me, and it doesn't seem to work for you, I confess. I've been talking at you for two days, but that's not what interests you. Come to think of it, I don't even know what does interest you. I am exhausted, I tell them, I feel that I'm not being a good teacher for you. Near tears, I offer to withdraw—unless they have some ideas for turning this around.

Well, the rest is part of my mythology (I've told it with different endings). But still, what a turn-around! Slowly, their arms uncross and they begin by a) agreeing that I seem to live on a different planet, and b) that they are willing to show me what they need to learn. We proceed to construct a rudimentary train-the-trainer course in which, over the remaining $2\frac{1}{2}$ days, they will practice in small groups how to teach all the things that I disapprove of (to do with guns, uniforms, and confinement). They respond to my careful feedback and directions. Their joshing, for the first time, includes me. Some comment on how much I seem to know about teaching; others acknowledge my willingness to admit my shortcomings. They even try to get me to visit their new medium-security prison ("so you can see where we live"), but are unable to get permission on short notice.

Sage: Quite a story, Peter. What is it, you think, that makes it so memorable?

Peter: I'd say it's the fact that these people, so uncouth and militaristic, took me under their wings and taught me to be their teacher.

Sage [eyebrows raised]: Uncouth?

Peter: I confess to my arrogance. I must have thought that with my background and qualifications I was doing them a favour coming all the way to Abbotsford to show them tricks. I truly thought I knew more than they did. Reminds me of a character in one of John le Carré's spy novels: "Dressed in my father's suit. A lousy actor concealed by his own performance ..." (1989, p. 146).

Sage: And the militaristic bit?

Peter: I looked down on them because they wore uniforms and worked in a prison. I have a deep distaste for—a fear of—uniforms and people in them. It goes back to my childhood in post-war Germany, the British troops that occupied my home town as I grew up; tales of war-time horrors alluded to but never spoken of; and the trauma of fleeing two countries (Germany, USA) to avoid being drafted into the army. It reminded me of the abuse of power in the hands of my early teachers and apprentice masters.

Sage: I understand that at the time of the workshop you were immersed in the "human potential movement," undergoing counselling training at UBC, deeply into personal therapy, and influence by the works of such people as Maslow and Rogers. How did you square your actions with their ideals?

Peter [shrugs in mock despair]: Looking at the first two days of the course, my actions were anything but client-centered (in Rogers' sense). I clearly arrived there with an I-know-better-than-you-do attitude. That wasn't based on any thought-out conviction, more on uncertainty about my ability. I probably thought that citing big names and using borrowed handouts would automatically confer respect on me. As it turned out, I earned my authority only after giving up on the borrowed expertise, and by declaring myself as not-knowing and willing-to-learn. These prison officers may not have known about Rogers' learner-centered teaching or

Freire's education-as-banking, but they seemed to know of both notions *intuitively*. They knew what they needed and, fortunately, hung in long enough till I began to listen to them and inquire into their learning needs.

Sage: What else did you take away from that experience?

Peter: Something that continues to concern me: how do I reconcile my responsibility as expert (who is expected to—and in fact may—know more about what's worth knowing about subject X than the students) and my basic humanistic notions of freedom, autonomy, individuality, and potentiality? For me, this is an ongoing conundrum.

Sage: ... and a central question to your being a teacher. I suggest you keep it in mind as you continue digging. In this kind of work you need to be careful not to shift too soon from *remembering* to *comprehending* (Krall). As you and David write (Quinlivan-Hall & Renner, 1990/1994, p. 2), fifty percent of problem-solving time should be spent on gathering the facts and understanding the situation.



8 February 2000. When I delivered the first 60 pages and the collage box to Carl's office, he offered a reply within a week. Unsure of the outcome, I ceased writing. This was all so new to me, to "write vulnerably" (Behar, 1996, p. 9). I desperately needed feedback, direction, reassurance. Two days later I began drifting toward depressive darkness—familiar and unwelcome. I was racked by doubt about my place in the academy. Then, on day five, I came up for light. In the middle of a movie (*The Emperor and the Assassin*) I realized that I'd be alright regardless of Carl's reaction! I left the cinema in mid-film (how many more

heads could they chop off?), convinced that I'd be able to hold mine up high, regardless. I suddenly knew that this work was worthwhile. And I sensed that this kind of writing had to come with its ups and downs, making it natural for the writer to be tossed between hope and despair, joy and depression.

Inserted later. Four months after leaving the cinema, resolved to write this thing, Annie Dillard offers corroboration. "Writing every book," she observes, "the writer must solve two problems: Can it be done? and, Can I do it? Every book has an intrinsic impossibility, which its writer discovers as soon as his first excitement dwindles. ... He writes it in spite of that. He finds ways to minimize the difficulty; he strengthens other virtues; he cantilevers the whole narrative out into thin air, and it holds" (1989, p. 72).

The next day a chance encounter offers further illumination. At a corner café, a man sits opposite, smartly dressed, yuppie type, cell phone, probably drives a SUV, expensive watch and trench coat. Contrary to habit, I initiate a conversation. We exchange fragments of our life stories. Thirty now, he plans to be a millionaire by forty. Explains about networks, e-commerce, and dot.com stock. And all I can talk about is being "stuck, stuck, stuck" in my writing. His simple response is disarming: "You're growing!" By itself, not such a profound observation, but at that moment a most amazing insight. Of course I'm stuck; no wonder I feel hemmed in. I am outgrowing my carapace! Not only tight and ill-fitting, but unsuitable, no longer serving its purpose. The time has come, I realize in a flash, to construct a new enclosure, one that's permeable, yet protective. Still smiling, I leave the café, straight to my running clinic, feeling light and strong. Later, over Japanese dinner, I compliment my friend Claire on "looking so confident" and offer a lecturette on individuation. Her presence serves me as a mirror, the third one in two days. In *Disputed Questions*, Merton writes that

in St. John of the Cross we find darkness and light, suffering and joy, sacrifice and love united together so closely that they seem at times to be identified. It is not so much that we come through darkness to light, as that the darkness itself is light. ... Hence the essential simplicity of his teaching: enter into the night and you will be enlightened. "Night" means the "darkening" of all our natural desires, our natural understanding, our human way of loving; but this darkening brings with it an enlightenment. ... All must be "darkened", that is to say, forgotten, in order that God Himself may become the light of our soul. (1976, p. 198)



9 February 2000. The "judge's decision" arrives by email. Carl writes:

I have just completed reading your latest gift of writing, and I am delighted and thrilled with the tone, insight, emotion, courage, and creativity that enliven your ruminations. This writing has the kind of energy that I have always wanted in your doctoral thesis. As far as I am concerned, you should continue writing in these ways, and let your thesis grow organically as the flourishing of more of these ruminations.

You write about the advice you have heard regarding writing that a writer just needs to sit with a blank page and pour out a vein on the page. There is wisdom in this perspective, but I encourage you to think also about a vein of ore in the earth. Writers search for this vein, and seek ways to reveal it, even mine it for its value. This takes patience and a single-minded commitment to locating the vein. You have now found the vein, and I encourage you to mine it, bring mindfulness to it.

I learned a great deal from your ruminations on my practice. You brought a very keen understanding to some of my pedagogical practice. What I continue to

learn about teaching is that, if I am going to care for my students, especially in the often relentless busyness of university teaching, then I must also care for myself. Teaching requires grace and forgiveness and forgetfulness and a boundless measure of bountiful hope.

Therefore, teaching (and researching teaching) is ultimately a spiritual endeavor, seeking to know pneuma, the light(ness) of spirit. And, like your writing, your art invites, draws the reader in, opens up spaces for more ruminating.

To which I reply:

Dear Carl, barely off the ferry, I rush to the computer ... There, on the screen, your words validate my excavations. Tears of relief. Joy. Well done. Thank you. Out of the doldrums. Fresh wind in my sails!

I gulp Carl's words like so many cups of cool water, restoring me after a long draught; they refresh my confidence and imbue me with competence. His action represents what Nel Noddings calls a "feminine ethic of care", in which, she says, "[w]e are both free—that which I do, *I do*—and bound—I might do far better if you reach out to me and help me and far, far worse if you abuse, taunt or ignore me" (1984, p. 49).

☞ Bernhard, too, stops at this fountain: "Teaching is ultimately a spiritual endeavor" . . . Wow. I finally had an inkling last year, three years before my retirement. Took a long time to come to that point. The craving to be heard, so strong. The courage of being "honest-in-the-moment" Spiritual growth. The courage to be "real".



Lawrence Cunningham describes a monk as someone who asks every day, "What is a monk?" (1996, p. viii), causing me to ask: "What is a teacher?" Immediately I notice an empty space within: this is not a familiar question. I may have glanced at it, lectured on it, even written about it ... but ask it of myself? Not till now.

- What is a teacher? Someone who tells others what's right, acceptable, and worth knowing. Someone who always tries to be a step ahead others and, if he isn't, might fake it, make light of it, or turn the question back on the other. But he's also one who offers to find the necessary information or invites the questioner to look and bring it back.
- One who is (expected to be) up, cheerful, enthusiastic, energetic, entertaining ... anything but what he really feels like. In fact, he often doesn't know what he really feels like; as an entertainer he has a special persona, a "show time" face, along with a bag of tricks stuffed with jokes, stories, and clever repartees.
- What is a teacher? Someone who stands in front of a group of people and acts out a role. The script for this role is made up of what he's seen others do, what he himself likes in a teacher, what he thinks others want of him.
- One who wants to say to people: I enjoy standing in front of you, having your attention. I like being at the centre, in the spotlight. It makes me feel wanted and appreciated. I crave

to be heard. I like telling people what to do and how to do it. I enjoy knowing something others want to know.

- What is a teacher? One who marvels at his ability to make people laugh—spontaneously, frequently to his own surprise. I delight in hearing that I’m good at what I do; that others wish to emulate the way I work with groups.
- One who is *beginning* to comprehend Carl Rogers’ realization after he’d been a teacher for 30 years: “My experience has been that I cannot teach another person how to teach. ... The only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning” (1961, pp. 275-276).

The dictionary traces the verb **a’nalys|e** to the Greek *analytika*: to unravel, set free. What an exquisite image. Instead of sitting, Freud-like out of the patient’s sight—passive, critical, detached—this other analyst is fully engaged, sleeves rolled up, excited and exasperated, puzzled and clever. He looks for patterns among the strings, unraveling the pile the cat’s been playing with. Sometimes he follows strings by their distinctive colours, other times by thickness and texture. Again and again, he reaches torn endings and knotted obstacles. Still he continues, knowing deep down that there’s no Right Answer. As he untangles stories—old ones often told, fresh ones emerging as he writes—he finds himself engaged in deciphering, disentangling and extricating. He resists the temptation to put things in order too soon; in fact, he thrives on not having to.

- What is a teacher? One who takes a person's hand and places it on their hearts. You already know how to teach, he assures them, the teacher-within is waiting. (The trick is to do this without people asking for their money back: to make it believable and real for workshop participants. To lead them, to paraphrase *The Prophet*, to the gates of their own temple¹²). "Tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 1966) is about the things we know but either lack courage, confidence, or plain awareness to acknowledge. "Truth that has been personally appropriated and assimilated in experience, cannot be directly communicated to another" writes Rogers (1961, p. 276).
- One who realizes, slowly, that "received wisdom" can only be "borrowed" for so long: sooner or later it has to be acquired through experience. I remember a line frequently quoted by my father: the poet Goethe writes: *Was Du ererbst von Deinen Vätern, erwirb es um es zu besitzen*. Roughly translated: What our fathers bequeath must be earned before we can own it¹³. How can I teach a group of strangers in a short two-day workshop anything of what it has taken me thirty-plus years to put together? I've often envied teachers of auto mechanics or math or other subjects in which—at least so I think—there are "right" answers. But teach someone how to teach? The best I can come up with right now is to state the dilemma to course participants ... and then lead them, by example, by

¹² The correct line, by Kahlil Gibran (1923/1973), reads: "If he [the teacher] is indeed wise he does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind."

¹³ My friend Beatrice—Bible scholar and teacher—points out that "Jesus did nothing without checking with His father for direction and counsel".

simulated experience, and by reflection on their lived experience toward some personally meaningful learning.

- What is a teacher? One who can have the most enjoyable and satisfying occupation imaginable. There are moments when an explanation comes out coherently, when participants ask probing questions, when people challenge me and each other, when lights go on for an individual, when something happens in the group that offers opportunities for insight and growth, when we sit at the end of a day's work to review and share personal discoveries—these are just some of the moments when I'd work for free just for the pleasure of being there (and for knowing that I had a part in bringing it about).
- One who's alone ... in front of a group that's being difficult ... at the airport when the flight's delayed ... the night before a workshop when he can't sleep ... in yet another strange hotel with bad TV, sad food, and skimpy "amenities" ... two days after a workshop when the excitement wears off ... back at the office responding to potential clients who wants a three-hour course on "how to teach" ... anxiously looking at the calendar with too many blank dates on it ...
- What is a teacher? Someone who, after all these years and hundreds of successful workshops, still fights off the *imposter*. That's the monster lurking everywhere, the one who at any moment might step into the room and point at me and say, "This man doesn't know what he's talking about. He is fooling you". Apparently, the "imposter

phenomenon” (Topping & Kimmel, 1985) is particularly prevalent among intelligent and successful professionals—every teaching colleague I’ve ever mentioned it to knows what I’m talking about.

- One who wonders about his purpose is in this world: do I make a difference in people’s lives? do I—really—help them grow and develop? In my workshops (and in follow-up questionnaires months later) I raise these questions and the responses are always on the affirmative side. But what happens afterwards, three, six, twelve months down the road? What happens to the insights and intentions people report during the course? Will they remember (me)? Will all that work bear fruit?

Sometimes I go about pitying myself,
and all the time,
I am being carried on great winds across the sky.

--Chippewa song, source unknown

- What is a teacher? One who learns with/alongside others. The word *co-learner* has become another buzz word. Yet it is as old as Seneca: *We learn while we teach*. Until about a few years ago, I never thought of myself as learning while teaching. I presented myself as “already-knowing”. That’s what I thought I was supposed to do; that’s what students and employers expected of me. In my early days, if a student asked a question that touched on my blind spots, I’d divert the questioner or make light of the question itself. Anything but admit to not knowing. I also constructed a mask, a persona, to

distance me from the students. In fact, my early supervisors told me as much; keep your distance, you are not one of them, you know—they don't. By building a moat between them and me, I'd created a sense of safety (superiority?) from their probing curiosity, I'd be able to run and hide, to counter-attack, even see the attacker trip and fall as I watched from my vantage point. To teach became a sparring contest: this is what I know and that's what you don't. Later, as I began to probe the inappropriateness of such a stance, I played with "not-knowing": it's ok, I said to myself, to admit that you don't know something, just make sure to get the right answer for the next class. But still, it was about the "right" answer and about the teacher's responsibility to find it. During the last five years or so I've become more comfortable with sharing my not-knowing with others. This frees me up, reduces the burden, lets me laugh more in class, allows me to sleep better the night before a workshop. It's taken me this long to begin to understand that teaching is, among other things, about *learning alongside another person*.

- What is a teacher? One who gives of himself. One whose purpose is to make the world a shade better ... a shade more beautiful. Quoting from a seventh century Sanskrit text, Merton writes:

It is not right that these eyes that belong to others should see in my own interest; it is not fitting that these hands that belong to others should move in my own interest.

The unhappy are so because they have sought their own happiness; the happy are so because they have sought the happiness of others. (in Daggy, 1997, p. 151)

- One who takes the time and makes the effort to create of an environment in which all learners are deeply heard. Such a teacher actually listens more than she¹⁴ speaks.
- What is a teacher? One who detects, explores, reveals, enlightens, creates, inhabits, cohabits, and respects the spaces between himself and his learners. As Ted Aoki says, teaching is living in the spaces (Leggo, 1997, p. 1).
- One who is capable of wondering about his own existence and inquiring into his own being.
- What is a teacher?



14 February 2000. I've been reading in Merton's personal diaries¹⁵ this week. They let me enter the lifeworld of a most complicated man: author of over sixty books and hundreds of pamphlets, articles and translations; Trappist monk, priest, scholar, erudite and super bright; fluent in several languages, hailed as the most important spiritual writer of the twentieth century. His restless, compelling, and unvarnished reflections on being a monk cause me to think about being a teacher. They take me to places of philosophical and theological exploration I never thought possible. I'm intrigued, aroused, puzzled, disturbed,

¹⁴ This item was contributed in response to my web-posting by Christine Nikoden who works as an online learning facilitator in Ontario.

¹⁵ In accordance with his last will, Merton's personal journals were not published until twenty-five years after his death. They are available, in five volumes, each by a different editor.

and moved. These deeply personal journals give access to a scrupulously frank writer, revealing a monk critical of Church politics, gossiping about superiors, and belittling his brothers. They contain his self-assessment as “an escapist, a snob, a narcissist” (in Daggy, p. 8). They show him doubting his ability to practice even the most basic of Christian rules: loving one’s neighbour (especially one you disagree with). I am simultaneously repulsed and attracted. Repulsed because I want him to be above the ordinary; aloof to the human weaknesses which plague me daily. Attracted because of the voyeur’s curiosity to peek inside another man’s bedside drawer. As I put down the fourth volume, I face the unsettling realization that *even a man as extraordinarily gifted* as Merton, remains an ordinary human being. This realization leads to several questions, one more disquieting than the next. For instance, How much do I expect of myself? How high do I peg my own passing grade? How tolerant am I toward my own humanness? How tolerant, or better, how forgiving am I toward myself? And, by extension, how forgiving and accepting am I of others? How much “weakness” do I allow my students, acquaintances, and teachers? How do I react to others’ imperfection, inability, clumsiness, ignorance, etc.? To what extent do my own prejudices and insecurities inform my practice? How much am I aware of and how much is hidden from my own view? How do I—inadvertently and deliberately—take advantage of (abuse) my power as teacher? In what ways does my conduct help and hinder others’ learning? How do I respond to someone who disagrees with me, questions me, threatens my authority?

Merton’s words reach out with compassion (*compassio*, to suffer with). On November 28, 1960, the first Sunday in Advent, he writes “Struggle in my heart all week. My own moral conflict never ceases. ... I do not know where I stand myself. As though I

were standing on 'nothing.' And perhaps that is the only position possible ..." (in Kramer, 1996, p. 70). Elena Malits, in a biographical summary of Merton's lifework, comments that his

autobiographical writings, evidently, bring all sorts of people to life. Reading his stories of open-ended conversion, people are disturbed, given hope, jolted, awakened, and prodded. New and unanticipated vistas are opened up. Merton forces us to confront ourselves and to answer to our God, who makes unimagined and new demands as we live and grow. (1980, p. 154)

Merton has become a teacher to me.



14 February 2000. Today I approach the "What is a teacher?" question from a new angle. Dan Pratt (1998) has developed the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) to sort out actions, intentions, and beliefs that make up a person's perspectives on teaching or facilitating learning. My "nurturing" perspective is captured in this snapshot:

Key elements: the nurturing perspective is based on the belief in the critical relationship between learners' self-concept and learning; concern for fidelity of relationship. Teacher's primary role: facilitator and friend. Teacher's primary responsibilities: foster climate of trust and respect; engage empathetically with individual needs; promote/enhance learners' self-esteem; guide students through content to build confidence; promote success in learning; provide encouragement and

support; encourage expressions of feelings; reinforce effort as well as achievement; challenge people while also caring about them. (1998, pp. 239-240)



Sage: Hi, me again. What's up?

Peter: I'd like your help in sorting through this "nurturing" bit. How did I become such a teacher?

Sage: Tall order, but a good next step. Now, tell me, what was your initial reaction to being labeled "nurturing"?

Peter: I remember doing the TPI in Dan's class and feeling no surprise. Instead, I felt acknowledged for who/what I am¹⁶.

Sage: No surprise?

Peter: No, because if there's one thing I'm clear on, it's my consistent effort to ensure everyone in my courses is heard, involved, included, challenged, satisfied. Over the years, students always identify that as my strength ... my gift.

Sage: You hesitate when you say gift ...

Peter [blushes]: Yeah, that just slipped out. I've never called myself "gifted" in any way: "hardworking" and "skilled" roll easier off my tongue. But the evidence is always there.

¹⁶ I later learned that 60 percent of adult educators (n=125) and 43 percent of the total test population (N=1200) report "nurturing" as their highest score (Pratt & Collins, 2000).

These comments, for example, given anonymously by past workshop participants asked to write a "Letter to Peter's future students"¹⁷:

Peter's personal characteristics ...	About the quality of his workshops ...
<p>Demonstrates qualities of an ideal adult instructor - a nurturing man - a dynamic man—lots of energy - has wonderful and rare gift of teaching without teaching - warm - compassionate - encourages gently - responds appropriately to feelings and needs - unique teaching style that is safe, comfortable and surprisingly calm - genuine sincerity and warmth - highly skilled - dedicated - treats you with respect you deserve - will honour you as learner, as simply human being trying to accomplish something - he thinks fast on his feet and can be very funny - supportive and wise - he models what he teaches - sensitive to comments, individual feelings, comfort/discomfort level - terrific sense of humour - brings a wealth of resources - flexible - congenial - generous - easy going - highly sensitive to the needs of the group - innate sense of timing - works in an unobtrusive manner - warm and sensitive - gentle person - infectious laugh and quiet humour - loves what he does and the people he's with -</p>	<p>You'll learn as much from his style as from his message - creates a safe place - makes material interesting and engaging - two days slipped by as if by magic - expect to feel refreshed and invigorated - he is concerned about the welfare of students in his class - no bullshit here - watch him and listen carefully! - he moves the group through a process with skill, personality, and sense of humour - the material will stretch you - everyone leaves with tools, knowledge, self-actualization - surprised how quickly the time flew - moves people through difficult moments - a wonderful way of working with groups - makes us extend ourselves ... in a safe, non-threatening environment - the captain knows what he is doing, yet gives control to the crew - gentle nudges towards expressing your thoughts - you will travel as far as you'll let yourself - respecting and respected -</p>

¹⁷ Written by 10 participants at the end of a two-day "Becoming a reflective practitioner" workshop in the University of Alberta CACE program, May 1998 and by 35 school principals of S.D. #64 (Campbell River) at the conclusion of a series of "Facilitation Skills" workshops, held over a period of six months in 1997-98.

Sage: Such rich feedback!

Peter: Yes, but ... no, let me try again. [pauses] Yes, a fine list. [pauses again to savour the effect] As I re-read these words, I'm moved ... humbled that these seasoned adults would say such things. I remember now how touched I was when they shared some of their comments during our closing circles. But, you know, these moments are so fleeting: I hear the words, feel the glow of appreciation, then close up again.

Sage: Close up ...?

Peter: When I hear such comments in class and again, now, as I re-read them, I'm open to receiving their nurturing. I briefly allow myself to be held by the care and attention of others.

Sage: Which normally is what you do ... for them! Accepting nurturing is difficult for you.

Peter: Right ... I'm reluctant to accept others' gifts, yet think it natural for me to nurture them. That's my job! One of my favorite lines, when asking participants to give feedback to each other, is to "think of feedback as a gift; as something that's offered from one caring person to another". Yet when I ask for feedback my *first* expectation is *always* that I'll be found wanting. To be critiqued—which I know is an essential source for learning from others—still brings up old, old memories of being abused, taunted, and ignored, to paraphrase Noddings (1984). Positive comments are always (still) a surprise. I'm still waiting "for the other shoe to drop".

Sage: So, caring for others is essential for their growth and thus legitimate and appropriate for you to attend to. Caring for yourself—or accepting others' caring for you—is treated with suspicion and reluctance. Makes me wonder, Peter, what or who nurtures you? As Noddings says, a caring relationship requires reciprocity (1984, p. 49).

Peter: I think it's the process of teaching itself. Dan's definition of a nurturing teacher's primary responsibility includes "fostering climate of trust and respect". Everything I do and say in the classroom is driven by that responsibility. I ask participants to recall instances of trust and respect in previous educational experiences. I encourage expressions of respect in the group; I name it, make it the norm, ask participants to watch out for it.

Sage: What's the "it?"

Peter: Oh, I'm talking about the climate of trust and respect. As a workshop evolves, the responsibility to foster it shifts from me to the group. As a member of that community of learners, I too benefit from the trust and respect that evolves. As Milton Mayeroff writes, "I do not try to help the other grow in order to actualize myself, but by helping the other grow I actualize myself" (1971, p. 30). I'm committed to creating a nurturing climate so that participants feel safe—to take risks associated with trying out new or unfamiliar behaviors.

Sage: Nurturing, for you, is at the core of teaching. Yet, judging from what you've said about your own schooling, apprenticeship, et cetera, your own experience as a learner was anything but nurturing. You were raised on a diet of intimidation and ridicule, not to mention physical and verbal maltreatment. You might just as well have become an authoritarian, top-down teacher. Or not a teacher at all. What happened?

Peter: I tell you, I remember walking into my very first class at BCIT in 1969. It was a small class of fifteen second-year students. Standing in front of that little group, I read my lecture notes *verbatim*. Halfway through I realized that something was wrong—there had to be a better way! But what did I have to draw on? I had never taken a teacher-training course or read a book on teaching and my own schooling was hardly a suitable model. From that day forward, my students began to teach me how to teach. The extent of this didn't come clear to

me until last year, when I read an article on *Pedagogy and Transference*. The authors position the classroom as a place for the teacher's reenactment of childhood memories. Based on the work of Sigmund and Anna Freud, transference in this context refers to the "idea that one's past unresolved conflicts with others and within one's self are projected onto the meaning of new interactions" (Britzman & Pitt, 1996, p. 117). This loops back to our earlier conversation about projecting my ideal teacher image onto other teacher-heroes. I now know that I take the opportunity, when teaching, to create "perfect families" in which we all try to get along, where needs are acknowledged and attended to, where everyone has an equal voice, where conflicts are dealt with openly and cooperatively, and where teacher and students acknowledge their co-dependence as learners. This transference has been at work subconsciously and I'm becoming increasingly aware of its presence in my practice.

Sage: Do you see that as problematic?

Peter: Not really. My primary responsibility is to work toward the participants' growth. My own comes second. There have been, I admit, moments when the personal got in the way of the professional; when I felt irritated, misunderstood, or angered by something that occurred in the workshop ... when my ideal family did not materialize.

Sage: What happens then?

Peter: I take note and decide whether it's something I have to deal with on my own or if it's something the group needs to "face" as part of the workshop agenda. Occasionally, participants express their frustration about "too much process and too little content". I have come to accept that this may be my blind side, this preoccupation with what goes on in the here-and-now. Pratt describes this as the nurturing teacher's ongoing "balancing act" (1998, p. 244) regarding matters of discipline, evaluation, and boundaries.

Sage: How about we stop here, for now. ✓

Peter: OK with me.



Later that week Dan forwards a notice of an upcoming workshop on “writing autoethnography” with Carolyn Ellis¹⁸. It describes, more or less, my project.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach that applies introspection and emotional recall to look inward to understand an experience, then moves outward to social and cultural aspects of experience to understand a way of life. In an attempt to show life as complex, autoethnographers fracture boundaries between social science and humanities, researcher and other, scholarship and therapy, research and practice. Stories are portrayed in the first person in a combination of forms-- short stories, poetry, novels, photographic essays, documentaries, art work, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose.

Introspection and emotional recall ... look inward to understand an experience ... moves outward to understand a way of life ... fracture boundaries ... stories are portrayed in the first person in a combination of forms ... that’s what I’ve been doing! And here comes Dr. Ellis, whom I missed at last year’s Qualitative Research Conference: professor and author, validating the stuff I’m attempting to do.



¹⁸ UBC School of Nursing, May 3, 2000.

Peter: It's you. Back so soon?

Sage [concerned]: Yes, I noticed a dark cloud over you. Now what's happening?

Peter: I got scared.

Sage: Scared ...?

Peter [agitated]: Yes, suddenly I became aware of the task ahead, writing this thesis; continuing along the lines Carl is so enthusiastic about; wondering what Dan will say; not even sure how to include Rita ...

Sage [reassuring]: Sounds like you feel overwhelmed. It sounds that all's well as long as you plow ahead, but the moment something jumps in your path, you get skittish. You might take solace from John Caputo's comment that hermeneutics "is a reading of life that ... restores life to its original difficulty. Hermeneutics is an attempt to stick with the original difficulty of life and not betray it" (1987, p. 1). You know ...

Peter [interrupts]: Yes, be gentle, remember that it's all a natural part of the excavating process. So, about Carl's invitation to make a presentation in class ... when I'm at the edge of a depressive cycle the smallest thing can de-rail me.

Sage: Depressive cycle?

Peter: As I've alluded to earlier, depression is my constant companion, always lurking to suck me down. But I don't want to go into it further, other than to say I'd rather not acknowledge its unrelenting presence.

Sage: I respect that. What can you tell me about this latest encounter? Perhaps you could retrace your steps.

Peter: This morning. I woke up early, smiled when I realized that it was still only 6 o'clock in the morning. The next thing I knew, I was sitting at the computer—quite pleased with myself—and it was 8:30 a.m., way ahead of my usual start time.

Sage: You were pleased with yourself, umh?

Peter: Yes. I had sent an email to Carl, asking whether I too could make a presentation in class. You see, I'm not formally registered, just sitting in, and didn't feel entitled to a time slot. And Carl replied that I should not only present but expand my time slot and give others a taste of this writing journey. It was soon after that I panicked.

Sage: So Carl not only accepted you as a full member of his class, but he asked for something extra ... in a way, to help him teach this course.

Peter: Something like that. I'd actually anticipated his request and imagined ways of making it interesting for everyone. I wanted to engage the class and, of course, earn Carl's approval.

Sage: So you were quite excited, even had done some advance prep. Yet you panicked when given the formal invitation. And it was an invitation, not a demand, or an order.

Peter: Yes. But it was enough to throw me off my stride, push me off the wave I'd been riding for the last three days. I was writing between four and five pages a day at that point.

Sage: And then?

Peter: The pattern is familiar. Instead of coming to my own rescue, I jump ship. As if there's a split: one part spooks, the other part flees. The one that stays behind is suddenly abandoned, without support ... flounders, trips, gets lost.

Sage: Where are they now, these two?

Peter: The spooked one is talking to you, the other one's standing off to the side, looking on, no longer running but still apart.

Sage: So you've stopped panicking. How did you do that?

Peter: I stopped running in circles and began to pay attention. I turned to a book on meditation, randomly opened it to these instructions:

Dwelling inwardly for extended periods, we come to know something of the poverty of always looking outside ourselves for happiness, understanding, and wisdom. It's not that God, the environment, and other people cannot help us to be happy or to find satisfaction. It's just that your happiness, satisfaction, and our understanding, even of God, will be no deeper than our capacity to know ourselves inwardly, to encounter the outer worlds from the deep comfort that comes from being at home in one's own skin, from an intimate intimacy with the ways of one's own mind and body. (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 96)

After reading these words, I sat for half an hour, letting them wash over and through me.

Slowly, the two separate parts of me returned to their dwelling place. I began to breathe for the first time this day. Breathed with purpose. Became conscious. Came to rest.

Sage: And ...?

Peter: As I look back now, and re-read the instructions above, I'm taken back to what I said about wishing to create "perfect families". I seem to use these occasions to bring happiness to my life, to create balance and harmony, to fill myself up. What happened today reminds me of my ability (and duty) to also care for myself *outside* of teaching.

Sage: How does this relate to your conversation with Carl about teachers caring for ourselves?

Peter: Carl recently wrote to tell me this: "What I continue to learn about teaching is that, if I am going to care for my students ..., then I must also care for myself. Teaching requires

grace and forgiveness and forgetfulness and a boundless measure of bountiful hope.

Therefore, teaching (and researching teaching) is ultimately a spiritual endeavor, seeking to know *pneuma*, the light(ness) of spirit.”

Sage: What’s *pneuma*?

Peter: The dictionary says “the vital spirit, the soul;” literally from Greek *wind, air, breath*¹⁹. Within minutes of sitting in meditation and observing my breath flowing in and out, it felt as my spirit ... my presence was returning. This led me to welcome back fragments of my self I’d abandoned earlier.

Sage: Kabir writes:

Don’t bother outside your house to see the flowers.

My friend, don’t bother with that excursion.

Inside your body there are flowers.

One flower has a thousand petals.

That will do for a place to sit.

(Bly, 1971, p. 47)

Peter: Funny thing, I did spend a couple of hours in the garden today, laying out a new perennial bed with Sara (a paid helper who has a truck filled with power tools), cleaning-up, pruning, and raking. Usually such work helps to ground me, but not today. It wasn’t until I sat still and attended to my breath ... not until I consciously cared for myself ... that calm returned.

¹⁹ According to Thomas Merton, *pneuma* “is the spirit of man moved and directed by the Spirit of God, liberated by deep faith and illumined by the wisdom of God Himself” (1961a, p. 67).

Sage: Remember the therapeutic work you've done with Joyce Frazee. "For some of us," she writes²⁰, "it takes courage just to live our daily lives. Every day we awaken to face the demons in our lives: perfectionism, guilt, avoidance, shame, despair, and failure. Time passes and we become skillful at living, despite a constant awareness that these demons are draining our energy, limiting our joy and freedom, and, in essence, preventing us from experiencing the fullness of life."

Peter: Such encouraging words. [stretches]. It's after midnight. How about we take a rest.



22 February 2000. What a night! One moment, 70 km/h winds rattle the house, blowing the blue plastic off wood scraps waiting to be cut into kindling; the next moment we get buckets of rain. I jump out of bed, run outside, drag the tarp back into place, getting soaked in seconds ... wearing no more than my gardening clogs. Laugh aloud at this spontaneous act that jolts me into the life of a new day. *Ergo*: there's always hope, as long as a 56-year old, out-of-shape doctoral candidate will run naked into a blustery night for the heart-pounding rescue of a pile of lumber and return drenched, out-of-breath, laughing.

A few days back I wrote about telling my friend Claire how I thought she looked transformed—something to do, I had explained, with Jung's *individuation*. Well, I now think that what I saw in Claire's face were reflections of my own transformation. C.G. Jung

²⁰ Frazee is a therapist and student of Buddhism; her quote is taken from her workshop description at www.hollyhock.ca.

depicts life as a series of metamorphoses—a lifelong process of completing the self. In the process of individuation²¹ we separate ourselves from the collective and find our own unique way. When individuation is achieved, writes Jung, “the ego is no longer the center of the personality, but is like a planet revolving around an invisible sun, the self. The individual has achieved equanimity and no longer fears death ... and [finds] a true link to other men”. *Paideia*, the Socratic notion of “true education”, anticipates Jung’s individuation as “the inner process through which the individual moves from naïve consciousness and ego to reflection and identity” according to Peter Abbs (1988, p. 21). Perhaps these dynamics are at work as I toil below the surface of my teacher persona, unearthing and exposing ...



Krall’s hermeneutic motion. After almost four weeks of assembling the first ninety pages of venturing and remembering. I now shift to **comprehending**. This motion, according to Steiner (1975, pp. 297-298), is where the researcher “comprehends not only cognitively but by encirclement and ingestion”, it’s an aggressive act “explicitly incursive and extractive ... invasive and exhaustive”. Foreshadowing that “analysis introduces self-doubt and tension”, Krall (1988, pp. 471-472) offers a step-by-step approach:

1. Read and re-read the text and make a list of one-sentence statements that set forth the major propositions your project addresses.
2. Group the statements under headings or categories to identify recurrent themes. Pay

²¹ The Jung quotes in this paragraph are from Ellenberger (1970), p. 712.

attention to your language and the etymology of frequently used words and idioms.

3. Share your text with others and collect their observations and reactions. This will open your work to careful scrutiny until it asks the question that leads you on this circular path.
4. Conduct library searches for works related to your work. Analysis is incomplete without comparison. For exegesis to occur, the text—the descriptions of experiences—must stand against other views.

Time out now to scrape off week-old stubbles, get a start at that pile of kindling, do the laundry, sweep and vacuum, see what's fermenting in the pantry, make a pot of eight-bean soup, phone Martin to ask him to go running. Clear the deck and make space for the next act. *Chop wood. Carry water* (Zen expression).



I'm in the garden, fingers dirty, face chilled, carefully digging up a tiny peach tree. Long suffering from aphids, leaf curl, and never quite recovered from tent caterpillars two years ago. This little tree—six spindly feet, with only three reasonable branches—didn't bear any fruit last year and only a single puny fruit the year before. It had been a gift from the woman who'd sold me this house thirteen years ago. I can't give up on it now; it's been given into my care. My garden helper tells me it's in the wrong spot altogether: I put it there to expose it to full sun and a good view of Georgeson Bay; turns out peach trees prefer warm spots against a south-facing wall, sheltered from ocean winds. We search and agree on a new site against the house, protected, facing south-west: full sun from noon till sundown during

the long island summers. With knees aching from yesterday's run and back pains announcing my age, I gather pickax and shovel, mark the area to be dug up, knowing I need a hole twice as large as the meager root ball. Dig, scrape, shovel. I am soon reminded that there's less than eight inches of good soil; after that, first layers of crusty black stuff from the previous house that had burned down, then conglomerate, tightly packed as if dumped here by a cement truck. Unable to dig deeper, I turn to using a discarded half-barrel with its stays dried and bottom rotten from time. Filled with soil the thing weighs a ton—if I empty it, it'll fall apart. Emptying half its content and making like an ancient pyramid-builder, I drag and push it into place. Next, lift the tree from its old location, drag it over, careful not damage too many tiny roots. Add bone meal to assist new root growth, fill in with last year's precious compost, and plant and tie a post to steady the traumatized tree in its new home. Offer a Celtic blessing found at Exeter Cathedral: *Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.*

Dillard writes that “we are earth's organs and limbs; we are syllables God utters from his mouth” (1999, p. 133). I notice the similarities between uprooting/replanting a little tree and excavating/writing my life story. Both endeavors call for thoughtfulness, courage, attention to detail, seeking advice, meditating on the process, and using old tools and procedures in new and unfamiliar ways. Both entail physical and emotional discomfort. Both are part of a larger task, filled with more work and uncertainty. From both I rise, straighten my aching spine, enjoy this sense of initiative and accomplishment. In *Zen therapy*, David Brazier echoes this, anticipating my interest in contemplative pursuits:

The gardener feeds the plants which are beautiful and fruitful and finds good uses for as many plants as possible. The gardener is always attentive and works hard. Often

his or her back aches. The gardener of the mind, sitting on [his] Zen cushion, is just the same. ... As the gardener, so the soil. ... This is the ultimate therapy: to improve the ground of the mind. (1995, pp. 64-65)

Ideally, both gardening and teaching are nourishing undertakings. I fuss and dig, plant and weed, arrange and re-arrange, water and prune, space and pinch. I do this with the aim of creating a garden that pleases the senses, my own and my visitors'. I do it too, in a very small way, to help to restore Nature's grace ... while the incessant chainsaws howl across Active Pass bearing witness to the clear-cutters' advance. I do it because it gives me momentary peace of mind, both in the doing and the appreciating. Wrote this almost two summers ago, one of my first outings into the land of poetic narrative:

"Sitting quietly
doing nothing
spring comes and
the grass grows by itself."

Spent the whole day
hacking, pruning, and digging
not quite as calm as the Zen poem says

nettles chest-high
attack with big scissors
snip! snap! take that!
fall like timbers
miss me just barely
what fun

feet wet with sweat
in big rubb'ry boots
make like a farmer
more like the kid I never was

manure, says OED

used to be a verb
 from Latin to French to English
 means *working with your hands*
a la main
 as in: manipulate, maneuver

lost in the act
 here and now
 what a pleasure
 to *garden* (verb)

Gardening and teaching mirror each other, suggests Jim Nollman as he redefines gardening, “not as control, but as nurturing—a nurturing participation with the natural processes of place” (1994, p. 5). Teaching, too, is an attempt at nurturing. In a nurturing relationship teacher and students collaborate, become interdependent and mutually supportive. The teacher, if he wishes to grow, needs the student; and vice versa. But this student is no longer waiting to be impressed, manipulated, categorized, controlled, and otherwise “managed”. Teacher and student are neighbours, living side by side, assisting and challenging each other. In a nurturing relationship, one person’s well-being is dependent on, and the outgrowth of, the other’s. As Nollman sees it, such nurturing expands the context of our attention “beyond the garden wall, now to include the ecosystem we inhabit” (p. 5). As I nurture those around me, I plant and seed and trust that—with careful tending—flowers and fruit will emerge long after I’m gone. As my teachers nurture me, I thrive and grow. And, in a new twist, I find ways to nurture *them*. Age-old whispers of “brown-nosing” and “sucking up” ring in my ears as I help my teachers be the best they can be. I look for ways to make them shine, just as I do for my own students. Seems so straightforward, but it isn’t. I don’t

think our hierarchical thinking allows for upward caring; student to teacher, employee to manager, child to parent.

Two recent incidents are examples of learning from/by teaching, both occurred at the University of Alberta. One took place during a course on "becoming a reflective practitioner". René's eyes meet mine as I look around the room. At first he remains silent but, when addressed directly or while working on small-group tasks, he makes helpful contributions. I sense his support and notice the absence of competition between us. During the break he mentions a model from his career counselling practice and, by my invitation, takes twenty minutes to present it to the class. He knowledgeably links my presentation to his model and extends it further. Our combined models remain on the board for the entire workshop and serve as an unexpected touchstone. His written assessment lauds my ability to "teach without teaching", just as he had done.

Months later, Rita asks me to unpack that expression: to teach without teaching. I recognized in René's gift something I had cherished from a distance, a kind of teacher I desired but didn't think capable of being. He saw it and named it. To teach without teaching means, to me, not telling others what and how to do or know something, but opening doors and creating opportunities. Such teacher behavior has several consequences. The student feels supported but not spoon-fed; she finds her own questions, her own answers, her own paths. The teacher takes himself, his ego, preconceived notions and prejudices, out of the picture. Both become co-seekers for their respective truths. They are not limited to the teacher's truths, yet still have access to his knowledge and experience. In the process, the student grows as a learner, gaining confidence and expertise in the ways of learning anything. She learns to become *un*-dependent on the teacher's (customary) power over knowledge.

In the second instance, Lorraine speaks up during the first hour of a three-day event. She points to a discrepancy between the calendar description and the agenda I've just proposed. She's a large woman in black business attire, loud voice, combative language. (Which of my demons did she embody, I wonder? What old fear? Who did she remind me of?) I feel threatened by her manner and tone. Fortunately, I am also in fine form that day, feeling confident and competent. If ever there was a call for reflection-in-action, this had to be it. I first paraphrase her concerns, then scan the room (for what: support? someone to rescue me?) and decide that it's too early for others to step up. Then, instead of engaging in a "show down" as might have been my automatic response only a year earlier, I swiftly devise Plan B. Four easels are quickly arranged back-to-back in the middle of the room and everyone is on their feet in small groups. I ask them to write their "what I came to learn" expectations on flipcharts. The resulting lists, combined with my own initial plan, become our just-in-time agenda. Having given everyone a fresh invitation to "buy in," we proceed. A day later, during a debriefing, several people revisit the incident. Some describe it as a fine example of facilitator intervention; others as an unnecessary interruption based on only one person's complaint. Jean Vanier points to links between interpersonal attractions and personal vulnerability:

We are attracted to some people while we shun others. Those who attract us are often those who please us, help us, call us forth. ... Those we shun, on the other hand, frighten us, maybe because we frighten them; we awaken feelings of rivalry and anguish in each other. And so, we create barriers that prevent openness. Maybe we

feel that if we were open, we would lose something. That we would be hurt or swallowed up. We create barriers to protect our vulnerability. (1998, p. 105)



29 February 2000. A full month since I began to write. Take away two and a half days each week for being in town, this means that I've produced between five and six new pages daily. Wonderful! Took the "found poem" (p. 64) to school last night, read it aloud in class, stopping only for tears to subside. Afterwards, classmates wrote their reactions on slips of paper and sent me home to weave this tapestry:

... be not threatened to grow old; I loved your poem ... two images that I think you should expand on, "tend to the little boy" and "beware of ancient habits". ... Powerful writing; moving, shivers as I quiver tears of love for yourself ... and understanding ... and attending ... heartfelt, kind, passionate: what do I still have in store for me? what words will I write 20 years from now? ... "take authority, be loved" ... lovely play with words. ... stumble, leap, ... transforming ... Just be, as you are, molded from inside. Resist the mold that others place on you. Learn from others, but resist molding ... Desiderata-like - instructive - from outside→in - algorithmic ... growing wise, the only way I want to grow – but what if growing wise means learning to flounder, to flourish in floundering? ... Your poem artistically calls for a type of recognition. Recognition of personal experiences and pains. ... Childlike qualities leading to growing wise ... putting aside the armour of maturity .. to live in the spirit & wisdom of youth ... abuse of that * little person * can make one * grow wise * foster * life-long

compassion. ... I think this poem took great courage and I commend you for it. It is difficult to expose to others what really matters, but that is how we "grow wise." ... de/light/ful ... Real, sincere, genuine, authentic, shared ... a journey—touching. ... Tend to the little one(s)...always. ... Nothing to say—you said what needed to be said, was lovely to hear. Thank you. ... Collages of words are oftentimes both effective and ineffective—what do you think?

This was my first outing, displaying snippets of my work to a sympathetic audience. Reading and re-reading their reactions encourages me to continue, especially along the themes of "tending to the little boy" and "growing older/wise". They speak to my daily "floundering ... and flourishing in floundering," as I grow wise, "the only way to grow". Like tree rings, growing from the inside out, each a witness to life's events and lived experience, as Rainer Maria Rilke²² puts it:

I live life in expanding orbits
each enclosing many things.
The last one, perhaps, I won't achieve;
but try, try I shall.

I encircle God, that ancient tower,
I revolve for a millenium;
still, I wonder: am I a falcon, a tempest,
or a very old song

²² my translation.

The following week I post a fresh list of words arising from my continuing work and ask class mates to work in triads and turn them into lines of poetic narrative. Strung together they read as follows:

Poem, found in Room 204
Scarfe Bldg., 2 March 2000

attached to arrogance
authentic, deep appreciation
finds balance in accomplishments

celebrate the present
erasing catastrophic expectations
calmer now
find courage and express
your creative self uncovered
charm and compassion
confessing the depressed

deny expectations
cease excavations
feet first into mutability
OR

enjoy dumb expectations
jump, feet first
into others' excavations

a gift of writing, gentle
healing, hoping, growing
heart-pounding moments

search for identity
in imperfect humanness
include the humorous imposter

from insight to integrity
internal tension intuitively interrogated
whether or not to let others care for us

one permeable voice
 makes others laugh
 in spaces of no panic
 nurturing our nightmares

run naked in poetic pleasure
 power, pulse, re/pulsed
 self-discovered short comings
 engender spiritual growth
 scared stiff
 stage fright
 a special gift

stepping stones to strength
 survive, take pleasure
 in tears, validate your self

Recycling words celebrates shared experiences. The collective poem invites me to let go and relinquish control. In return, we are nourished in unexpected ways. These lines speak of a new hope (suffering precedes enlightenment?) while acknowledging and honouring their origins. Writing like this serves to remind us that we're not one self, but many past selves.

Joan Didion says this:

I think that we are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find the attractive company or not. Otherwise they run up unannounced and surprise us, come hammering on the mind's door at 4 a.m. of a bad night and demand to know who deserted them, who betrayed them, who is going to make amends. (1968, p. 142)

Sitting at the keyboard (scribble, scribble) I hardly look up, avoid editing and correcting, allow the "thesis that's been writing you all your life" (Carl's words) to appear on the screen. From autobiographical to electronic memory. From there to the first performance in class: to furnish others with a taste of my endeavor. In return, they gift me their responses, projections, and suggestions. Their feedback encourages me and validates this work.

Soon Old Man Doubt pays another visit. Talk about outstaying one's welcome! "And where do you think this'll lead to," he nags, "how can this be academic work?" He reminds me (again) of our working class roots and the steady climb uphill—the "self-hauling to the pinnacle of produce manager" as Annie Proulx (1993, p. 17) mocks. "Know your place," he drones, mimicking my father's voice. This time, emboldened, I tell him how essential this work is to my individuation, to my work as teacher educator, to my transition into what C.G. Jung calls the "afternoon of life" (in Brewi & Brennan, 1989, p. ix). He persists in taking pot shots at my new-found certainty as writer and researcher. This is no longer just about completing a thesis and pleasing the examiners, I explain, patiently. This is about reading and re-reading my life story, about making meaning through interpretation and re-interpretation. This is about finding a voice—without losing touch with my roots. Both continue to reside in me. I point to David Jardine and James Field's observation that "[c]ontemporary hermeneutics thus gives up the odd hope that, if we are diligent enough, we might straighten out human life, as if it were simply some object with properties that can be pinned down through objective methods or techniques" (1996, pp. 255-256). As a gesture of reconciliation, I extend a hand to my old nemesis, asking him to pray alongside Merton, a fellow seeker:

Lord have mercy. Have mercy on my darkness, my weakness, my confusion. Have mercy on my infidelity, my cowardice, my turning about in circles, my wandering, my evasions. Lord have mercy. Guide me, make me want to be holy, to be a man of God, even though in desperateness and confusion. I do not necessarily ask for clarity, a plain way, but only to go according to your love (in Kramer, 1996, p. 28)

📖 Rachel writes: "The afternoon of life"... I found that phrase very evocative. It captures exactly where I am right now, too. A common thread. Losses are inevitable, more keenly felt than gains at times, and yet I find I hold these losses and these pains close. They are mine. They bring tears of passion and remembrance. I rejoice to find them in others and to share our common humanity. Must be why I do the work I do.



Whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, to let them dangle
And the dirt
Just to make clear
where they came from

Charles Olson (in Bly et al., p. 184).

The dictionary lists
 many types of roots . . . conical
 napiform
 fusiform
 fibrous
 moniliform
 nodulose
 tuberous,
 tap root
 prop root
 aerial root

Leave the roots on, demands the poet. *Root*, says the dictionary, is a *part of the body of the plant that develops typically from the radicle and grows downward into the soil, anchoring the plant and absorbing nutriments and moisture*. Leave the roots on. Mine dangle, exposed, ungrounded in many ways: after more than thirty years in Canada, still looking for a homeland; after years of taking courses, still the doubtful student; after a life without a mom, still longing to suckle and be held as a child. Without good soil, how can roots be anchored, how can they find a steady store of nutriments and moisture? Is it the immigrant's lot to remain uprooted—forever? Is my desire to garden and to tend to flowers and shrubs not another expression of my need for grounding of my own? Look how I fussed about the little peach tree: given by a friend thirteen years ago: for the first three years kept in its original pot, neglected, more or less. Then planted in one place; again moved to another. cursory care; plastic fuzzies but not the real thing. Then, last week, at last: proper

preparation of the new bed, the best soil from last year's compost heap and a handful of ground-up bones ... to receive and revive a neglected tree.

Root, the source or origin of a thing. Roots, a person's original or true home, environment, or culture. I wince, just typing the words. Where is my true home? What environment holds me, home-like? Where, pray, is my culture? Who are my people? It's hip, says a classmate, to read works by non-Europeans, such as Métis, African, and First Nation writers; our premier is Indo-Canadian, a colleague is First Nation. In class, two women tell stories of growing up in Greek-Canadian households; another relates the terror of entering Canadian elementary school, speaking only Punjabi; yet another speaks of the disorientation he experienced as an Ismaili, growing up in Africa, speaking the language of a foreign queen. And what do I do? Do I call out: hey, what about me? I too am a stranger in a strange land. That's not an accent I have, that's my way of showing that I'm not from here, that I'm from elsewhere. "Whom will you cry to, heart?" laments Rilke, writing from his own lifelong sense of homelessness,

More and more lonely,
your path struggles on through incomprehensible
mankind. All the more futile perhaps
for keeping to its direction,
keeping on toward the future,
toward what has been lost.

(1982, p. 137)

My roots have been pulled up so many times, unceremoniously: home, foster home, master's house, crew quarters, student lodgings, basement suites; Germany, Sweden,

England, USA, Canada, Wales, Canada. I too am confused, disoriented, dislocated. I, too, am looking for home (along with hundred twenty million others, as Dillard reports [1999, p. 130], who are living in countries where they weren't born). With Merton, I lament that "I don't know where to go, what to look for" (1969, p. 17) and wish that "someday, to this door, will come some person with the news I am waiting for, although I do not know what kind of news it is that I am waiting for" (p. 51).

And don't get me started about Nazis and the War! Some say it doesn't matter, we know *you didn't do it*. Others assure me they *like Germans*, admire *you people* for having *Mozart, Beethoven and Bach, plus all those Nobel laureates in science and literature*. Rather than imbuing me with second-hand pride, such comments only exaggerate my shame: I cannot (will not) hear it! And, please, don't even mention *German efficiency, engineering, and enterprise*. All that does is remind me of my own rigidity, that ingrained obsession to get it (and be) Right; it serves as unwanted reminder of my formation as son, pupil, apprentice, and assistant to the assistant manager.

I root with determination, *turning up the soil with the snout, as [if a] swine; poking, prying, searching to find something; to unearth, bring to light*. What a lovely paradox. Roots go down into the soil to perform their function and sticking my snout into the ground may, if I persist, yield truffle-like morsels that otherwise would not come to light. So, cheer me on, applaud my enthusiasm, lend your moral support: *root for me!*

And what of the dirt? Leave that on, urges the poet, to make clear where you came from. *Any foul and filthy substance, such as mud, grime, dust, or excrement*, says the dictionary. This dirt, this concoction of discarded, smelly, decomposing matter, serves as the repository for my lived experience. It holds my mother, dead when I was three; home town and country, burned, bombed-out, defeated when I was two; a family disjointed and forever scarred; a childhood, too short to let a man first be a boy; working ten hours a day by age fourteen; schlepping buckets of coal and scrubbing stinky fish boxes when I should have been playing and dating; two sisters dead in childbirth; an older brother gone when I needed his companionship; a father, embittered and confused, first embracing then disowning, finally dying on me; countless homes away from home; looking for love in all the wrong places. Gardening teaches me that dirt and decaying matter are the birth place of new life.

"The task", writes Anthea Francine

is to go deeply as possible into the darkness, to name the pain that one finds there, and the truth of one's perceptions, and to emerge on the other side with permission to name one's reality from one's own point of view. (1983, p. 75)

Dirt, the lexicographers say, also refers to *private and personal information which, if made public, would create a scandal or ruin the reputation of a person*. My jaw tightens, fingers cramp, writing stops in its track: _____. What is (in) that dirt clinging to my roots? What is this *Dreck am Steck*, the "dirt on my walking stick?" What do I keep locked away so as to guard against scandal and ruin? How much can I reveal and still appear sensitive, cultured, hard-working, honorable, capable, responsible, law-abiding, and trustworthy? Without the protection of the confessional or the comfort of the therapist's office I, like

everyone, am compelled to carry my secret cargo on the inside ... where it threatens to choke me as I write, sending pain to my shoulders, quickening my breaths, feeding my nightmares, nurturing my insecurities.

Still, making compost is said to be essential to *individuation*. In order to understand where/who I am, I am challenged to examine how I got here, what I am made (up) of. To know the whole I have to name the parts. Such digging, while at best uncomfortable, more often painful and discouraging seems necessary to *get to the root of the matter*, to understand. And, as I grow aware of mortality, I revel in this undertaking, this exposing of roots, this lamenting over root/less/ness. As my fingers gather precious crumbs of lived experience, I begin to notice how re/new/al is located in composting memories. William Johnston, a Jungian scholar, says:

I believe that in this psychological turmoil grace is working gently, if painfully, in the unconscious inviting our number two personality, our true selves, to emerge from the womb into fullness of life. Quite often the whole process ... is nothing less than a mystical experience of death and resurrection to a new life which is filled with true joy. (1978, p. 148)

What I'm called to do is to incorporate opposites and reconcile polarities: light and darkness, death and resurrection, male and female, good and evil.

I read later that the Buddhist "theory of root relations" states that all *dukkha* (mental suffering) "can be traced back to the three bitter roots: greed, hate, and delusion" (Brazier, 1995, pp. 92-93).

Their opposites, the "sweet roots", notes Brazier, are also found in Carl Rogers' three core conditions of a helping relationship: unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence. Expanding orbits. Tossed pebbles in the pond.

I enjoy this play at deconstruction. Without realizing it, I expose Olson's poem "beyond the apparently clear and manifest meanings ... to reveal [how] language is always slipping and sliding as it works, and is worked, rhetorically to create meanings" (Leggo, 1998, p. 187). In *Burnt Norton*, T.S. Eliot alerts us to this slipperiness:

Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
 Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
 Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
 Always assail them.

(1994, p. 12)



What is "deconstruction"? Introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-), the term is chiefly associated with a school of literary criticism. Derrida himself refuses to offer a definition, writes Mark Lilla. [Derrida] tells us that

deconstruction is neither an analytical nor a critical tool; neither a method, nor an operation, nor an act performed on a text by a subject; that it is, rather, a term that resists both definition and translation. ... [Derrida] conceives of deconstruction less as a philosophical doctrine than as a 'practice' aimed at casting suspicion on the entire philosophical tradition and robbing it of its self-confidence. (1998, p. 6)

Leggo writes:

Deconstruction is founded in the contemporary philosophical view that the world, as known and experienced, is constructed and disclosed in language. ... As an approach to responding to texts, deconstruction seeks to go beyond the apparently clear and manifest meanings in order to reveal how texts can be interpreted in many different ways (1998, p. 187)



Palmer encourages us to "think the world together" (1998, p. 61), to embrace opposites and appreciate paradoxes. Let's take, for instance, my question of how to shift from writing the personal to writing the academic. When I asked Carl the same question, he urged me to "avoid living in the space of a binary opposition between 'academic writing' and 'poetic writing.' Refuse to credit [such] opposition." He drew my attention to an article by Jane Tompkins in which she writes about her two inner voices: that of the critic wanting to talk of epistemology, context, and intelligibility—and that of the person who wants to express her feelings. "These beings exist separately but not apart," she explains. "One likes

to win arguments and see her name in print, "the other has hardly ever been heard from." She demands an end to the "public-private dichotomy, which is to say the public-private *hierarchy*.... The reason I feel embarrassed at my own attempts to speak personally in a professional context is that I have been conditioned to feel that way." If this goes on for an established writer-researcher, what of the novice? "I say to hell with it," shouts Tompkins (1987, p. 169).

Trying one of Palmer's exercises (Livsey, 1999, pp. 24-25), I select a pair of polarities: personal vs. academic voice. The task is to identify (a) the reasons this polarity is so compelling, (b) the price I pay for holding on to it, (c) alternative ways of framing the issue that might bridge these so-called opposites; and (d) the benefits of doing this.

1. Why is this polarity so compelling for me?

(To compel, from Latin, *with drive*; rousing strong interest or attention or feelings of admiration.) This split between personal and academic voices, as with other polarities that govern me, draws me in with its promise of order in the face of chaos. Things are either like this or they are like that. Further choices only augur confusion and disagreement. Ideally, I'd like a world of black or white (or analagous choices between opposites). You either love me or you hate me. I'm either clever or I'm dumb. We either agree or disagree. Fight or flight.

2. What is the price I pay for holding this polarity?

Such constriction! I'm closed off, denied access to a wondrous range of shades and hues. The moment a conflict arises—internally or with another—I automatically look for a way

out, ideally *in the opposite direction*. If I don't know something, I am tempted to fake it, to manufacture an answer, to camouflage my ignorance in some way. In disagreements with others, I tend to avoid, ignore, cover up, delay ... instead of admitting not-knowing. I learned a long (long) time ago, that disagreement is nasty, that it leads to anger, leads to separation. When it comes to writing from the heart—something that promises confidence and lightness—I'm quick to abandon it at the slightest criticism. Instead of engaging in a conversation (with myself or others) on the merits of such work, I get spooked and want to run the other way, towards more formal, academic writing. The price payable for this is confusion, self-doubt, not-writing. *What are alternative ways of framing the issue to bridge so-called opposites?* How freeing it would be to blend personal with academic writing. How I long to introduce a heartfelt tone into formal discourse *without one distracting from the other*; to blend them so that one lends strength and verisimilitude to the other, that the distinction becomes blurred. How might I go about doing this? Perhaps by learning about *shoshin*, the Japanese phrase for 'beginner's mind.' "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities", writes Shunryu Suzuki, "but in the expert's there are few" (1970, p. 21). In practical terms this suggests that the next time someone queries the academic worth of my writing project, I need neither defend nor abandon it. Instead, I might say (in all honesty), "You know, I am still unsure how my work fits into traditional academic research. Essentially, I'm trying to address this dilemma: how can I, in my work as teacher and researcher, open up spaces in which we can find and explore our unique voices?" And then I'd stop explaining. And turn to the other person, suggesting we engage in conversation. I might ask, Does this make sense to you? or, If this is of interest to you, I'd like to talk with you some more.

3. *What might be the benefits of such alternative ways of framing the issue?*

Relief ... from the pressure to come up with the right answer, a clever response. Relief (and delight) by expanding on the number of options of how/where to proceed. Relief in sharing the responsibility for the next step with others. Delight in opening up unknown places to go, not to go, or to consider going. Just imagining such an approach floods me with calm and confidence. I imagine that we'd both experience new ways of clearing space for each other's voices. In a way, I'd cease being controlled by my need to control, that is, by not knowing I'd open myself to a multitude of possibilities. I'd also engage others in the exploration which, in turn, may just shine a new light on what I have considered to be the "only way to go." In the words of Lao-tzu: "If you want to become full, let yourself be empty. If you want to be reborn, let yourself die" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 22). Kieran Egan views binary opposites as the "most obvious structural device," (not only in children's stories, the subject of his writing), and notes their presence "prominently in all kinds of areas in which we organize and make sense of things" (1986, p. 28). The educational aim is to seek mediation of binary opposites (p. 28). Writes Palmer: "The principle of paradox will not permeate our teaching until we understand that suffering the tensions of opposites is neither to be avoided nor merely survived but must be actively embraced for the way it can expand our hearts" (Livsey, 1999, pp. 26-27). In what ways have I experienced "suffering" as a teacher? To suffer: from Latin *to bear*, to undergo, experience, be subjected to pain, loss, grief, defeat, change, punishment, wrong, etc. To embrace: from French *embracer*, to hold closely in the arms, usually as sign of affection; clasp, enclose; accept eagerly, adopt, include. I am challenged to hold in my arms, with affection and acceptance, aspects of life that have grieved, defeated, and wronged me. This itself is a paradoxical act. Yet, can one exist

without the other? Is this not the law of polarity? Without sickness, no health. Without war, no peace. Not that one has to occur before or after the other—existentially, the notion of one is not possible without the other. I cannot flourish until I have come to friendly terms with pain and defeat.

4. *Has your suffering had any redemptive quality to it; has it made your heart larger?*

To mind comes the workshop with prison guards described earlier. For three days I talked *at them*, with little impact and increasing frustration, my behavior informed by my arrogance as a recent Adult Ed. graduate and my prejudice about their paramilitary occupation. Things began to shift dramatically when I ceased talking, admitted being at a loss, and opened up a space for our stories to be told. I was able to redeem, to *buy back*, their trust and my confidence. The guards taught me humility as a teacher and respect for their humanness. This, then, is another take on “teaching without teaching”. Instinctively (desperately) I let go of my control and opened the floor—and myself—up for joined inquiry. Lao-tzu says: “When she runs into difficulty, she stops and gives herself to it” (Mitchell, 1988, p. 63). By coincidence, an email query came last week from the training coordinator for the Michigan State Police Hazardous Materials Training Center. A Lt. Cortez is asking me to come and work with a group of twenty police instructors. Without knowing it, he is presenting me with a fresh opportunity to measure my growth over twenty years.

5. *What would help you deepen the redemptive quality of the suffering you experience in your work?*

With this Michigan opportunity, I am revisiting the seeds sown during the prison guard experience. I'm approaching this with humility. I respond to Lt. Cortez's query by writing that I'm flattered that you think I might be able to make a contribution to your training efforts. Yes, I'd be interested in exploring the possibilities. To which he replies, ... my apologies for not getting right back with you. ... Will you please give me more information on your workshops and a ball park figure for costs. My next step now is to "disappoint" (i.e. to *not please*) him—at least that's how I fear he'll react when I offer him something other than the expected "techniques" workshop. I'll say that I don't have a ready-made workshop to offer him and that I know little about the work his people do. I'll propose that we begin a conversation about his group's previous training experience and learning needs. I'll suggest he (and anyone in his organization) visit my website and have a look at my book on teaching adults. Both will give him a taste of my approach to teaching and training. "I have found that it does not help, in the long run, to act as though I were something that I am not," says Rogers (1961, p. 16). I'll further propose that we look at a mechanism to involve the proposed participants in this conversation as early as possible: by means of an email round-table or needs assessment survey mailed to each. Furthermore—and here comes the part about being 'honest'—I'll describe to Lt. Cortez how my experience in giving short workshops over thirty years has brought me to the realization that, in addition to knowing content and having a good command of instructional skills, there's another aspect to trainer development: nurturing and celebrating the identity and integrity of the trainer-as-person. Rather than approaching his group of instructors as people in need of "upgrading" (which suggests that they are lacking something right now that I'll be able to remedy), I'll tell him about my interest in what Palmer (1998) would call the renewal of mind and heart and spirit.

This will be my opportunity to declare my intentions and limitations in a forthright manner. It won't be easy. I've rarely²³ tried to sell an employer on the idea 'up front;' in past workshops I simply inserted my heart & soul agenda surreptitiously. The risks are several: (a) I may not be able to make a persuasive case; (b) even if I do, the Michigan Police won't be interested in that aspect; (c) I may lose the chance to work in the States, for US dollars. But I'd redeem myself by re/claiming my own identity and integrity through openness and vulnerability.



Krall's hermeneutic motion. A few pages back I announced that I'd be shifting to the "comprehending" phase of Krall's model (1988, pp. 471-472). Instead, I got distracted by "new" material and let my ruminations take me in several directions. It's that "messiness" Rita warned me to expect. Deena Metzger explains that

[s]tories go in circles. They don't go in a straight line. So it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories. ... If you're lost, you really start to look around and listen. (1986, p. 104).

Gail Weinstein-Shr depicts the researcher as someone entering the field "unarmed except for self. ... Weaponless [he] negotiates relationships and through self-as-instrument begins the process of collecting and analyzing data" (1990, p. 346). Unarmed, weaponless ... stripped

²³ Two exceptions: the first a series of workshops over six months with a group of enlightened school administrators from the Campbell River School District. They explicitly asked me to guide them in this direction... and taught me so much ... the next a team of nurse-educators at Richmond Hospital who asked me to work with them on a similar agenda.

bare, reduced to tears more than once; alone, living minute-by-minute, whacking through the underbrush one laborious step at a time, going forward, sideways, in circles, yet, never without hope or purpose.

From the first step on this journey (January 16) to this day (March 7), I have been preoccupied with writing and thinking about writing. Each day that I sit down at the keyboard I have one or two or three topics that I push ahead of me—that's as far as I can see right now. Beyond that, a mere haze, thick vegetation obscuring my view, fleeting glimpses of light through a filter, water reflecting, creatures stirring—that's all. I come up for air, take stock, try to get my bearings. A stack of 120 pages attests to progress. I print new pages every day so that I can touch them, count them, be re/assured by them, take them to bed with me. Last week I worried that I should be doing analysis pretty soon—I couldn't just go on writing, could I? Carl reassured me, in fact, pushed me on: go dig farther, scrape below yet another surface. I felt briefly abandoned when Dan said he had no time to read, asking me to wait two weeks. Didn't he know that I was unstoppable, that I could not wait for him? Yet I wanted him to be part of this journey, share my progress, co-experience the messiness of the process.

☞ Caroline is the first member of our cohort to complete her oral examination. "A two-week wait is normal," she tells me. And then: "What do you want from Dan?" My reply, honestly? Perhaps a case of transference: he's my master, I his apprentice. I desire his acceptance, his confirmation of my competence, his love. I also wish he'd comment more on the substance of my ongoing work. "Come, give

us a taste of your quality" I wish to say, with Hamlet²⁴. That said, I realize that he is teaching me by respecting my maturity and independence. I'm learning by finding my own way, locating my own voice.

Eager to proceed *and* to include Dan, I proposed that Carl and Dan co-supervise my work. Both agreed. At one point, Carl sent me a note about his own thesis writing experience:

When I wrote my own dissertation, I spent a few months dreading the beginning of each day because I thought I had to write in an academic voice that felt very alien. I did not want to get up in the morning. Then my committee advised me to write what I wanted to write, and I was eager each morning to resume my writing. After I began writing what I wanted to write ... after I began to hear my poetic voices singing and calling out, the whole thesis took about 2-3 months to write. I had so much fun.

I need to hear about such experiences; I'm comforted by the similarities. I, too, have not wanted to get up many mornings, wishing to stay "asleep" just a little longer, avoiding being "wide awake" for as long as I could fool myself. Get up I did, under protest and in pain. My committee gave me my marching orders and Carl has been my guiding star on this otherwise solitary journey. As I slog along I grab hold of others' writing, finding a foothold here and a springboard there. Thomas Merton, Carl Rogers, Valerie Janesick, T.S. Eliot, Wilhelm Dilthey, Max van Manen, Florence Krall, Stephen Brookfield, Carolyn Ellis, C.G. Jung, Parker Palmer, and Lao-tzu have been my guides. They frequently divert me onto crooked paths, toss packs of nourishment and flasks of drink my way. But none stays

²⁴ Act ii, Scene ii.

alongside very long, "You must cut your own path," they urge me, disappearing among the flora and fauna.

As I trip, I stumble; as I slip backwards, I move ahead. Others before me have dragged themselves through unknown terrain, only to find themselves returning to the very place from whence they departed and to know the place, in Eliot's words (*Little Gidding*, 1944), for the first time. Encouraged, I worry less and less about the polarity between gathering material (re/searching) and making meaning of it (interpreting). Looking back on what I've written so far, I find myself swimming in and out of these extremes, floating from one to another, allowing (not fighting) their natural tendency to intermingle. Narrative research has been described as "inductive/interactive" (Hymes, 1990, p. 346), that is to say, data collection and analysis are integrated with interpretation. "The consequence," reassures Weinstein-Shr, "is a research process in which insights are incorporated into research, questions are refined, and reinterpretations are par for the course, the researcher never can be sure what s/he is in for. It is like starting down a road without knowing where it leads." (1990, p. 346). Ram Dass describes such a practice²⁵ as a roller coaster ride.

Each new high is usually followed by a new low. Understanding this, it makes it a bit easier to ride with both phases. ... There is in addition to the up-and-down cycles an in-and-out cycle. That is, there are stages at which you feel pulled into inner work and all you seek is a quiet place to meditate and get on with it, and then there are times when you turn outward and seek to be involved in the marketplace. Both of

²⁵ The notion of "practice", in Zen Buddhism, encompasses one's conscious engagement in spiritual development.

these parts of the cycle are part of one's practice, for what happens to you in the marketplace helps in your meditation, and what happens in your meditation helps you to participate in the marketplace without attachment. (Kornfield, 1993, p. 172)

Living in this writing project echoes Ram Dass' words. His roller coaster ride is my jungle journey. Until a few pages ago, I tried to keep the Up separate from the Down and the Inner from the Outer. In my habitual situating of things as opposites, keeping my world neatly compartmentalized, I tried to view writing as separate from research, research from analysis, analysis from interpretation. "At first you will think of practice as a limited part of your life. In time you will realize that everything you do is part of your practice," says Ram Dass. If that is so, then everything I do, from gardening to running, teaching to writing, sleeping to waking, is part of practice. Instead of "taking time off from work to do my doctorate" I'd be saying, "I'm learning to write in a new way." Not either/or, but both/and. I'd be including my charming with my moody side, the performing me with the solitary me. And where does such insight lead? Where do I end and where do I begin? Jung speaks of the conscious self (the ego) as that by which I know myself and am known to the world. "What the ego does not know is that the opposite of many of these traits and aspects ... are as much part of the personality as the ego, but unconscious at this time" (Brewi & Brennan, 1989, p. 50). This is what I have carved out for myself, e.g., the talented teacher, rootless immigrant, solitary wanderer, celibate male, and emerging writer.

Being and non-being create each other.

Difficult and easy support each other.

Long and short define each other.

High and low depend on each other.

Before and after follow each other.

Lao-tzu (Mitchell, 1988, p. 2)

☞ René writes: Your words have touched my heart and my soul. Your work raised good questions, has been affirming at the same time (usually a good sign). It's helped me to reflect on my own life and to ask myself the same questions you've been struggling with (also a good sign). Although the details are different, I see myself in the upbringing you experienced.



Krall's hermeneutic motion. And so we return (at last) to the aspect of **comprehending** (1988, pp. 471-472). The first step, to refresh memories, is to read and re-read the text and make a list of short statements that illustrate themes and propositions of this text (see below). The left column contains those that rose to the surface after the first reading. During a subsequent re-reading (which by then included another ten pages of fresh text), additional thoughts called out. All along, I tinker with headings (shown between the two columns), finding comfort and dissatisfaction in trying to categorize.

Grouped after 1 st reading		Additions after 2 nd reading
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I think this research is worthwhile? • Can I do this kind of work? • Am I capable? • Is this legitimate work in the academy? • How will this get me to graduation? 	<p>I ponder the legitimacy of this research ... and of myself as researcher.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I doubt my intellectual abilities. • I'm easily intimidated by others' knowledge and insights. • Overall, I'm pleased with my progress. • I'm becoming more confident about narrative-based research when speaking with Carl and my classmates ... but am not sure about others' reception of it. • Writing like this, digging and questioning, constitutes "reflective practice."

- Part of the attraction of teaching is that others will like me.
- When watching other (good) teachers at work, I see myself in them.
- My teaching continues to be informed by early schooling experiences.
- Caring for others is fundamental to the way I teach.
- When I teach, I try to create a family (transference).
- I'm still puzzled how, of all possible occupations, I became a teacher.
- I'm still surprised when someone tells me that I am a good teacher
- Before I have the right to ask (or show) others to become reflective, I must do my homework

I explore the question of Who is this teacher.

- Writing deepens an experience (after the fact); this new experience, in turn, is freeing.
- Artistic talents hide within me (e.g., writing, making collages).
- I take delight in my (new) writing.
- One story begets another.
- The more I write 'from the heart' (with courage), the clearer my prose becomes.
- Stories are unstable over time; they change in the re-telling.

I muse about this writing project ... about becoming a writer.

- When I don't know, I feel dumb and insignificant.
- I thrive on being encouraged.

I reflect on the

- How much longer can I continue to ruminate ... before I do what?

- As a teacher-of-teachers I can impact what goes on in other teachers' classrooms.
- Participants consistently compliment me on my teaching.
- I enjoy shaping a group into a 'family.'
- Why am I teacher? That is, what's my motivation ... my mission ... my purpose?
- Why this and not another occupation? What other occupation if not teacher?
- I thrive on caring for others.

- My writing strikes a chord in readers (i.e. members of my UBC cohort).
- Gloria (after skimming all 111 pages, felt herself represented in my writing.
- The strength of my writing lies not in its profundity, but its honesty.
- The passages about dirt and roots are well done. I'm pleased.
- The roller-coaster metaphor of writing reflects that of my life; over the long haul ... and day by day.
- I'm surprised by the outburst about being German. There's more to be unearthed there.
- I'm reluctant to use the word "heart" and "soul" in regards to my own life/work.
- I have published four books and am writing this thesis; still I don't call myself as a writer.
- In class I equated "voice" with "ventriloquism". Who is that dummy that's talking? I am the first listener to my stories.

- I (must) stand up for myself (re: Dan's supervision). Novel idea ☺.
- Why do I doubt myself so much?

- I try to please others. My confidence is tied to my mood swings.
- When confronted with a challenge/problem, my first tendency is to “do”, not “think”.
- Tears come easily to me.
- When I get scared (lonely, abandoned) I turn against myself (borrow abusive language).
- I’m becoming increasingly more open to male caring energy (in others).
- I have high expectations of myself (and of others).

- I put others on pedestals and resent them for not wanting to be there or failing to stay up.
- Being reflective does not come naturally to me: I am, however, able to develop this.
- The imposter is always on duty; less so when I feel confident.

process and the appropriateness of disclosing personal information.

- There’s little talk of joy in these pages.
- I continue to wonder what’s appropriate for inclusion here and what ought to be kept strictly private.

- Not knowing appears to be a precondition for learning
- Naming a demon reduces its power-over.
- Re-reading past journal entries yields amazing treasures.
- Striving and toiling are inherited values I hold.
- Speaking in a second language hides the first (voice).
- Allowing others to care for me is problematic.

Not sure how to classify these ... emerging insights, perhaps?

- Life history writing is not linear (like life itself).
- I am confident being German (but prefer not to talk about it).

Many of these statements look closed-ended, resisting examination. What if I were to turn them around, phrasing them as questions. For example:

Instead of ...

My early schooling experiences have shaped my current teaching perspective.

Try ...

Can you recall events from your early schooling that may have influenced your becoming a teacher?

Immediately, doors open, inviting me to explore, speculate, remember. By speaking to myself as if I were the interviewer opposite, I am relieved of the burden to know, to have the answer. What if I were to follow the thread of the question, letting it lead me? What would I find? "There are no chance memories," claims Alfred Adler, "out of the incalculable number of impressions which meet an individual, he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however darkly, to have a bearing on his situation. Thus his memories represent [the] Story of My Life" (in Nachmias, 1998, p. 79). I don't have to be an Adlerian to hear the ring of truth in that assertion. Almost immediately three "old" stories pop up, ready and waiting after a slumber that's lasted half a century.

First story: In the soup

"Was ist denn nun los?" calls a loud voice over the din of tin spoons scraping an assortment of hand-me-down containers. "What's going on here? Look at the mess you made!" The time is around 1949-50, grade one or two, everything is rationed. The British occupation forces, through the Red Cross, provide warm mid-day meals for school children. On this Monday noon it's chocolate soup, a sort of runny custard. I'm sure it was a Monday because I was wearing my little white Sunday suit to school that day, just one more day till it would turn "dark white", as I used to say. We were all seated in wooden rows of fixed desks, seats that flip up like movie seats, desk tops that slope.

I remember lining up to receive a ladle of soup. Each kid brought his own dish; mine was an enameled pot, two handles, chipped, brightly coloured, red or blue I'm not sure now. As I balance back to my seat, squeezing past others already seated, I slide the pot ahead of me, ready to fold down my wooden seat. But my wrist lands in the wrong place

and spills both pot and content. Priceless soup, warm and sweet, oozes unstoppably down the sloped desk, covering the seat, the front of my white shorts, the floor, and my only pair of shoes.

"Dummkopf! Look at your mess." Others snicker, as I'm dragged into the isle, roughly wiped down, left standing. Details are hazy but I remember missing lunch that day (was it as punishment? or because there was no spare scoop left in that huge thermos container?).

Until the end-of-day bell rings, I sit in my crusting Sunday suit. There will be more trouble when I get home. I cried—that I'm sure of. But more than anything, I remember feeling embarrassed, unfairly reprimanded and deprived of food. No one came to my rescue, no kind voice to comfort me and explain the inevitability of accidents. "I hope you've learned your lesson," rang the parting shot for the day.

What lesson did I learn that day? How does that event still teach me to this day? How does it still "starve" me? How does it explain my actions as teacher of teachers? Could this be the reason why I'm so preoccupied with 'process' in my courses, wishing to include everyone, ensuring people are heard, attending to the quiet ones, fussing about room layout, catering arrangements, and seating details? *Compassion arises from suffering.*

"When we ask students to describe their classroom experience with teachers, it becomes immediately evident how students often see teaching in terms of ... qualities such as fairness, patience, commitment, and kindness", writes Max van Manen (1999, p. 19). How serious should we take stinging accounts of classroom life? Aren't all students exaggerating? How would teachers describe the same events? Would they not proclaim their

deep caring? Van Manen's response is that "...no matter what teachers say their feelings and intentions really are, what seems ultimately more important is how students *experience* them" (p. 21). Dan Lortie (1975) coins the term "apprenticeship of observation" to capture the effect of prior schooling on the formation of (beginning) teachers' attitudes and values. Ross (1987) argues that new teachers select attributes and practices of their former teachers and synthesize them into an idealized image of the teacher they want to become. Or, I would argue, subconsciously pledge *not* to become.

📖 Rick: The school stories caused me to take a long, reflective pause. I was the little shit-disturber all the way through school—that may be why I took a time out from reading your text where I did—to reflect on the effects of my own school-days experiences on me as trainer and trainer-of-trainers. Why did I find my way into the study of theology in the 60s? Then teaching? Then counselling? Then, in short order, training? Which stuck!!! Why did training, not teaching, stick? Why are both you and I, Peter, "outsiders" to the system, looking in, poking at it from around the edges?

Second story: How to (almost) kill a teacher

"You don't know me, my name is Kuhlmann. I'll be filling in for a week as your teacher is away." We had heard about a substitute coming. My stepmother had warned me to "be good," as Herr Kuhlmann had been her teacher way back and was now returning from retirement to enlighten us. "*Diese Woche üben wir das Schönschreiben*," you'll be practicing proper penmanship this week, he explains, lamenting the demise of that old-fashioned, delicate, precise, copper-plate style of handwriting of his days. Soon thirty heads, bent over their books, imitating tricky pen strokes, dipping scratchy nibs into shared ink wells, tiny hands making mess of paper and ink.

With a child's sixth sense, I feel Kuhlmann approach me from behind. Quick! What have I done wrong? Talked, giggled, spilled ink, made a false line? Probably all of the above, perhaps none of these. "Renner!" booms the voice and as I turn, I see him towering: dark shadow of a man, three-piece suit, angered face. My writing arm rises in automatic protection as his descends in ready punishment. A scream and commotion follow: the inked nib has pierced Kuhlmann's wrist. The rest is a blur. What I do remember is that there was Big Trouble the next day. Not sure who tells me first: classmates, another teacher, the principal: Renner almost killed Teacher Kuhlmann ... they took him to the hospital with blood poisoning ... he had a black line up his arm ... luckily they were able to save him ... had the line made it to his heart, he'd be dead now *"Du machst uns nichts als Sorgen!"* You cause nothing but grief.



Figure 9: All set for Herr Kuhlmann's lesson

Not only blame the ten-year old boy for a teacher's clumsiness, but hold him responsible for the medical consequences! What lessons did this episode embed in a young boy? How about: teachers may hit you at any time and if they injure themselves in the process—it's your fault. ("This hurts me more than it does you.") How you process that information, how you cope with your guilt and shame—that's your problem. Just retelling the story, with all the embellishments and flaws inherent in a 46-year old anecdote, makes my blood rise as I contemplate the injustice perpetrated. According to Alice Miller's

historical analysis of “poisonous pedagogy” (1983, pp. 10-13), generations of parents were taught to anticipate and combat children’s obstinacy, willfulness, defiance, and exuberance. Lacking other instruction on How to Be a Parent, they relied on handed-down traditions, their own experience as children of their parents—all informed by such authorities as this 1748 text:

As far as willfulness is concerned, this expresses itself as a natural recourse in tenderest childhood as soon as children are able to make their desire known by means of gestures. They become angry, cry, and flail about. These are dangerous faults that hinder their entire education and encourage undesirable qualities in children. If willfulness and wickedness are not driven out, it is impossible to give a child a good education. (in Miller, 1983, p. 11) ... Just as soon as children develop awareness, it is essential to demonstrate to them by word and deed that they must submit to the will of their parents. Obedience requires children to (1) willingly do as they are told, (2) willingly refrain from doing what is forbidden, and (3) accept the rules made for their sake. (p. 13)

Again I marvel how I turned to “nurturing” as my teaching perspective. At the same time, I’m reminded of the “roots of violence” (Miller, 1983) still engrained in my psyche. Years of therapy have softened their power, but not relieved me of the duty to remain vigilant.

Third story: A teacher’s tears

“Listen to me, children, I have something important to say,” Frau Schaper calls out. As always, she’s dressed impeccably, black hair coifed in ways my stepmother would never

know how to, a string of pearls over a deep-blue *Kostüm*. We sit in rows, itching to be off for the summer, restrained only by her somber tone and demeanor.

"There is a possibility that I won't be your teacher this fall," she explains. After being our home-room teacher for two years, custom demands she pass us to another teacher. But instead she's been in conference with the *Rektor*, our invisible principal ... to fight for us. Yes, "I fought for you," she says, and begged to keep you for another year."

"You are very special," her tears are no longer a secret, "I don't want to give you up." Twenty-five children sit, silent as one, stunned, unsure of what to make of this display.

As I remember, I weep—pierced by the realization that here an adult, someone of distant authority, reached down from her desk, opening her heart and linking it to ours. She confided, proclaimed her need for us, made us cause and subject of her passion. We were no longer a horde of unruly urchins: we were her precious children and she our protective mother; our guardian angel against evil forces, flinging herself in the path of impending tragedy. "But how did you come burning down like a / wild needle knowing / just where my heart was?" asks Mary Oliver (1997, p. 48). Shaking over the keyboard this moment, my vision blurs in salty tears as I float in this realization: among the dust and rubble, I have hit the mother lode. Behold this precious stone! The source of my caring which I had known anecdotally but not—till this moment—viscerally. How many times have I told these anecdotes? "Engaging in critical reflection permits us to reclaim our own histories and to surpass them through the acts of remembrance and interpretation," suggests Madeleine Grumet (1981, p. 115). How many ways have I recalled these same events? In one form or another—depending on setting and audience—they have been trotted out before, "well worn

stories we tell about ourselves ... summations of our lives ... capable of reformulation in a variety of ways. Parts ... could be omitted, embellished, reframed and adapted for different audiences" (Kehily, 1995, p. 24). Salman Rushdie makes clear that

those who do not have the power over the story that dominates their lives, power to recall it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts. (1996, p. 58)

Rushdie's words echo Randall's "autobiographical imperative": if we want to continue to grow and learn, we have little choice but to attend to our personal stories. And to be "awake" in Maxine Greene's expression: "I cannot imagine an aliveness streaming out of someone who is half-asleep and out of touch with herself or himself" (1978, p. 46).



Figure 10: Frau Schaper's Grade 7 class, 1955

📖 Rick again: I want to talk about your statement "I have hit the mother lode." Great! Your exploration has paid off. The prospector

found what he was looking for. Now put on your miner's hard hat and mine the vein. I want to hear more about the riches you might find well below the surface. How does this discovery inform you - and me - about Peter as teacher-of-teachers? I'm craving more...



I stand in the heart of a hermeneutic circle of interpretation and understanding; "attached to the world through the circuit of selfness," as Denzin says (1984, p. 246). Friedrich Schleiermacher envisages this circle as two people—or person/text, reader/writer, narrator/text, researcher/researched—mutually transforming each other's ideas through continuing interaction (Palmer, 1969, pp. 86-88). Kenneth Gergen speaks of a "jointly achieved pattern [that] is not decomposable into fragmentary units ... any more than a Jackson Pollock painting could be reduced to the variety of colors by which it is constituted" (1988, p. 45). Geertz speaks of

[h]opping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them, we seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual perpetual motion, into explications of one another. (1983, p. 69)



Sage: Time for a little review? You seem pleased with your progress; I notice a sparkle in your eyes, a spring in your step.

Peter: Indeed. Much has happened. Where do we start?

Sage: Go ahead, be messy. Just start anywhere and we'll sort through together.

Peter: Well, Dan phoned yesterday to say that he's finally reading the first batch I sent him, the one with the collage. That seems so long ago, both in time and as far as my progress is concerned. He said that he'd been looking inside the (collage) box and read my text. That he's actually been late for a meeting because of it, that he's "enjoying the ride". He finds himself in my story, both literally (where I mention him by name), but also in another way. I didn't quiz him on that, but I think he was telling me that he found himself (as person? as teacher? as learner?) reflected in my words.

Sage: You didn't clarify that with him?

Peter: No. I was so excited and pleased and relieved to hear from him, that it didn't occur to me to press him for specifics. In fact, this sensation of relief ties in with this thing about polarities. I had feared that he'd "abandoned" me; when he said a while ago that he wouldn't have time to read, I thought I'd "lost" him.

Sage: Strong words...

Peter: I understand ... Dan neither abandoned nor lost me; it's not really about him and me. But that is the language I use in describing my feeling sensations. Look at the three anecdotes about my German school days. They speak of fear and aloneness—then of love and inclusion. And look at the larger picture of my home life, what was happening in my country at the time, and how my life has evolved from there. Fear of abandonment (other- and self-inflicted) looms as a Leitmotif: the theme of inclusion/exclusion is everywhere.

Sage: What else did you and Dan talk about?

Peter: We exchanged expressions of delight at my progress and that neither of us was sure of our roles. I listened particularly for any indication that Dan might be upset that I'd asked

for Carl to co-supervise (which has since been agreed to). But, if anything, he seemed relieved.

Sage: That's settled then. Now, about your writing. You say you're making progress ...

Peter: Every day a writing day. While scratching below the surface I came upon a gem ...

Frau Schaper who fought for us, who loved us. For me that was an epiphany, a turning point.

Perhaps two turning points...

Sage: How so?

Peter: Well, in that brief event 46 years ago my soul was inoculated with the sweet taste of love. Makes me think of Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*). This plant is not a native to the West Coast, yet you can find it everywhere on this island and all the way down the coast to Oregon and California.

Sage [interrupts]: What's that got to do ...

Peter [interrupts]: Hang in there; this'll make sense soon. Many of my island neighbours hate broom, it's invasive and crowds out native plants. It's been called noxious and a botanical barbarian. It came here with Scottish settlers. They must have brought a few seeds in their pocket to remind them of home. The reason I mention it here is that when Scotch Broom seeds fall to the ground, they can lie dormant up to forty years on inhospitable ground. Then one day, when the ground is disturbed they touch fertile soil and spring to life. Soon they grow their leafless branches, please the eye from early spring right through summer with their bright yellow blossoms. Broom plants develop deep taproots to provide an anchor in stormy weather and reliable access to nutrients and moisture.

Sage: And so it was with the seed which Frau Schaper placed inside you that day in 1954.

What caused it to finally germinate?

Peter: Through the act of remembering I disturbed the ground and brought dormant memories into fertile awareness. That's why I think of this as two epiphanies: one in 1954 and one in 2000.

Sage: Epiphany?

Peter: It was Denzin who first drew my attention to a word I had known, vaguely, from my Catholic youth: "interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people's lives" (1989, p. 70). The dictionary traces it to the Greek for *apparition, to appear*; "a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience."

Sage: And what was it that you perceived?

Peter: At long last, a solid lead in the "How did I become a nurturing teacher" investigation. How did I acquire such capacity to care for others? How did I learn about love and compassion—along with distrust, exclusion and abandonment? This has puzzled me for the longest time, caused such confusion, such self-doubt.

Sage: Say more ... dig on!

Peter: My natural desire to "care for" was continually sabotaged by my memories of maltreatment, of not being cared for. I felt like a fake, a hypocrite. How could I be a truly caring individual while remaining suspicious of and pushing away others' caring toward me.

Sage: Thinking in polarities?

Peter: Yes. The way I had it figured, to be a caring person meant caring-for and being-cared-for, both equally and in harmony. Otherwise I'd be an imposter, caring for others on the one hand, and hiding behind my barriers on the other.

Sage: And now?

Peter: If I extend to myself the same generosity and patience as I do to my students, then I'm free to engage in an open-ended exploration of caring in all its possibilities. I'm already pretty good at caring for others and have begun to take better care of myself (e.g., eating, exercise, leisure, etc.). And now I'm opening myself up to others' offers to be caring toward me (e.g., my younger brother, neighbours, friends).

Sage: Notice your cautious language, how tentative your pronouncements are?

Peter: Yes, and I enjoy this opening up. It's a fundamental shift for me. Jack Mezirow calls it a

transformation of meaning perspective ... a habitual set of expectations that constitute an orienting frame of reference that we use in projecting our symbolic models and that serves us as a (usually tacit) belief system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience. (1991, p. 42)

Sage: And Patricia Cranton, one of Mezirow's interpreters, writes that "the way we view ourselves as people is a deeply woven strand in the fabric of our perspectives on the educator role." She explains that "articulating and working with psychological meaning perspectives is ... clearly, a difficult process; it is easier to talk about what one knows or one's background than to describe personal fears and private perceptions of oneself" (1996, p. 102).

Peter: You see! I knew it all along! Doing this personal work is as necessary to my continuing professional/personal development as any study on, say, epistemology.

Sage: Why is this so important?

Peter: ... because it goes to the question of legitimacy, both in terms of the thesis and my teaching practice. It confirms my intuitive belief that personal and epistemological research and development deserve equal billing. I'm pleading for same-status ranking of logos, ethos, and pathos—inside and outside the academy. It's with this in mind that I've proposed to Lt. Cortez of the Michigan State Police that we might offer a workshop to explore the heart and soul dimension of teaching *alongside* the more conventional issues of teaching techniques and group dynamics.

Sage: Ah, yes, what happened there?

Peter: That was two days ago and I haven't heard back. It's a bit of leap for me to consider a workshop outside the more familiar topics, you know, techniques and tricks of the teaching process.

Sage: Let me know when he replies²⁶ ... and how you plan to continue to integrate these dimensions. Now, where are you in this writing project?

Peter: As you know, I've been guided by Krall's hermeneutic movement and during the last twenty pages have operated in the comprehending phase (Krall, 1988, p. 471). Thus far, I have ✓ read and re-read my emerging text; ✓ paid attention to the language I use and the etymology of frequently used words, ✓ listed one-sentence statements that represent key propositions of my work; ✓ grouped and re-grouped the sentences to let themes emerge; ✓ exposed parts of the text in private/public readings and woven others' reactions into the text; ✓ intensified my excavations and inserted the resulting materials in the text; ✓ and continued to listen to voices in the literature, heeding Krall's warning that "without some

form of critical evaluation, the narrative descriptions, no matter how poetic, are at best creative non-fiction and at worst solipsism. For exegesis to occur, the text, the description of experiences, must stand against other views" (p. 472).

Sage: What do you plan to do about the literature?

Peter: I want to extend the dig to the library, to situate my own voice amidst others. By coincidence, a few of the writers I'm drawn to seem to share my sense of homelessness: Rilke, Eliot, and Merton for instance. They help me to enrich my *Verstehen*, my understanding ... to confirm, question, confront, problematize, investigate, corroborate, interrogate—all these wonderful tools.

Sage: Are you saying that we won't hear any more of your own story?

Peter [smiles]: I'll continue to speak with my newfound voice. I think this investigation will become deeper and richer as I expose it to other writers and to Rita, Dan and Carl's critical eyes.

Sage: I hear confidence in your voice.

Peter: Yes.

Sage: But this won't be easy ...

Peter [interrupts]: ... no, it won't be easy. But I'm as ready as I've ever been to continue to expand my meaning perspectives. Krall, in laying out the researcher's tasks in the embodying movement, says that "reading other works provides distance from [students'] own experience and from attachment to their own word that becomes ever more appealing as

²⁶ Two weeks after sending him a proposal consisting of questions and suggestions of how we might proceed to design a workshop, I have not heard back from the lieutenant. A follow-up query still (four weeks later) waits for his response. (He never responded).

their writing skill increases. From this other view, they return to their original perceptions and see the questions more clearly" (1988, p. 472).

Sage: In that way you're expanding the circle of your excavation, taking in a larger terrain. As in Rilke's "expanding orbits, each containing many things".

Peter: ... awaiting further modification and transformation, in what George Steiner metaphorically calls the "sacramental intake or incarnation and ... infection" (Krall, 1988, p. 472).

Sage: What does that mean to you?

Peter: Each transformation causes a shift; each birth a death; each death a rebirth. What today seems an epiphanic insight may crumble tomorrow under the weight of fresh evidence. The ground that's firm now can shift tonight. "We may be transformed; we may also be consumed," writes Krall and she points to a distant landmark: "To regain their bearing, [students] must integrate what they have comprehended into their experiential matrix" (p. 472).

Sage: And that's not something you're afraid of, is it?

Peter: Right! That's what I thrive on. That is the stuff of the street urchin, the immigrant, the social climber, the Outward Bound survivalist. I approach this as an experiential learner in Dewey's spirit, as one "not merely a property of nature, set in place according to a scheme independent of him ... but [as one who] adds something, [who] makes a contribution." Dewey speaks of the "modern discovery of inner experience, of a realm of purely personal events that are always at the individual's command and that are his exclusively as well as inexpensively for refuge, consolidation and thrill" (1958, p. 186). In this tradition, I proceed.

Sage: Carry on!

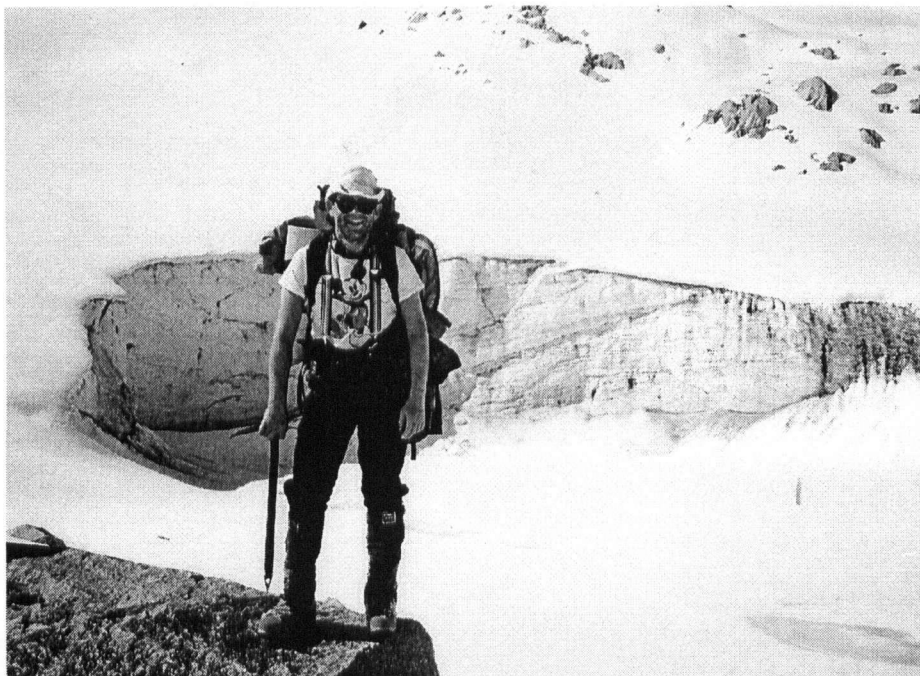


Figure 11: Outward Bound



Let's linger a while with these school stories. They're simple anecdotes, yet they contain the nucleus of an emerging self-description and self-construction. Denzin talks about "lives turned around by significant events" and observes that "at least since Augustine, the idea of transformation has been a central part of the autobiographical and biographical form" (1989, p. 23). The first two stories are typical of school experiences of that era and give an accurate foretaste of my five-year apprenticeship. Back then, teachers and parents were guided by child-rearing theories which we would condemn today. Little attention was paid to the psycho-social development of their charges (except to punish "willfulness" and ensure

that “boys don’t cry”). Physical punishment was dished out freely and, to today’s sensibilities, unfairly. Teachers and parents hid their feelings (with the momentary exception of Frau Schaper), closing their actions to scrutiny, discussion, and negotiation. The resulting moral for me was a clear (if unarticulated) notion of how not to educate. The neglected and abused pupil/apprentice became the caring teacher, determined to give his students that which he had not received. In the process of creating a “preferred identity,” my “inner integrity ... demonstrably triumphed over adversity” (Covery, 1999, p. 135). Through this narrative inquiry, with its emphasis on the subjective, I am stringing together autobiographical sequences. By re-telling stories and making forays into interpretation, I construct a “new” story that is meaningful to me. Rather than setting out to be a certain kind of teacher, I constructivistically “create” a practice and guiding principles—after the fact.

In recalling and interpreting a tiny event—Frau Schaper’s self-disclosure as seed of my nurturing teacher persona—I hit upon Roland Barthes’ notion of *punctum*, something “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (1981, p. 26). Something which causes a hairline crack in the armour so carefully constructed over time—and challenges me to dig for other explanations. For years my own fiction has served as my “life story”: born and raised in a war-torn country, abused, poorly schooled, motherless boy beats adversities, emigrates, makes good, becomes wonder teacher. But, as Jean-Paul Sartre writes: “A man is always a teller of tales; he lives surrounded by his stories ... he sees everything that happens to him through them, and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it” (1964, p. 39). Each listening is a re-telling; each re-telling a re-presentation. And then a new interpretation, plausible in its simplicity.

Last night, after dinner, I read the school stories to Sabine and Franco, both German-speaking friends and fellow-islanders. In the ensuing conversation, I let it slip that “come to think of it, I’m not absolutely sure whether I received a second serving of chocolate soup or not.” There—a crack! An old story, kept locked in a safe place, brought out and polished on special occasions, embellished in the re-telling with certain people and specific purposes, shows its brittleness. Writes Miller:

It is rare for the patient to perceive and feel the misery of his childhood by way of direct memories. [They] are either completely banished, a prey to amnesia, or separated from feelings, emotionally inaccessible, and hence of little help. (1990, p. 160)

According to Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992), we live storied lives. Freud claimed that much of what he took down as “factual” case histories were, instead, “fantasies of events as if they had actually happened” (Hillman, 1983, p. 12). Whether one agrees with Freud’s categorization or not, the question of what to make of autobiographical memory remains. Should we trust it? Yes, writes Hillman, “it is only a lie when it claims literal truth” (p. 12). To complicate matters, I find not only the recalling suspect, but also the interpretation—forever slipping and sliding. Take, for example, my two friends’ responses to the school stories. Sabine commiserates, expresses her compassion, is caught up in their drama and trauma. Franco, however, disagrees and offers a fresh take. “To me,” he explains, “you seem a caring and compassionate man. That runs deep inside of you. It’s not something you’ve learned after coming to Canada. I think you were a highly sensitive person all along, from the start. The hardships of childhood and schooling et cetera put a damper on your

development, they did not interfere with your essentially kind and giving nature." I am moved by his depiction, aroused by the inherent truth. Were I to adopt his interpretation, even for a moment, I'd be able to claim my nurturing side without hesitation. Yet, as we have seen, I hesitate.

Randall depicts the process of self-creation as a constant reworking of our personal story (1995, p. 36). We assemble found pieces into a structure, take "a cliché here, a slogan there, a partial imitation of this role model and that, a hodge-podge of habits, a repertoire of routines for thinking and acting borrowed from the people around us or breathed from the culture in which we are based, and a scattering of uncritiqued assumptions about power and truth and love ... and patch together a life, a way of being in the world, a self" (p. 37).

Jacques Derrida might say that I am creating this new story not out of real people and real facts, but out of *différance* (his punning play on the French verb *différer*, meaning simultaneously 'to differ' and 'to defer'). Derrida finds himself bound by the "hard doctrine that since all texts contain ambiguities and can be read in different ways exhaustive interpretation must be forever deferred" (Lilla, 1998, p. 36). Derrida claims that texts have no centre or essential structure, but only exist in transformations and traces. "Nothing ... is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. Writers and readers 'presume' and 'read into' texts real authors, real intentions, and real meanings" (Denzin, 1989, p. 45). By following the scent of What is a teacher and How did I become this teacher, I have cobbled together My Story: from found, borrowed, and made-up bits, driven by a hunger for order and understanding among "oppositions, differences and absent presences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 46). In due time, I found the three little

stories. Then, briefly, I thought I'd achieved some sense of comprehension about the who and how—only to be alerted by Franco and Derrida that such “presence” is unwarranted. Instead, Denzin urges a deconstructionist reading of all autobiographical writing to render it “playful, open-ended, and inconclusive—never complete or final. “After all, there can only be multiple versions of a biography or autobiography” (Denzin, 1989, p. 46).

A few months later, on a visit to Germany, I follow my stepmother's long-standing pleading to stop at a flower shop and “say hello to the owner, a cousin on your mother's side.” I gather my courage to introduce myself: “*Guten Tag, ich bin Ihr Cousin Peter.*” Within minutes we weep, laugh, and wonder if “it's really you.” Later, a lavish dinner amidst a thousand summer flowers brings another surprise: her brother, another cousin, arrives with a load of photo albums: pictures of my mom as a girl, of grandfather, grandmother, and oodles of relatives I knew by name but not in person.



Figure 12: My mom at age 19 (1935)

What's so remarkable? That at age 57 I meet my very first cousins. And, even more wondrous (and how it all fits with this narrative), they are warm and expressive and compassionate people ... not the

guard-your-feelings types I'm familiar with. Ursula and Gerhard, my "new" cousins, are links to birthmother, grandfather, and a tribe where speaking from the heart and celebrating the wonder of family seem everyday norms. This must be where my nurturing self comes from, the "highly sensitive" person my friend Franco described earlier.

I'm reminded (yet again) to stay alert, ready for transformations and possibilities.

Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese monk and poet, invites me to "learn to sing in my new nest" in a long poem which includes these lines:

Look deeply; I arrive in every second
to be a bud on a spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile,
learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

(in Ram Dass & Gorman, 1987, p. 178)

Nhat Hanh's words point to a link between *open-endedness* and *open-heartedness*. They speak of the careful listening necessary to hear what a text/person is saying, even more what it is not saying. Just listen how Leggo explains this:

As I learn to listen to light, I also learn there are many languages I do not hear, rendered deaf by too strict reliance on only one or two or three languages, rendered deaf by my eagerness to master a few ... I want to feel the world beating in my heart, and my heart beating in the world. (1999, p. 130)

To focus purely on a text's explicit message "is to do an injustice to the hermeneutical task," writes Palmer (after Heidegger); "it is necessary to go behind the text to find what the text did not, or perhaps could not, say" (1969, p. 234).



How does one go behind a text? How do I learn an unfamiliar new language? How do I listen to the sound of silence, the pause between the notes where, as Artur Schnabel²⁷ says, the music lives? Again I acknowledge being stuck ... No! more like lost for want of a map. What did the Zen master say about the Beginner's Mind? Something about there being many possibilities in the beginner's and few in the expert's mind? By trying to be an expert at this—writing about and making sense of my life story—I narrow the range of possibilities, dip again and again into the same well, cook from the same recipe book, rummage in the same tool box. None—not even these clichés—would refresh my ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and tasting. But Beginner's Mind promises to open me up to curiosity and surprise.

As I sit in meditation, trying to sit with a straight back, observing only my breath, letting my body be still, I begin to let go of thoughts, past and future. As I sit, in the present, scanning my body for tightness, pain, and temperatures, I notice sensations which, till now, I had been unaware of. And within seconds my mind wanders ("monkey mind"). I gently refocus. Don't force anything. Let the breath rise and fall. With each breath let go of

²⁷ Austrian-born pianist, 1882-1951.

cravings and of aversions. Somewhere between these polarities resides Beginner's Mind—ever so fleetingly, before the mind wanders off, chasing mundane matters of car repairs, fantasies of ripe peaches, and daydreams of perfect conversations. Flush with possibilities, Beginner's Mind now bids me to return to the keyboard. Curious and naïve about many possibilities; unafraid and cocky, Beginners' Mind makes no claim to know the answers. "Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart," offers Rilke in his *Notes to a young poet*, "and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books that are written in a very foreign language" (1984, p. 34). Again, a reference to learning/speaking/not-knowing a foreign tongue. An ESL speaker for most of my adult life, I know of that peculiar sensation that comes from speaking in tongues, as it were. Sometime I have the *perfekt* German word in the middle of an English (or French) sentence; other times I wish to correct grammatical errors committed by native speakers. Being patient and loving the question is not something I'm good at. Rilke addresses this impatience and unfamiliarity:

"Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now ... the point is, to live everything. *Live* the question *now*. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer" (1984, p. 34).

When in deep water, become a diver, remember? As I slip below the water's surface, questions arise; as I let go of the illusion of knowing the answers, they float first toward and then past me:

1. What are the stories behind my stories?
2. Whose stories am I telling?

3. Am I repeating what I heard others say?
4. If my stories are fiction, is there a non-fiction version?
5. If personal stories are fiction, then who is the writer: a creation of fiction perhaps?
6. Carl says "you're writing the dissertation that's been writing you all your life." Who wrote it in the first place?
7. Am I now re/writing it? Why now? Why at all?
8. How come it feels as if I'm reading it for the first time?
9. What else needs/deserves to be written?
10. If writing is about re-writing, how much can I re-write and still end up with a believable story?
11. What is believable?
12. To whom?
13. If my stories are "made up" (Min-ha Trinh, 1989, p. 141) and "experiences are constantly out of reach of language and discourse" (Bruner, 1986, p. 6), then what is the point of this writing project to me—and to others?
14. Do I have to "justify" the appropriateness of this project in order to qualify it as "academic research?" If so, where do I start? How far do I go?
15. Take the chocolate soup story: how much is made up? Will we ever know? How important is it to have the facts? Whose facts, anyway?
16. What is a teacher?
17. Why am I a teacher?
18. What if Mr. Birnbaum hadn't come along in 1969 and offered me a teaching post? What if he'd had a bakery—would I be a master baker today?

19. Why did I return to teaching (in 1972) after the disastrous first three years and the accompanying depression?

☞ Caroline remarks that this is the first time I've mentioned these events. My reply: there are too many stories contained in this question, too much pain. I don't wish to say any more about it.

20. What makes me so "good" at teaching, as others say?

21. What do I actually do that is so good?

22. Perhaps I teach in order to serve, to care for, to give to others?

23. Why else do I teach? What is *in it* for me?

✓ 24. What if my teaching were not about creating "perfect families" but about wishing to make "the world a better place"?

25. What if I have been, as Franco says, a caring person all along? What if my nurturing ways are natural and not a reaction to earlier hardships?

26. What if I were to re-cast myself from the role of "victim" to, say, that of a highly sensitive man?

27. What is it like to live as a highly sensitive being in a world that's often insensitive?

28. How do I know I'm looking in the spaces between/behind/around my text?

29. Who is asking these questions?

30. Is there a self²⁸? If so, what's its nature? Or several selves, co-existing or dissolving as one falls away and another evolve?

31. Or is the self an illusion, created to keep me going to explain my/self?

²⁸ Questions 30-32 arise from Chernin (1995), p.93.

32. Are questions themselves not a reflection of who's asking?
33. What is it my text does not say?
34. What is 'my' text, anyway? Who am I writing it for? Who will be reading it (after Carl/Rita/Dan)?
35. What impression am I making? Trying to make?
36. Does this text have a voice of its own? What does it say to me? What am I hearing?
37. Is this voice separate/different from its author?
38. If so, what's the space between these voices?
39. Is that where Derrida wants me to play?
40. How much playful probing from different angles is needed until I understand the text?
41. What are the possible angles?
42. How deep/wide is such probing?
43. And then what? Play some more?
44. Is it true that there are no 'right' answers, only temporary explanations, illuminations, possibilities?
45. How can I live with that?
46. How can I live without that?
47. How do I interrogate my own text?
48. If I write it—how can it also have written me? One paradox after another.
49. How can I step outside to become a questioner—negate my own horizon?
50. Do I have to step outside or can I question from within?
51. Is it an either/or situation?

52. Where does Peter end and where does the text begin? And vice versa?
53. What would that last question look like if phrased in a non-linear way? As in: how do text and writer connect? What is their relationship?
54. If “understanding” is contextual, won’t my questions be so as well? Will that limit my effectiveness as an hermeneutic questioner?
55. Does interrogating my text expand my horizon?
56. If there are no ‘right’ answers, what’s the point of this exercise?
57. In response to previous question: What if I were to start this writing project from page one today—would it be different? How?
58. What have I learned since I began writing in earnest? About teaching, writing, reading, researching, listening?
59. What’s happening to my confidence as a researcher?
60. How has my writing changed?
61. How is my writing different on page 150 compared to, say, page 15?
62. What’s it like hearing my voice as I read the text back to myself?
63. ... as I read to others?
64. Why do I want others to hear my text?
65. What do I make of their reactions?
66. Does my text elicit emotional responses and recollections of shared experience from the reader?
67. What does it mean to me when others weep as they read? What power do these stories hold? What responsibility arises for me?

68. Where will this writing/reading/interrogating lead to?
69. How will it change the way I practice my craft? Live my life?
70. How many more pages until I stop?
71. What else do I have to do/has to happen before I can stop?
72. Will I stop—or is there writing/telling beyond this thesis? If so, in what form?
73. et cetera



I look over the items on the list ... seeing them unfold in waves, as one passes, the next arises. At one point I stopped (number 61, I think), feeling self-conscious of playing, doodling, and messing around. That critical voice stopped me briefly. But I proceed. It's as if I'm able to see faint light through the thick of these questions. Or a scent, like stepping outdoors one morning in early spring and sensing that winter has ended. Perhaps a song, heard softly at a distance, which Lorna Crozier captures so well:

Where does the singing start?
Here, where you are, there's room
between your heartbeats,
as if everything you have been
begins, inside, to sing.

(in Leggo, 1999, p. 115)

I hesitate to describe 'it' in any detail for fear of scaring it away; like a dream at dawn, clear one moment and retreating the next, I try to hang onto it before it disappears. What is this 'it'? One way I can describe it is by saying that I am being re-born. "All good develops from

within us, growing up from hidden depth of our being,” writes Merton, we are guided by the law that calls us to “be what you are” (1961a, p. 236). What I am doing here—this intensive writing and relentless investigating—is transforming me. A mind, once expanded, won’t contract; a question once asked, remains a query; eyes, wide open, will see what they’ve never seen before. Dewey explains that “in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed” (1934, p. 14). I am at a point of awakening, at what Merton calls *le point vierge*, the virgin point. In this journal entry we find him rising at 2:30 to say *lauds*, the first prayer in a monk’s day. He writes:

The first chirps of the waking birds of the dawn, a moment of awe and inexpressible innocence, when the Father in silence opens his eyes and they speak to Him, wondering if it is time to “be”? And He tells them “yes.” They one by one wake and begin to sing. First the catbirds and cardinals and some others I do not recognize.

Later, song sparrows, wrens, etc. Last of all doves, crows (in Kramer, 1996, p. 7)

The first chirp of the waking birds: the first 150 pages of writing that are my own, not imitations of what they *ought* to be. Thousands of words strung together in my own voice, from within, unpretentious and true, interwoven not with impressive quotes but companion-like voices by men and women who’ve tread this path before me.

... *in awe and inexpressible innocence*: speechless, I fumble, moved by the poignancy of this encounter.

...*then the Father opens their eyes and tells them it’s time to “be”*. How long have I waited for permission to be. Now the father opens his eyes . . . and mine. Could this be my

own father, guarding my steps, forgiving my impatience with his ways? Or my grandfather, adored and distant?



Figure 13: My father and paternal grandfather (ca. 1941): what are they saying?

Or, perhaps, a fathering-me, guiding the emerging self through the turmoil of individuation?
Or God Himself, all-knowing and all-loving, as my friend Martin would say?

... *one by one they wake and begin to sing*. And so do I begin to listen and to write;
rise from my chair to sing in English and in German, to dance, and bake bread.

The poet Thomas Kinsella writes that

there is no end to that which,
not understood, may yet be noted
and hoarded in the imagination,
in the yolk of one's being, so to speak,
there to undergo its (quite animal) growth,

dividing blindly,
 twitching, packed with will,
 searching in its own tissue
 for the structure
 in which it may wake.

(1970, p. 11)

Fortified and reassured, I embrace the twitching being-within and continue my search. I come up for air. My eyes adjust to daylight and my lungs expand. I glance across a rippled surface, seeking to orient myself, wondering where I am. How's my re/search progressing? Where do I go from here? How much further? I ask Carl for advice and receive this in reply:

Consider your dissertation a long poem that breathes and sings and calls out. Just as we need to let our voices animate and inspirit our writing, we need to listen carefully so we know when a sense of wholeness has been conjured.

I am drawn to the rite and metaphor of baptism. Although no longer a practicing Catholic, I remain imbued with Christian traditions and fascinated by rituals of all kinds. Baptism was originally framed for adults, explains Merton (1961a, pp. 135-223). Prior to the ceremony, the candidate "is supposed to have entered within himself, to have struggled as far as he could to dispel all his illusions about himself, to come to some rough answer to the questions: Who do I think I am? What do I think I am doing? Why do I think I am doing this?" The event begins at the church door, when the priest asks: What is your name? From then on, the candidate is addressed by name throughout the ceremony, thus emphasizing baptism's most fundamental question: man's true identity. Later, the priest breathes on the candidate, names him again, and makes the sign of the Cross on his forehead. He recites:

"I sign thy ears, that you mayest hear the precepts of God."

"I sign thy eyes, that thou mayest see the brightness of God."

"I sign thy nostrils, that thou mayest perceive the sweet odour of Christ."

The rite symbolizes the recovery of lost spiritual senses re-opened "through the veil of darkness and mystery that separates us from God" (p. 215). Soon this is followed by the most simplistic and profound question: What are you called? The candidate answers with his name. "To be named is to be called," says Merton (p. 219). The question is not what is your name but, much more importantly, what are you *called*? In other words: What is your vocation? Then the priest puts another defining question: Do you want to be baptized? The response is I do—in Latin even more forceful than in the vernacular: *Volo!*—I *will* to be baptized. Merton sees this as "an act of self-determination and of autonomy ... [since] without a free and conscious and clearly realized exercise of our own liberty we cannot become, in the full sense, persons" (p. 220).

For me, this writing project has been a baptism, an opening of spiritual senses. I have entered into myself, struggled to gain authority to tell my story, admitted (with relief) that there are more questions than answers. In seeking to recover *pneuma* I have tasted freedom. Freedom from the bondage of longings and aversions; of the restrictions of polarities; of living according to scripts devised in childhood and repeated *ad nauseum*. Freedom to know that I am continually constructing and re-constructing my/self. Clark Moustakas names this part *illumination*, describing it as

a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and ... themes. ... [This] may be an awakening to new constituents of the experience, thus adding new dimensions

of knowledge. Or, [it] may involve corrections of distorted understandings or disclosure of hidden meanings. ... Illumination opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time beyond immediate awareness. (1990, p. 29)

Kim Chernin, writing about psychotherapy from the double perspective of patient and analyst, tosses this observation into the mix:

Nothing happens overnight. If you think something happened overnight, that means you have missed the earlier, subtle manifestations. Most things happen by degree. There are minor (almost invisible) appearances of the new; they slowly gather momentum, disappear for a time, return for longer periods, nudge the old self-structures out of the way, endure the backlash of the old dying, suddenly pop up as new configuration, wide-eyed, exuberant, declaiming all over the place, "Look at me, I am the new, the reborn, the emergent, the freshly created." (1995, p. 94)



"So, what have you learned?" How many times have I put this question to workshop participants. How many times have I pressed them to quantify an experience barely concluded, hardly digested? So, what have I learned? What a question! Where does one start? I am in the midst of it all, at or near the centre of the hermeneutical circle, "a foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, apprehensions, motions,

revolutions" (Shakespeare). The best I can do right now is to report fragments and impressions. Is this an awakening, a new dimension of knowledge, or a correction of distorted understandings (Moustakas)? Is it the backlash of something old dying, the arising of new configurations, or a keen awareness of earlier manifestations (Chernin)? As much as I want to answer these questions (out of habit, need for structure, longing for order), I allow them to dangle. Learning to live the question lets me off the hook, gives me time, allows me to create space. Listening to space—among the notes, behind the words, between my heartbeats—frees me from the compulsion and obligation to know. I return, in another circular movement, to my lament of the lonely and scary nature of "not knowing". I recall stories of surviving by faking and of living in fear of being found out. One hundred pages ago, I speculated that "not knowing is a precondition to learning". Now, I expand and theorize that learning may occur when I immerse myself in not-knowing. Significant personal learning is less about knowing the answer than about dwelling in the joy/frustration and discipline/freedom of the question(s). It calls for a willingness to play, to risk, and to be prepared for even more not-knowing. As a re/searching quest/ioner I "believe nothing, and yet believe almost everything," as Leggo puts it, "... never still and still always seeking to be still" (1999, p. 118). However "bright-eyed, exuberant, and new born" (Chernin, 1995, p. 94) I may feel at this moment or the next, I am on intimate terms with the seductiveness of inertia. How many knots do I tie in my proverbial handkerchief to remind myself to live and love the questions? How might I resist the temptation to offer an answer when I don't have one? How might I catch myself at playing the expert, the one who knows, when in fact I don't? How will I remember to refuse opposites (Carl's advice) and to "seek mediation of binary opposites" (Egan, 1986, p. 28)? How might I heed e.e. cummings' advice of "always

the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question"? What may appear frustrating (not knowing) can also be liberating (not *having to know*). One thing I can do is to practice not knowing, become an apprentice questioner, a gatherer of beautiful questions, remaining silent when normally I'd open my mouth. "Those who know do not talk. Those who talk do not know," suggests Lao-tzu (Feng & English, 1972, #56). What a paradoxical invitation to one who gets paid to talk.

What have I learned?

What am I learning?

☞ René: I've been touched by your searching spirit that has propelled you on this path. Throughout your writing you have been open, honest, vulnerable and courageous in sharing with us your joys and fears, your pride and your shame, your shining moments and your dark ones. Baring one's soul is not an easy thing to do, even in private; to do it in this context is a sign of your character. Just as anger begets anger, truth begets truth. I see the work you've done as a beacon to others to dig deep into their being to discover their truth. This is the only way we can change the world. You've done your part—good and faithful servant.



Palmer prompts me to ask how teaching and learning would be different if I helped participants to find questions that are worth living, questions for which they have no answers in any conventional sense? (Livsey, 1999, p. 27). I pause as I visualize a physical setting where there's no "front" of the room, no designated expert-spot, where everyone faces everyone, where visual aids are everyone's tools. A hush descends over the group. With

hesitation and excitement, the mantle of teacher and learner is passed from person to person. No one opinion is privileged. No one person is expected to have the answer. The rule is simple: you may ask any questions; no one may answer; no one give advice; everyone listens to what is said and what is not; silence is allowed to just "be". The designated teacher—perhaps called facilitator, elder, animator, or guide—models with words and silence, action and non-action; creates easy openings for the quiet ones and gentle obstacles for the talkative ones. The group experiments with such routines as going around the circle once, and then again; in addition to customary modes of speaking, participants use playful means to communicate: they draw, doodle, sculpt in play dough, write/read poems, make collages, stand up, walk around, dance, sing, recite, offer prayers, affirmations, invocations, and tribal wisdom. Everyone is free to keep a journal or learning log, to share entries only at their pleasure. Tacit knowing, hesitations, and heart-felt expressions are valued. Not speaking is honoured as another means of participation. Tears and laughter receive equal attention. Not-knowing is prized along with tentative speculation. The focus travels between other-directed to self-directed questions and observations. Participants interrogate their own truth, their beliefs, assumptions and actions. And so on.

At the conclusion of what might be called a learning or wisdom circle²⁹, participants quietly turn to their journals, guided initially by the teacher's trigger questions to help focus their reflection. Soon, conversation resumes ... if they wish, participants share (in small groups or in plenary session) their experience of learning to love questions ... express what was frustrating and what liberating about living the question now (in Rilke's words). Soon

someone proposes that—instead of slipping back into old habits—we use “speaking in questions” as our primary mode of inquiry for the remainder of the session or workshop.

Someone reads aloud a favourite poem or quote, perhaps Eliot’s from *The four quartets*:

In order to arrive at what you do not know,
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.

(1944, p. 20)

To teach and learn by posing questions requires a shift in the mindset of all participants. It blurs the demarcation between traditional roles: neither teacher nor student holds Right Answer cards up their sleeves. Instead of students and teacher facing each other, forcing interactions through a top-down network, participants would reposition themselves to face the questions instead, side by side. They’d collaborate in the spirit of Paulo Freire who calls for dialogue and equality between teachers and learners and insists that teachers must also be students and that students can also be teachers. Freire is not opposed to the teacher as expert, but proposes that “the heart of the curricular process begins and continues along lines of the problems that learners raise in their own situation” (Elias & Merriam, 1995, p. 156). Bruner envisages teacher and student in a cooperative position where the “student is not a bench-bound listener, but is taking part in the formulation and at times play[s] the principal role in it” (1961, p. 126). Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner advocate the “inquiry method” where a teacher rarely tells students what he thinks they ought to know and uses questioning

²⁹ A term used in Garfield et al. (1998).

as basic mode of discourse. In fact, an inquiring teacher “has a persistent aversion to anyone, any syllabus, any text that offers The Right Answer” (1969, p. 35).



Sage [feigning annoyance]: Hold it! What’s the point of all this?

Peter: Whaddayamean?

Sage: What *meaning* do these quotations hold for you?

Peter: A couple right off the bat. One, they remind me that I’m another link in a chain of collective wisdom; I honour my elders and attach my contribution to theirs. Second, I’m struck by how much their words have entered my own working vocabulary over the years. At the same time, I’m dismayed how, in spite of frequent mention in books and courses, their ideas have made such little inroads in practice.

Sage: Say more.

Peter: It is my impression, from reading trade magazines³⁰, for instance, or from the recent experience as a graduate student, that everyday adult education practices continue to rely on the “teacher knows best” model. Sure, participants are asked to think about why they came and what they expect to learn, but teachers/trainers continue to act as guardians of content and process. Lecturing remains the most widely used teaching technique; passive attendance the most widely expected learner behavior. In my experience, the ghost of Freire’s “banking

³⁰ For instance, the trainer certification program offered by Langevin, the “World’s Largest Train-the-trainer Company” at www.langevin.com and the *Become a Total Trainer* program sponsored by the American Society for Training and Development.

education in which students receive, file, and store deposits” (Elias & Merriam, 1995, p. 155) still haunt many hallways, including those leading to corporate classrooms.

Sage: And ... ?

Peter: I want to link the voices from the past, to support the proposition that personal learning is best facilitated when teacher and learner work side by side, focussing on questions instead of answers. This may be no grand discovery—its beauty lies in its simplicity. It is grounded in lived experience, it grew out of thoughtful ‘reflection on action.’

Sage: Just because you reach a conclusion based on personal experience doesn’t make that conclusion true, does it? I refer to Krall’s warning that without critical evaluation, narrative descriptions are “at best creative nonfiction and at worst solipsisms” (1988, p. 472).

Peter [rolling his eyes]: Ach ja, solipsism! I looked it up in the dictionary: *extreme preoccupation with and indulgence of one’s feelings, desires, etc.* Another source paints the picture of the visitor trapped in the waxwork museum after closing time, asking: ‘Is anybody there? Or is there only me?’ (Honderich, 1995, p. 838). I embrace Krall’s stance that “self-understanding when pursued reflectively, rather than leading to a constructed and egocentric view, is a primary link with the world” (1988, p. 468). This writing project clearly arises from my experience, but it is free to reach in and out through many openings of its housing. Its roots may be lodged in my personal worldview, but its leaves and branches poke through into a larger world. To that extent I am now looking for contact points between my own and others’ experience.

Sage: And how do you do that?

Peter: By connecting my writing with that of others, by reading/sharing it with colleagues, and by interweaving their reactions and questions into this ongoing work. I’m in the process

of shifting away from personal narrative toward shared narrative. Soon, Rita and Dan will receive the full draft, while Carl has been reading it in installments. Several teacher-colleagues have agreed to read the whole thing. Their eventual comments will enrich my own exploration and situate it squarely as a collective experience.

Sage: That would take your work well beyond the walls of the waxwork museum ... well beyond the criticism of being solipsistic. David Jardine observes that “none of us necessarily knows all by ourselves the full contours of the story each of us is living out. This is why dialogue and conversation figure so prominently in interpretive work, as contrasted with the ‘monologue’ of scientific discourse [as Habermas would say]” (1992, p. 59).

Peter: Good—that suits me fine. I have a need now to expose my work to others.

Sage: Why is that?

Peter: If it is to have a purpose beyond self-pleasuring, it must resonate with others ... cause them to want to recall their stories, examine their becoming, question their customary ways of being. It must be evocative “in all its tangled ambiguity” (Jardine, 1992, p. 55).

Sage: Anything else ... ?

Peter: I’d like to come back to your comment regarding truthfulness in personal narrative. If something “rings true,” I take it as “my truth”. Take, for instance, my earlier saying that I felt dumb for not knowing how to proceed. For me that was truth then. Subsequently, I reframed that notion by saying that not-knowing might be an essential and even desirable precondition for learning. I’d say that personal truths constantly evolve and easily get mixed up with half-truths, double truth, shades of truth, partial truths, grains of truth, false truths, truth-like, subjective truth, logical truth, and truisms.

Sage: Regarding truth and validity in personal narrative, Denzin writes that when “written accounts contain a high degree of internal coherence, plausibility, and correspondence to what readers recognize from their own experience and from other realistic and factual texts, they accord the work a sense of authenticity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 88).

Peter [grins]: Looks like we both agree. But I’m careful not to rest there, to remain open to truths beyond my own and readers’ experience. Derrida gave us *différance*, asking that interpretation must remain indefinitely deferred. And Leggo asks us to bring “a skeptical, questioning approach” to reading any text and to pay “attention to elements ... that contradict one another or fail to cohere” (1998, p. 187).

Sage: Right.



- What is a teacher? One who is surprised every time students (and clients) thank him for having inspired them. To inspire, *to breathe upon*. Much like the priest during the rite of baptism, breathing on the candidate, blessing his ears, eyes, and nostrils. A teacher invites students to be re-born, again and again.

I almost wrote “Who is a teacher?” instead of “what is”. But I shall keep on asking the what question a while longer. For one, because that’s how this meditation began, with “What is a monk?,” for another, because phrased like that it broadens my focus from me-the-teacher to teachers-as-such.

- What is a teacher? One who challenges students to ask questions, to look behind the obvious, to interrogate the familiar. Such a teacher avoids the occupational temptation of holding knowledge, expertise, and “right” answers; who, in Leggo’s words asks students “to resist me and themselves and everyone else in a joyful, celebratory way” (1996, p. 238).
- What is a teacher? One who views all teaching, essentially, as story-telling. And who knows that for every story told, there are others that are not told, some implied, others disallowed. One who invites his students to look behind the words, in the shadows, and underneath, behind, and inside of what Ted Aoki calls “spaces of possibilities” (Leggo, 1997, p. 1).
- What is a teacher? A learner *inter pares*, alongside and equal to his students. He encourages them to raise questions that pertain and arise from their own situation. He holds a persistent aversion to anyone (teacher, student, syllabus, text) claiming The Right Answer.
- What is a teacher? One who assists students to find, define, refine (and interrogate) their own truths.
- What is a teacher? One who often (more often than not) finds himself at sea, at a loss for words, out of his depth, in deep water, without a paddle. One who’d like to think that

such a state is acceptable (even desirable, certainly natural) but who still thinks that he *ought to know* the right answers.

- What is a teacher? One who acknowledges that taking responsibility for others' expressions of anger, disagreement, resentment, and confusion deprives them of their own voice, their opportunity for self-discovery and growth. Such a teacher also realizes that is natural to want to fix, smooth over, or bury uncomfortable emotions.
- What is a teacher? One who thrives on the excitement of working through difficult passages—within himself and in relationships with others.
- What is a teacher? One who appeals to inquiring minds and curious creatures; one who invites students to “nurture doubt” and “question the notion of selfhood” (Leggo, 1996, p. 239).
- What is a teacher? One who seeks to live at the edge of discomfort, where he responds to students' request to “feed me fish” with the compassionate invitation to “catch your own”.



I revisit a collage which I made last year, a month before I began to write these ruminations. On the surface no more than a playful assemblage of magazine cut-outs, it

reveals—Rorschach-like—much more than a *Man Walking Along*. What began in reaction to a line by Kahlil Gibran: “For even as you have homecomings in your twilight, so has the wanderer in you, the ever distant and alone” (1923/1973, p. 34), emerged as an amazing map depicting the essence of this writing project.

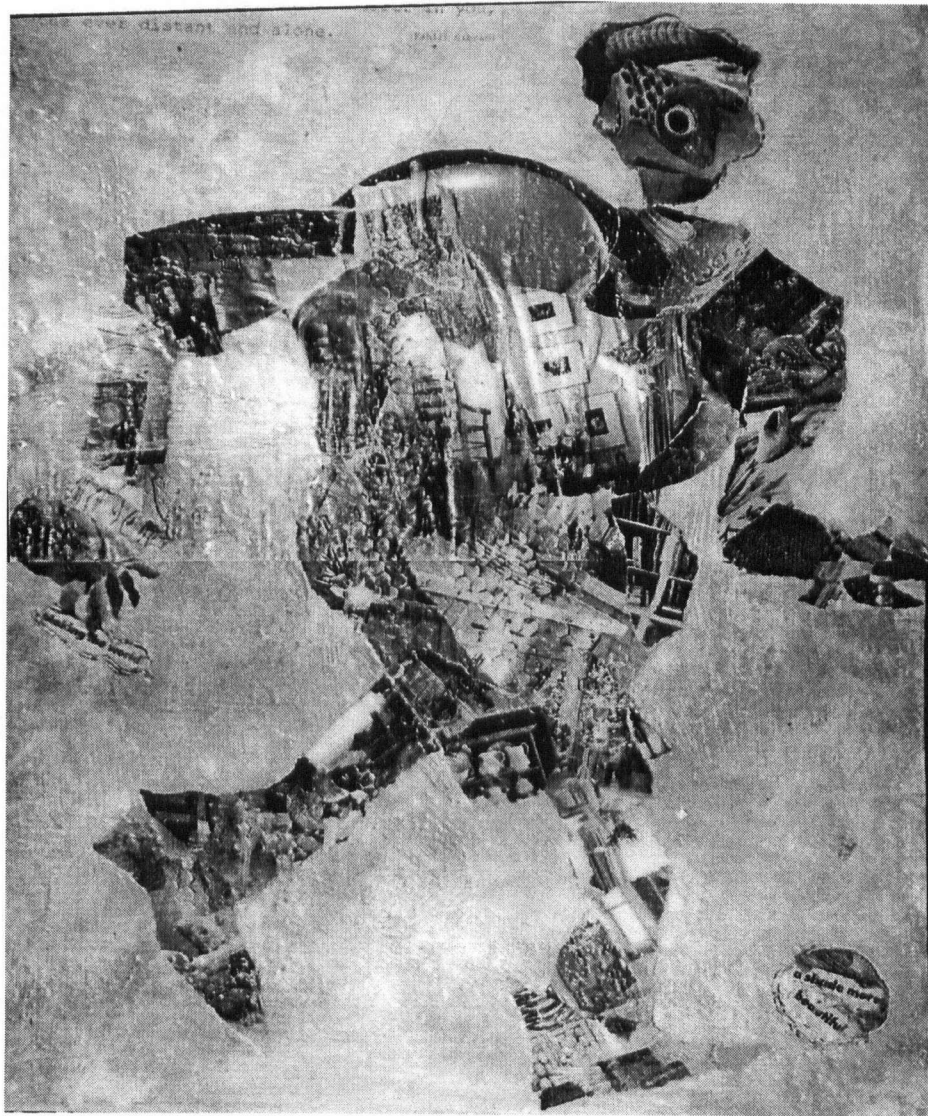


Figure 14: *Man Walking Along*, collage, 36 x 50 cm (1999)

Look at the image now and hear its multiple voices:

I'm in motion, animated,
energetic, unstoppable ...
and a tad weary from all
this hectic coming-and-
going.

*Look at those shorts I'm
wearing: just a tad goofy
considering my age; strong legs
like a soccer player's (is it too
late for me to learn to play?).*

Can you see one body
emerging from another; new
from old, novice from ancient;
transforming, sliding out of its
skin like a snake?

Big pointy shoes, high heels
even: remind me of jester's
shoes. Good foundation, though:
won't be easy to knock this guy
over!

I'm looking ahead while
my head is turned
backwards...on myself, with
an expression of amazement,
and disbelief. All this is me?

That's one big heart rising
like a new full moon from my
shoulder. Next to the garden
window. Firmly anchored and
exposed.

"Making the world."
reads the sign in my hand.
"a shade more beautiful"
. . . Too pretentious? . . .
. Too much of a cliché?
. . . . How about
just saying the words . . .
. and then . . . listen to
their song.

I'm aching, my bones
brittle, my muscles scream,
my joints need oiling, too
much weight, sweating
profusely. Yet I (must) keep
running . . .

My butt a bunch of red
tulips, my lower back an
empty armchair, my pants a
cupboard of china, my chest a
gallery of framed photos, my
belly a loaded bookshelf.
What do you make of that,
eh?

Wanna play? I've got a ball to
kick around. What a wonderful
day to be free.

I realize there aren't any
people in this picture: but you're
welcome, any time, to step
inside, pull up a chair, pour some
wine, take a nap, read a book ...
Be My Guest.

The image of a Man Walking Along symbolizes my corporal body searching for
direction and questing for meaning. "The legend of the Traveler appears in every

civilization, perpetually assuming new forms, afflictions, powers, and symbols. Through every age he walks in utter solitude toward penance and redemption" (Connell, 1963, p. 34). With Teilhard de Chardin, "I'm beginning to think that I shall always be like this and that death will find me still a wanderer" (in Dillard, p. 185).



1 April 2000. Sixty-one days since I began to write. Two days ago I sent 161 pages to Andrea—Oxford-educated poet and German-speaker—who has agreed to give the draft a rough editorial trim. I attach this note:

Hello Andrea: The draft is rough and meandering: no headings, no clear beginning, middle, or ending. I fear you'll think me pretentious sending such a rough draft. ... Please tidy it up for its first round of unsuspecting readers.

After I'd picked it up from the print shop, I sat in the car and read it for the first time, start to finish. I cringed at my wordiness, my repeated self-doubts – but also delighted in occasional passages that flowed with style. I wanted to chuck out much of the self-absorbed stuff but held on, knowing it's all part of finding my footing (autobiographically and metaphorically). Merton came to mind³¹. In a new intro to one of his very early books, he writes: "Perhaps if I were to attempt this book today, it would be written differently. Who knows? But it was written when I was still quite young, and that is the way it remains. The story no longer belongs to me, and I have no right to tell it in a different way, or to imagine that it should have been seen through wiser eyes." So, leaving the early parts as they are might serve to document my subsequent maturing as a writer and researcher.

³¹ Preface to the Japanese edition of *The seven storey mountain*.

In the pages still to come, my writing journey will shift from solitary to shared pilgrimage. Eudora Welty writes: "As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover; and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. Our living experience at those meeting points is one of the charged dramatic fields of fiction" (1984, p. 102). It's toward these fields that I'm headed—where we interpret, act, grow ... and where, after all, my educational practice is situated.

In class that evening, Carl's comment that "Peter is almost finished with this thesis" catches me off guard. I had no sense of being anywhere near the end. He offers me another opportunity to share my work with classmates and we take twice the allotted time with the three school stories: first I read, then we explore, à la Heidegger, what these stories might not, or could not, say. The next day Carl sends this note:

What a lovely gift you offered all of us last night!! You performed your word-making and storying, and generated a lively performativity with and in and among us. A journey of hearts. ... Last night was a further exemplary manifestation of the energy—creative and spiritual and emotional and intellectual and physical--that is generated by your research and writing.

About my ongoing work, he writes:

You are sustaining the courageous (connected with the heart) commitment that you initially demonstrated when you began listening to and honouring your voices. Keep in mind that those voices are personal, professional, academic, and poetic, and so the interweaving that is taking place in your writing is the creative unfolding of these several voices learning to sing together. In the past you have been more familiar with some voices than others, and so your writing now unfolds as several voices that are seeking balance. So, continue to listen to and hear all your voices.

Carl consistently does what I accomplish so rarely: to teach without teaching. His words and actions are a feast of modelling and congruence, of inspiration and mentorship. In each class he sets a table and invites us, unconditionally, to feast: multiple food groups are spread in abundance—from healthful heartiness to positive prodding and affirming authority. In Shakespeare's words³²: "...in his commendation I am fed; It is a banquet to me." But Carl makes clear his impatience with anyone wishing to "simply hammer a spigot into me in order to collect a bucket of syrupy knowledge" (1997, p. 240). Grow your own knowing, he exclaims. Big smile.

☐ Rick: About Carl's "syrupy knowledge". Having grown up in the maple syrup country of southern Quebec, I know that's not what you get out of a maple tree in March. What you get is clear fluid - sap - the life-blood of the tree. What you do with that sap is carefully and lovingly boil it down, reducing it to its essence. It takes 40 gallons of sap - and a lifetime of skill and "feel" - to make a gallon of good maple syrup. In that gallon, along with the sweetness of the sap, you can taste the earth (terroir), the heat of the bright spring sun, the iron of the boiling pans, and the deft hand of the sugar-maker. Distill, Peter. Go for the essence!

☐ Cindy, after reading the first fifty pages of the very first draft, writes: My head (or perhaps it is the empty box inside) connects with much of your angst with being the imposter. ... When I teach, I sometimes hear the words coming out of my mouth and realize that I don't do it myself. Lately I have come to fess up and let people know that I find it really difficult to do what I am teaching them. I guess I hope that they will see how hard it is and go easy on themselves . . . The other thing that I am appreciating is your openness. To talk about your fear - of what ever it might be at the moment, of the judgements of yourself. ... I am already wondering how I can change the way I teach, let people take more risks, (read, let

³² Duncan, King of Scotland, *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 4.

myself take more risks...). I am really being called to task by the work you have done to get here. Every page has a phrase or a line or a word that strikes me and makes me think, ponder, link to your experience.

I savour my colleagues' words, appreciating their texture, weight, vitality. They bear witness to our shared struggle toward authenticity. I'm thrilled to hear that even these rough-cut ruminations strike a chord in another. A "recipient-designed" text, to borrow from Frank³³ is metamorphosing into a "recipient-designing" text. Much like the *Ancient Mariner* (Coleridge in Fry, 1999, last verse), who demands to be heard and, by button-holing the reluctant Wedding Guest, transforms his listener into a "sadder but wiser" person, so is this thesis designing its reader in subtle ways.



Krall's hermeneutic movement. This "inward journey through time" continues to take me "forward and back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling" (Welty, 1984, p. 102). Writing like this (and then reading and re-reading) is turning into the roller-coaster ride Ram Dass described up and down, in and out, one moment pulled to inner work and meditation, the next turned outward, seeking other voices and opinions. Following Krall's assertion that "for exegesis to occur, the text, the description of experiences, must stand against other views" (1988, p. 472), I've taken tiny steps outside the writer's cave to expose my text to the din of the marketplace. Krall describes this as the end of the comprehending

³³ During a workshop at the 6th Annual Qualitative Health Research Conference, Banff, AB, April 6 - 8, 2000.

and the dawning of the **embodying** phase. The researcher begins to distance himself from his own experience and “from attachment to [his] own word that becomes ever more appealing as [his] writing skill increases” (1988, p. 472). This step is necessary for me so as to avoid the isolation of solipsistic inquiry. Teaching is, after all, situated in both spaces, the private one to expose my/self to my self and the public one where I expose my/self to others. One reveals and nourishes the others. With each turn, new questions arise. With each listening, fresh sounds become audible. With each rumination, unexpected tastes emerge. With each touch, long-forgotten shivers traverse my skin.

For ten weeks I have excavated a personal narrative. More recently, I have begun to explore the mutuality of my growth with that of others. Martin Buber says that “the innermost growth of the self is not accomplished, as people like to suppose today, in [our] relation to [ourselves], but in relation between one and the other ... together with the mutuality of acceptance, of affirmation, and confirmation” (1966, p. 71). What occurred to me instinctively—first “spelunking in Plato’s cave” (Keen, 1991, p. 128), then re-emerging into the bright of day—is said to be natural and necessary. Erik Erikson, the psychoanalyst, speaks of “disciplined subjectivity,” one’s attempt (usually with the help of the therapist) of relating the deeply personal and irrational to established theory and concepts (Wetherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 86). Adds Wetherell: “Distance provides the human situation; relation provides one’s becoming in that situation” (1991, p. 86). I expect this exchange to continue—to the inevitable cessation of this writing project and beyond, way beyond. Having unearthed my story “gives meaning to the past from the point of view of the present and the future” writes Laurel Richardson (1990, p. 23). And more, I think. The past, when

fully heard, is becalmed; it can cease its lament, relent its choke hold, take a long deserved rest, and nurture me as I care for myself and others. Having told my story once (again)—as storytelling is often a re-telling of familiar events and constant re-constructing of meanings—I now shift my frame of observation in an effort to chase down what Geertz calls “fugitive truth”.

To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening. To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. (1983, p. 16)

Instead of looking backwards to past pains and losses, I feel propelled in new and unfamiliar directions. How and where to from here?—I don’t know. The Buddhist advice is to stay in the moment, endeavoring to just be. As the first reader of my own writing (and you, Dear Reader, as its next), we are engaged in a continuous spiral of meaning making. *Every listening is an act of interpretation* are watchwords for this undertaking. In Adlerian³⁴ terms, life has no intrinsic meaning; we *give* meaning to life, each of us in our own fashion. There is no Right Answer, no neat conclusion, no tidy ending ... only a promise of continual exploration, exuberance, and exorbitance. All part of Witherell’s “intricate tapestry ... composed of interlocking patterns of cultural-historical, individual-biographical, and

³⁴ I’m paraphrasing Alfred Adler and Richard Dreikurs. Teaching (a *caring or helping calling* as I see it) presumes the meaning of life as residing in doing for others and in contributing to social life and social change. Other post-Adlerians, such as Victor Frankl and Erich Fromm, believe that the meaning of life lies in love.

interpersonal-relational treads" (1991, p. 84). Or "songlines" in Bruce Chatwin's words, reaching way back and pointing way forward, locating our conversation universally.

I have a vision of the Songlines stretching across the continents and ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then, catch an echo); and that these trails must reach back, in time and space, to an isolated pocket on the African Savannah, where the First Man opened his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him, shouted the opening stanza of the World Song. (1987, p. 102)

As I attend to the songlines in readers' reactions to my work³⁵, I continue to wonder: How representative is my story? How is mine also "a story of the times"? (Frank). How *typical* is this *particular* story? How does it convey not what happened, but what happens: the typical, recurring, what Aristotle calls universal event³⁶. To what extent does one *I-experience* represent multiple *we-experiences*. As social beings we define ourselves—and are defined—in the company of others; as Valentin Volosinov explains: "I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong ... [since] a word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee" (1973, p. 86).

📖 Rick: One of your most profound insights is buried in a footnote regarding Adler and Dreikurs, viz., "Teaching (a *caring calling* as I

³⁵ In addition to the three teachers who constitute my research supervisory committee, I have asked six fellow-teachers to read and respond to what I have written thus far.

³⁶ As Northrop Frye (1963, p.24) says: "You wouldn't go to *Macbeth* to learn about the history of Scotland—you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul."

see it)" presumes the meaning of life as residing in doing for others and in contributing to social life and social change." That's it, Peter! I just put down your draft and fished out a copy of my major paper [for his 1980 UBC M.Ed.] I haven't looked at it in years! I've just re-read three short sections, including "Servanthood" (based on Greenleaf's The Servant as Leader - there's my answer to why I studied theology!), and "Caring" (based on Mayeroff). What's neat is all ring just as true today as they did 20 years ago when I was sweating it out to meet my final-final-FINAL deadline for Dr. #@! who, by the way, never got what I was driving at . . . About Caring-it's the one biggie I've always looked for in a facilitator or trainer, because I never have had-and still don't have-a clue as to how to develop it in an adult. In a child, yes - by caring for him or her unconditionally day in and day out - this I've learned from parenting Lars, who, by the way, is now a decent and caring 25-year-old man. I look for a caring disposition in the adults I choose to work with because I don't know how to "train it in" if they don't come wired that way by that point in their lives.

I wish for readers' responses to many questions: How do my ruminations speak to you, resonate in your person? Which parts more, which less? What does reading my story evoke in you? How *similar* is your story from mine? How does it *differ*? Do you see yourself represented? How so? As you read, which parts excite you? Which aspects of your own "becoming a teacher" are not reflected here? Tell me your story. If you were to undertake a similar writing project, how would you start? What would you like to say to me?



I continue floating in the hermeneutic swirl, savouring the fruits of this laborious process, and inhaling the depth of meaning in my writing. As this project comes to a close, new questions take shape: Is this enough? If 200 pages, why not 300? If not enough, how

much more ... or, what else? How much more interpreting is needed? What's been left out? Are the omissions deliberate or accidental? Should I leave more "dirt on the roots"? Examine them closer? Dig up other roots? What is the text saying that I'm not hearing ... or unwilling or unable to hear? How much "tidying up" is necessary to ready it for public consumption? Do I, for instance, leave-in the frequent expressions of self-doubt or do I gather them in one place—recollect them in tranquility, to borrow from Wordsworth³⁷? Is there a benefit to showing the writing process in all its messiness or should I aim to present a neat summary instead? To paraphrase Dillard's question (1998, p. 7): how many gifts can I ask the reader to unwrap—with the price tag still attached? I have only just begun! So many more packages, so many bows, such intricate wrappings! In Connell's words:

I have agreed to paint a narrative on the city walls.

I have now been at work many years,

there is so much to be told. (1963, p. viii)

In Pompeii archeologists are now re-burying parts of the already excavated site in order to protect it from erosion and to bequeath work to future explorers.



Krall's hermeneutic movement. Over the next few weeks—from committee approval to final examination—I anticipate a continuing deepening of my listening to and refining of this text. Moustakas (1990, pp. 30-32) foreshadows several phases in this regard:

³⁷ I thank Cathy Stonehouse for this question and the Wordsworth quote.

incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. Krall offers **restoring** as the next, and last stage. Completing the thesis will involve the “weaving [of] analysis and interpretation into the description” (1988, p. 473). Steiner talks of *restitution*: having been alternately thrown off balance and centered, the researcher—if the hermeneutic act has been authentic—“restore[s] parity” so that the mirror “not only reflects but generates light” (in Krall, 1988, p. 473). Such enlightenment serves as apt metaphor for the flow of this graduate program. It invites participants to step back from everyday doing ... question their guiding assumptions and beliefs ... and return with increased awareness and deepened understanding. Sam Keen writes:

Stories open you up to the stories of others, as common and singular as your own. That remains the best way we storytelling animals have found to overcome loneliness, develop compassion and create community. Indeed, if the unique stories of individuals are not cherished, a group of people may become a mass, or a collective, but never a healing community. (1988, p. 46)



18 April 2000. Today I deliver the first draft to Rita, Dan, and Carl. I anticipate their critical reactions with joy and confidence. On May 2 we'll meet as a committee to chart the next phase of this project.

2 May 2000. We met for two hours. My advisors are pleased and impressed by my new-found writing voice ... and confidence. I imagine they were as relieved as I was. Some

of the issues raised during the meeting are explored below. But first, a month off: to travel and visit family and friends in Europe. Time-out from writing.

One of the questions Rita asked during the May meeting is this: Has your practice changed as a result of your research? I didn't answer immediately, afraid to admit that I hadn't taught for nine months. A Toronto client who's been putting serious bread on my table for six years, no longer needs me ("Thank you for your excellent work over the years, but we've outsourced our entire training department"). I've booked three workshops for 2001, but my preoccupation with this research has made me turn down other offers. I further resist Rita's question, afraid to reveal too much progress too soon; putting into large words what can only be said in whispered tones.

Perhaps I can approach the question by reflecting on a recent teaching assignment. It was only a small job, half a day as part of a PD day at a private career college. I agreed to do it without pay, for Gloria, a member of my Ed.D. cohort. Little did she know that she was doing me a favour—little did I know how important it would be to teach again at this moment. I asked Gloria to describe her expectations along three simple questions and she sent this reply:

Q: what do the participants expect?

A: learn how to be better teachers

Q: what would you like me to do?

A: touch their hearts

Q: what would you like participants to take away?

A: the experience of getting in touch with themselves and thereby able to touch their students

In return, I sent her this rather unorthodox course proposal. Note how it refrains from listing “measurable outcomes” in the language familiar to my intended audience. Instead it kicks open the door to questioning our practice and foreshadows a focus on the personal side of teaching:

The heart of teaching

How did I *become* this teacher? What is my ideal of a ‘good’ teacher?

How do I nurture the natural teacher within me? In what ways does my life experience affect the way I teach?

How do I care for myself?

What (other) questions are worth asking?

A half-day workshop for YVR staff & faculty ☼ with Peter Renner EdD/cand ☼ author of *The art of teaching adults* ☼ June 5, 2000 ☼ After a morning learning from the Teaching Perspectives Inventory with Gloria, you’re invited to an afternoon exploring the heartfelt dimension of your teaching practice. ☼ Expect to be nurtured intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually ... with story-telling and careful reflection. ☼ Meanwhile, please visit www.peter-renner.com.

Although the workshop is only a four-hour event and the client someone I know and like, I’m as nervous as if I’d never taught before. The moment we are underway, things get better—as they always do. I follow a plan based on Palmer’s suggestion around questions “worth living,” questions for which participants lack conventional answers (Livsey, 1999, p. 27).

Later that evening, back at the island hideaway, I’m met by a backward slide into depression, triggered by a sense of uncertainty. Sure they had applauded, twice even. Sure, there were tears and expressions of profound insights. Sure, we debriefed and the group

made a list of what they "saw me do," a list that began with the amazing observation: "you showed your vulnerability." Still, not enough. Again, agonizing self-doubt. What had I expected? That I'd be a "new" teacher? That the doubts of old would disappear? Yes in not so many words. But, to be pragmatic, I did behave differently: less emphasis on me, the teacher, more on individual's stories; less focus on technique, more on heart connections; less talk, more silence; less telling, more eliciting, probing, and questioning. The next morning Gloria sends this note:

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING TO OUR PD DAY!! It was quite an emotional afternoon and I was still so wired up when I went home that it took me a while to sleep. You created such a safe environment that we were able to bare all, something difficult when you have management and staff in one room. But you did it and made us bond that much more!

The client is satisfied and that, dear boy, is the bottom line for us itinerant trainers (it's the sage's voice, chiming in uninvited). It matters little what went on for you or whether you're happy with your progress. This workshop wasn't about you. And besides: have you ever considered that doubting is what keeps you on your toes, keeps you thinking critically about your work ... defines you as a reflective practitioner? And what if, as Johanson and Kurtz propose, you were to view your work more like that of a midwife (1991, p. 38)? When the baby is born, there is no question to whom it belongs.

I continue to be puzzled by this reaction to an otherwise uncomplicated teaching assignment. Determined to think outside familiar boundaries and refusing to give in to

polarities, I turn to Jack Kornfield's book on spiritual practice. The pages open at a Tibetan prayer:

Grant that I may be given appropriate difficulties and suffering on this
journey so that my heart may be truly awakened and my practice of liberation and
universal compassion may be truly fulfilled. (1993, p. 73)

Age-old wisdom invites me to view difficulties as essential to liberation. Kornfield says that "very often what nourishes our spirit most is what brings us face to face with our greatest limitations and difficulties" (1993, p. 74). His own teacher calls this "practicing against the grain" or "facing into one's difficulties" (p. 74). bell hooks tells of a similar "song in the black church tradition that says, 'I'm going up the rough side of the mountain on my way home'" (1990, p. 148). Fresh ways of seeing past customary polarities: it matters little whether I taught "better" than before, only that I did so whole-heartedly, using questions and silence and vulnerability. Herein lies a partial answer (forever partial!) to Rita's questions: What have you learned from doing this research? Do you have a sense of knowing yourself better as a teacher? Yes, I do. "Exposed on the cliffs of the heart", in Rilke's words, I met a man sure of his assignment: to live heart-fully and to embrace difficulties. Rilke writes:

Exposed on the cliffs of the heart. Stoneground under your hands. Even here,
something can bloom; on a silent cliff-edge unknowing plants blooms, singing, into
the air. (1982, p. 143)

The poet's "unknowing plants" are my "moments of not-knowing". In their blossoming they reveal a shared blooming and singing: workshop participants touch memories deep inside, Gloria stays awake at night with excitement, and I glimpse a fresh sense of purpose. Rilke's lines reveal and connect the dots between Gloria's and my own experience and open

passages for deeper realization. Writing in Europe during the Great War, Rilke gives meaning to events occurring on another continent eighty-five years later. His words support my effort to situate my personal narrative in a larger context, linking I-experiences to we-experiences. My resonance with his words point to the lineage of human experience—"songlines stretching across the continents and ages" (Chatwin, 1987, p. 102).

"In the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood ... we all come to the end together, and even to the beginning: living, as we do, in the middle", writes Ursula Le Guin (1980, p. 199). The real question, according to Janet Gunn, may not be "Who am I?" but "Where do I belong? ... the question of the self's identity becomes a question of the self's location in a world" (1982, p. 23). It has taken me four months of writing (and fifty-seven years of living) to uncover that I'm called to do heart-work (which to this day I have taken to mean *teaching* but which I suspect could mean other undertakings). In a long poem entitled *Turning-point*, Rilke³⁸ tells of a man, "whose vocation was Waiting", arriving at a moment of truth:

For there is a boundary to looking.

And the world that is looked at so deeply wants to flourish in love.

Work of the eyes is done, now

go and do heart-work

on all the images imprisoned within you; for you

overpowered them: but even now you don't know them.

Learn, inner man, to look in your inner woman,

³⁸ I have made slight changes to Mitchell's translation from the German.

the one attained from a thousand
 natures, the merely attained but
 not yet beloved form. (1982, p. 135)

So, if my vocation was that of Waiting and I've outlived my state of Looking, then where to from here? "Look in your inner woman", says the poet, for the "merely attained but not yet beloved form". This feels like important advice, but understanding escapes me. How about I sit with it for a while . . . resist rushing . . . embrace the question . . . taste what's on the tip of my tongue . . .



What have you learned from doing this research? Funny how replies squeeze through the cracks of daily routines, pop up during such mundane acts as writing a cheque, sweaty and tired after a long day's gardening, "Here it is, \$299 for the last six weeks . . . thanks, Sara." Five hours of weed-whacking, pruning, cleaning the pond, making a compost enclosure, fussing over the peach tree's suffering from leaf-drop and leaf-curl, agonizing over the tiniest of spiders devouring the juicy tips of the clematis leaves, lamenting the fickleness of roses, pulling up so-called weeds, reinforcing the fence to keep deer at bay—stopping once only, to admire a tree frog blending perfectly into its deep green background. "Sometimes I feel like black-topping the whole damn thing. It's getting too much for me," I let slip, half joking to shock, half meaning it.

What a bizarre notion, really—a man-made garden at the edge of a forest. I'm fully aware that the day I stop, Nature will simply reclaim this half-acre of man-made paradise.

Ninety percent of the shrubs, flowers, fruit trees, berry bushes, and vines I keep in this enclave don't belong here, can't defend themselves against spiders, aphids, slugs, and deer. I am constantly restraining one aspect of nature to protect another. And I'm growing weary of it. That's why black-topping holds such a ludicrous appeal.

"Come have a look." We walk to a section of ground opposite the garden, away from ocean view and glaring sun, towards The Bluffs, 300-plus acres of rain forest. "Wow, only a minute away and a different world," says Sara. We both notice the dramatic change: cool, moist, a thousand shades of green, perfect harmony, natural disarray. The pond, black with years of decomposed leaves turned to humus, shiny as polished metal; sun rays filtered through branches, dragon-flies and pond-walkers in erratic travel patterns, clusters of giant skunk-cabbages congregating where water meets mud. The only colour that's not green or brown comes from bright yellow irises, three tall candles next to the little dock. "How perfect," I stutter in worn phrases, "so peaceful, waiting for us, demanding no maintenance, always present." This naturally messy scene—a picture of harmony.

I'm struck by the physical experience of contrast. Contrast between my never-ending efforts at gardening—containing, pruning, pinching, taming Nature—and the simple undemanding presence only a few feet away. "I wish I could live here," I tell Sara as we round the pond, walk along a soggy deer path bordered by salal, Oregon grape, huckleberries, ferns, and dozens of different mosses, duck under branches that reach down from 20, 50, and 90-foot cedar, fir, yew, alder, and maple trees. "I'd be happy with a simple hut, made of stamped earth or straw and clay maybe ... just two rooms; simple, simple," my

voice trailing off as I realize the dream's impracticality. We return to where my car, Sara's truck and power tools, my three-bedroom, two-and-a-half bathroom, two porch, two-storey house and other trimmings of civilization await.

What's this got to do with reflective practice? "Our senses by themselves are dumb," says Natalie Goldberg, "they take in experience, but they need the richness of sifting for a while through our consciousness and through our whole bodies. I call this composting" (1986, p. 14). Frederick Buechner labels "the humdrum events of our lives ... an alphabet" (1982, p. 11) with which to decipher Nature's messages. As I learn to reflect on life (here in this garden, this forest, this research), I also learn to reflect on everything I do, including teaching. In this instance, I learn by following chance occurrences, momentary observations, or throw-away comments (such as, "I'm thinking of black-topping the garden") through my physical senses to another level of understanding: for a brief moment, heart and earth are linked as one. "It is the task of seeing the macro in the micro, or even the micro in the macro which is at the heart of listening and seeing," explains Celeste Schroeder (1997, p. 6). As I work hard to maintain an artificial paradise, another one is already there, sitting and waiting, offering to hold and nurture all sentient beings. In the words of Lao-tzu: "If you realize that you have enough, you are truly rich (Mitchell, 1988, p. 33).

Extended to my life/work, this experience teaches me to be present, let go trying to control, and become aware of the riches already there. St. Augustine knew this.

The impulse present in our seeking goes out beyond the seeker, and hovers as it were, unable to rest in any other goal until what is sought has been found and the seeker is

united with it. ... So an impulse of some kind precedes the mind's generative act, and through this will to seek and find knowledge, the knowledge itself comes to birth. (in Wills, 1999, p. xiii)



Also during the May committee meeting, Dan speaks of witnessing a turning-point in my writing. "This has been some act of therapy," he exclaims, "your writing seems more therapeutic than any actual therapy ... or am I just guessing that?" No, Dan, I'm thinking, you're absolutely right. Rita cautions against the use of the word therapeutic: "I think it would be dangerous" Carl likens "therapy" to other y-words he continually wrestles with—such as theology and theory—and suggests that "it's probably not a useful word to use in the context of academic writing." But the cat's out of the bag! This *has* been and *continues to be* a therapeutic undertaking for me. I resist the implied polarity of academic vs. personal writing.

The dictionary traces "therapy" to the Greek *therapeutikos*: to attend, to treat medically; and offers several definitions that have direct bearing on our discussion: the treatment of disease or disorder, as by some remedial, rehabilitating, or curative process; curative power or quality; psychotherapy; any act, hobby, task, program, etc. that relieves tension. Since "cure" shows up repeatedly, I look it up next: from Latin, *curare*, to take care of. And among its fourteen definitions *Webster's* includes these two: a means of healing or

restoring to health and a means of correcting or relieving anything that is troublesome or detrimental. Finally, from the pages of *Current Psychotherapies* the admission that

[m]any ... strange procedures have been employed in what is called psychotherapy.

What one authority considers to be psychotherapy may be completely different from how other authorities see the process. There is no way at present to settle any differences We come to the same conclusion as Lewis Carroll in *Through the looking glass*: "A word means what you want it to mean." (Corsini & Wedding, 1989, p. 2)

Unexpectedly, the editors serve up the term "self-therapy," providing a home for the therapeutic aspect of personal narrative. "In self-therapy there is only one party," they explain, "there is no formality and no professional or legal approval, and yet it is certainly therapy" (p. 1).

"Certainly therapy", "a curative process", "anything that relieves tension", "a means of correcting or relieving that which is troublesome": Yup! that is what this inquiry has been for me. Acquaintances who've heard about my research often inquire if I've found it therapeutic; they naturally assume I would. Several descriptions of adult education's fundamental role seem to concur. Peter Reason (1994, p. 10), for instance, considers "the purpose of human inquiry ... not so much the search for truth, but to heal" and John Dirkx ranks "to foster knowledge of one's self" as the principal aim of adult education (1998, p. 1). Susan Reinharz writes that feminist social science researchers "report being profoundly changed by what they learn about themselves. Changes may involve completely reconceptualizing a phenomenon and completely revisioning one's worldview" (in Foltz &

Griffin, 1996, p. 302). Therapy, says Hillman (1975), "is the restorying of life (p. 168). It enables us to "construct a more contradiction-free and generative narrative" of our life (Bruner, 1986, p. 9).

Many are uncomfortable with the word therapy, with its connotations of mental illness, private suffering, and embarrassing details. Behar, writing at the forefront of vulnerability (in anthropology), notes that "emotion has only recently gotten a foot inside the academy and we still don't know whether we want to give it a seminar room, a lecture hall, or just a closet we can air out now and then" (1996, p. 16). At a recent *Writing Autoethnography* workshop³⁹, Ellis tells her audience that if her autoethnographic work "is not therapeutic, if it doesn't contribute to making the world a better place, then I don't want to do it." Makes me wonder if my advisors' warning arose out of legal or ethical concerns, or whether they're worried about my mental well-being. I didn't ask them. But I want to assure them that, after thirty years of seeking insight, self-acceptance, and freedom with the help of good and bad therapists, I'm well equipped to practice self-therapy without a license. People who are mentally unwell are said to be "disturbed". I'm relishing the level of *disturbance* this writing project is causing me (and, perhaps, some of its readers). From the Latin *disturbare*: to demolish, upset. Says novelist Kate Green, "if you want to write, you have to be willing to be disturbed" (in Goldberg, 1990, p. 71).

³⁹ My verbatim notes, UBC School of Nursing, May 2000). Ellis is professor of communication and sociology at University of South Florida. Her books include *Final Negotiations: a story of love, loss, and chronic illness* (1995, Temple University Press).

Bochner, in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, expresses his impatience with any discounting of the therapeutic consequences of stories. He questions the “assumptions that govern the institutional workings of social science—arguments over feelings, theories over stories, sophisticated jargon over accessible prose” (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746). Frank McCourt is the author of *Angela’s Ashes* (1999), an autobiographical novel of an Irish childhood marked by poverty and abuse. During an on-line interview, a reader asks: “Did you find in writing this book a catharsis and a healing? Did you weep at times?” McCourt replies: “I wept often. But there’s no catharsis. Where there is memory, there’s no catharsis. This is not an enema. As a matter of fact, it might have had the opposite effect. It might have opened up wounds that were better left untouched. Sometimes it’s dangerous going back like that because you start remembering very painful events that are best forgotten. Beware of writing memoirs.” Catharsis, says the dictionary, from the Greek for cleansing; the “purging of emotions, or relieving of emotional tensions.” Before a wound can begin to heal, it needs to be cleansed. What if we were to position personal narrative research as *healing* work in Hillman’s sense of the word. “Healing,” he writes

is not a procedure leading to a product. Healing is a life process that begins with our acceptance of our fictive realities and authorial roles within them, the acceptance, that is, of myself as the arena I create for specific independently originating psychic forces. (1983, p. x)

Dharma, the Buddhist word denoting teaching, wise council, and spiritual law, arises from the original meaning of “that which heals” (Surya Das, 1999, p. 224). “Healing is not the same as curing,” writes Ram Dass, a year after having suffered a paralyzing stroke, “after all, healing does not mean going back to the way things were before, but rather allowing what is

now to move us closer to God" (Shambhala Sun, 2000, p. 71). Etymologically, both *to heal* and *health* share the Germanic root *hailaz*, meaning whole. As in whole person: logos, ethos and pathos seeking reunion in whole-hearted praxis.



During our meeting Carl observes that "Peter is bringing a man's voice into the academy" with "an unfolding research and writing which is, for the most part, largely connected with women." At the recent AERA conference in New Orleans he'd noticed that (in his session) he was the only man among five presenters and that the audience consisted mostly of women. He describes Peter's writing as not merely "beautifully written—which is fundamental for a work of this kind," but as giving him a sense that this is "what real life, living with others in the adult education context is about. And it's the body that's brought in," he goes on, "that's what I find fascinating, the body is here." And we laugh as Carl recalls the incident of Peter dashing into the stormy night, naked but for his gardening clogs, to retrieve a blown-away tarp for the fire wood pile.

Doing this research/writing leads me *zu den Sachen*, "to the things themselves," in Edmund Husserl's phrase (Van Manen, 1990, p. 180)—into myself and, through myself, onto the page. Such a process demands deep listening for a new voice. "This listening to life, which is a listening to both mind and body is echoed in the notion of embodiment," writes Schroeder; it calls for "solitude as a practice for writing" (1997, p. 9). Is that what's been going on these past months: withdrawing to my island home up on a hill, at the end of the

lane, behind deer-proof gates, the phone turned off? Calm forest, wild garden, predictable household routines, a steady regime of running, eating, sleeping, writing, and meditating? Have they all contributed to a physical and spiritual slowing down that's made me listen, attend, be? Quite so, replies Rumi, twelfth-century Sufi poet:

For this perishable body is the evidence of the eternal
and the babbling of the drunkard
is proof that someone poured the wine

(Helminski, 1998)

By living through many a "dark night of the soul" (St. John of the Cross), I've learned, in the most rudimentary ways, to literally sit with my uncertainties, worries, bouts of depression, stops and starts ... as well as little insights and moments of light. Living in seclusion and contemplation has provided space and opportunity for me to "dwell in the present moment", as Thich Nhat Hanh urges us to do so as not "to sacrifice the journey for the sake of the arrival" (1990, p. 73). Merton views solitude as leading to opening-up: "The truest solitude is not something outside of you, not an absence of [others] or of sound around you; it is an abyss opening up in the center of your own soul" (1961b, pp. 80-81). And somewhere in the centre I have caught a glimpse of—and begun to attend to—a writing voice that is utterly fresh, churned anew each morning.

Carl: "That is what your work is ultimately about ... learning to attend. Poetry is about attending."

Rita: "I was thinking of it as a piece of art, because there are so many devices used and I thought it took you a long time to get your confidence [the first 80 pages], but then you

really got into it. I found the last half just remarkable. ... But if you change [edit] too much of the first part then you're losing the sense of process, which is wonderful."

Dan: "Yes, the process, the product is in the telling; it represents, to me, the intent of the EdD program. As a finished document, I don't know. I have a feeling that there is more...."

Carl: "I think we need this sense of an unfolding story of confidence as a writer and a researcher and a teacher. I think that the *journey* needs to be represented."

All three agree (make that four, as I'm part of this discussion): We suggest you sit back, Peter, and linger with the words, go through them page by page, sentence by sentence, evaluate each word. Not to polish to perfection—showing the cracks is vital—but to a point where you "feel glad with the ways the words fit together" and where we, as a committee preparing you for examination, "can grow confident that other people will be drawn into the work, engage with the work" (Carl).

The direct quotes above arise from our May 2 meeting; they're taken from my transcription of our taped conversation. As I listen again and again, I'm touched by the generosity of care. I listen, with affection, to the autobiographical voices of my three guides: Carl as poet, Rita as artist, Dan our navigator.



5 July 2000. Peter meets Alex, a psychologist with the university counselling centre. Their therapeutic relationship goes back to the first summer of Peter's enrollment in the

doctoral program. The fictionalized dialogue that follows is based on their taped conversation.

Alex: Welcome back.

Peter: Yes, it's been, how long, a year? You'll find me a more confident man than the last time we met. I've been writing for the last six months and soon the committee will meet to approve the thesis.

Alex: And then you'll be finished.

Peter: Yes, exam's scheduled for January. It's been really wonderful ... a wonderful journey. And I've come today to bring you up to date, since you were so helpful when I struggled to find my place here in the academy. The thing that caused me to book this session was a little crisis that occurred about a week ago. The acuteness of the crisis has worn off ... it's probably a good idea that I had to wait for a week.

Alex: That often happens.

Peter: Certainly with me.

Alex: Tell me.

Peter: Well [stutters, mumbles] it's like this ... to come right to the point: I've lost interest in being a teacher. [pauses] Let me explain what happened by showing you some correspondence which began with a distress postcard to my advisors:

en route
June 29, 2000

Dear Dan, Rita, & Carl,

Just hit a snag that gives new meaning to 'messiness.' Woke up to the realization that I've lost interest in being a teacher! Not sure what that means. Never again? Or, never again as before? Or ...? This could be epiphanic!

What kind of an ending will this make to the thesis, eh? Do I dare include it and still ask for a degree? (Of course, sez a little voice, this is an instance of "facing into your difficulties," as Kornfield's teacher called it).

Well, gotta run. The bus is leaving and I want to be on it. Not sure where it's headed. The signs are all in Greek.

Yours, pR.

PS: I'm hoping for your reply at the next American Express office.

Within hours, four replies dropped into my email box. Carl wrote:

A wonderful postcard, Peter. You are writing and living yourself into spaces of textuality where nothing can be taken for granted, and where everything could be granted. Best wishes on the journey.

and Rita:

Interesting revelation Peter ... I wonder if a number of us have this thought on occasion? You can certainly still add this to your work. What I would suggest is that you ask yourself why you are feeling this epiphany. What has brought you to this feeling? Do you still feel this way after several days? Explore the contradictions in what you are learning through this journey with what the theoretical sources talk about, as well as any contradictions between what you are learning and who you have been as a teacher. I feel like I want to tell you not to be hard on yourself. When I have felt these feelings myself it is because I am learning how to be a better/different teacher (which is different from how I was taught or how I have taught) and I wish I had known these things before. Or

I may realize my soul needs something else, or it means I no longer want to be a teacher but a pedagogue I am freeing myself to create a new kind of relationship with others. Keep on going Peter! These are good thoughts.

and Dan:

Well, well. Isn't this just a bundle of news. I am really surprised; and yet, not at all surprised. Surprised that it manifest itself in the message of losing interest in being a teacher; not at all surprised that an epiphany has struck on the road to your Ed.D. Not that the Ed.D. is the only intervening variable. However, it is remarkably common that people in their doctoral program have some profound insight about themselves during their program. The most common one is that people are no longer interested in continuing a particular relationship; or they find it impossible to continue in their former occupation. Not sure why this is so common to the doctoral program and not the masters, but it is. I say keep it in the document. It's part of the journey. And, I suspect the qualifier you added ... never as before ... has the most profound meaning in this epiphany. Explore that on your way to the bus.

and Rachel, my electronic pen pal, to whom I'd sent a similar card:

Oh, groan....what is going on?? Is there some weird conjunction of the stars or something? Seems to be a time of trouble and pain. The realization that you can't go on doing something which has formed the backbone of your life for a long time is terrifying, I know. I wonder if this has been coming on for a while? Certainly the sort of work you are doing in your studies and writing could yank you out of any complacency. *[She goes on to describe a related event in her own experience.]*

Alex: What did you make of these responses?

Peter: I was relieved, felt understood, I was not alone. And yet, I was. I had never said those words aloud, with such clarity, before witnesses. Perhaps because I was afraid of the consequences. If not a teacher, then what? That's what kept me from speaking the words

before. Fear. I've been a teacher for over 30 years. But I have inserted an escape hatch; the note said "never teach again as before". Perhaps there's another way I could continue.

"Perhaps you're learning to be a better/different teacher" (Rita). "Explore that!" (Dan).

"Nothing can be taken for granted, everything could be granted" (Carl). "...yank you out of your complacency" (Rachel).

Alex: Umm-hmm.

Peter: It's about doing heart-ful work, really. Maybe there are other ways for me to be of use to the world. [hesitates, becomes very quiet]. Just saying that makes tears well up. [Gestures to his face.]

Alex: I noticed a change in you.

Peter: Yes, that's something new for me to say out loud: *that I have something to give.*

[Both sit in silence for 30 seconds.] That's why I thought I'll bring this to you. You've known me for a while. You've accompanied me on some troubled waters. Also, because you do heart-work and I thought here would be a good place to talk.

Alex: Umm-hmm.

Peter: All along, all these years of teaching "content" toward "measurable outcomes", I've wanted to engage participants in their own personal development, in heart-work as I call for now. I'm so interested in the process, helping people tap their innate strengths. ... They tend to come to courses, on *How to be a Facilitator* say, expecting to learn techniques. In recent years they told me, yes, they'd picked up plenty of tricks from the master, but what mattered most—to their surprise—was their personal learning.

Alex: You know, before we met today I was with a group of doctoral students, counselling interns, taking them out for a final gathering. The words that came from them are exactly the

words you're speaking. Coming in at the beginning of the program, needing to learn skills, techniques, their bag of tricks, fill it up a little more, and then arriving at this stage when they realize that what they take away is really about their own personal growth ... So what you're describing resonates for me also. ...

Peter: As I listen, it occurs to me that this is all part of maturation, of individuation. That it's a natural progression from wanting to know about techniques and then discovering that what really matters is what's inside. What's there when you put away the bag of tricks. What have we got? Just me, being present as wholeheartedly as I can be.

Alex: But you've always known that.

Peter: Perhaps. But always as received knowledge, not self-appropriated. Now I know it in a different way, with more confidence, *mit Ueberzeugung*, with conviction. ... I suppose I've wanted to teach "differently" from the outset. Soon after I began at BCIT in 1969, I read something by Carl Rogers which spoke to me directly and rattled me: it ran counter to what I saw happening around me, what I was told at UBC⁴⁰, and what seemed to be common practice around me. So I buried it. Now, 30 years later, it's popping up again and this time I'm able to hear. His words are unchanged, but the reader has new eyes. Rogers wrote, and I am paraphrasing from memory: *My experience has been that I cannot teach another person how to teach. To try this would, in the long run, be futile. Anything one person can teach another is relatively inconsequential. I'm only interested in learning that significantly influences behavior. Such learning is/must be self-discovered; it cannot be communicated to another. As a consequence of the above* (and now an exact quote): "I realize that I have lost

⁴⁰ Where I completed the Diploma in Counselling in 1980.

interest in being a teacher” (Rogers, 1961, p. 276). Reminds me of *Meno*, where Plato has Socrates declare that one person cannot teach virtue to another. I remember reading Rogers at age 27, *Meno* at 47 ... but it’s taken me to age 57 before I gained some practical understanding.

Alex: Understanding?

Peter: That I don’t want to teach content any more, present myself as an expert at anything except, possibly, process. I’m no longer interested in telling people what and how, want to move away from the “exposition of conclusions” as Rogers puts it (1961, p. 277).

Alex: You’ve known that for some time ...

Peter: Well, it’s been lurking in the wings since I read my first lecture verbatim, back at BCIT in 1969, regurgitating the “Seven points of this” and the “Three principles of that” in hotel management. I bumped into it again when I tried—in vain, it turned out—to pass off UBC notes as wisdom to that group of corrections officers.

Alex: What’s different now?

Peter: I’ve become more courageous, perhaps ... to stand up and state my belief. And more humble, also ... prepared to admit my not-knowing.

Alex: As I listen to you, I’m reminded of the Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference I’ve just come back from, big American do, happens every five years. One of the threads running through that event, for me, was that the gurus themselves are aging. They are all now facing their own death ... so it was quite something to sit with those grand teachers who, perhaps thirty years ago, spoke in the abstract and now spoke from the heart, as real persons. That was quite powerful, to sit with them, their bags of tricks long put aside ...

Peter [speaks softly]: Yes, yes ... physical changes, feeling one's age, casting off ballast, turning to what's real and holds meaning. My little brother just turned fifty, that was quite a jolt, a reminder, making me wonder how many years I have left to work, to live, to come to a still point.

Alex: You're coming to an end.

Peter: Yes, of the thesis writing, of the degree process, and, now the end of my teaching career.

Alex: Your writing ... you mentioned that you hoped it would reach people. Say more...

Peter: Six people are now reading it, all teaching colleagues. My hope is that my words will resonate with them, cause them to see themselves in my pages, and begin to ask their own questions about who they are as teachers. In a way, I see it as my new way of "teaching". As in this description⁴¹ of teaching in the Zen tradition: "Although fundamentally teachers have nothing to give, they are indispensable in helping us navigate the difficulties along the way ... [on] our journey deep within ourselves to uncover our inherent wisdom and compassion." That's the kind of teacher I'd like to become.... I've actually cancelled a speaking engagement for a March 2001 conference.

Alex: Out of that fear?

Peter: I couldn't honestly enter into a contract, however lucrative, based on work that's now suspended. ... I have some notions of what the new work might look like: a retreat setting with focus on mind and body and heart, no more 9 to 5 workshops in meeting rooms or conference centres. In the future, there will be time for reflection, meditation, walking, storytelling, and so on. Call it contemplative education, perhaps ... [hesitates]. At least that's

where I'm headed or that's what I'm attracted to for my own growth. ... But I don't want to rush ... [his voice fades, he looks away].

Alex [after 30 seconds]: Where are you right now? I see you drifting off...

Peter: Right, yea, I'm drifting. [Hesitates, lets tears well up and settle in, quietly.] I want to say to myself: don't rush, Peter, don't hurry to the next thing. My energy faded just now as I saw myself heading for a quick fix. This moment tells me that I'm learning to live the question, that I'm dwelling in the spaces, in the present moment.

Alex: There's the notion of transition⁴² ... that we start with endings, not beginnings. [Both sit in silence for a while.]

Peter: The image of birth comes to mind. We mark life's beginning with the moment of birth, count our age by the number of birthdays. But just before being born, we undergo a traumatic ending. Nine months, more or less, of absolute safety; everything taken care of, completely dependent in mother's womb. Then, snip. On your own. Having to ask (cry) for attention. Being fed when and if food is available. And so on. I've never thought of endings as precursors to beginnings; we tend to see the sequence the other way around. Wow! Much to learn. So little known. Reminds me of that Eliot (1944, p. 42) passage in *Little Gidding*: "What we call the beginning is often the end; and to make an end is to make a beginning..."

Alex: "...the end is where we start from." [pauses] Perhaps you're approaching a rebirth, in a state of not-(yet)-knowing.

Peter: Yes. [Tears]

Alex: What's going on for you?

⁴¹ *Summer & fall 2000 programs*. Zen Mountain Monastery, Mt. Temper, NY, p.6.

⁴² For more, see Bridges (1980).

Peter: A beautiful sense of being in the moment. Right now, through these quiet tears ... such light, such weightlessness. I could die right now and be content. Bliss. Not knowing is not even an issue, I just am, in this brief moment here with you.

Alex [after some silence]: There is a notion, in so-called primitive societies, of a period of isolation, of going away as part of a ritualized transition to a more spiritual realm of living. The person goes off to spend time alone, in a cave, on a mountain top, in the desert. Perhaps alone, or in the company of an elder, a guru, a shaman.

Peter: Something to consider ... I'll let you know what happens, in six months or so.

Alex: I'd like that.

[They embrace and part company.]

☞ **Rachel:** I am thinking about the crisis you discuss with Alex. It reminds me ... I changed careers late in life, from teaching to nursing. What a bungler I was, crashing around trying to change dressings, hang IV's, manage the technology. Constantly in terror of making mistakes, trying to remember medications, finish on time, I often did not notice the patient! Ten years later, the equipment is invisible. It is all window dressing for the important stuff ... who is this person? I wonder if that is where you are now? It hardly matters whether you call yourself a teacher or not, or what the content is meant to be. You will continue to BEHAVE as a teacher.

☞ **René:** I agree with Carl Rogers. We can't teach: the only reality is that people have the freedom to learn or not. ... Next to love freedom is the most important gift we have. It takes a loving person to let another choose their own path--especially when we disagree. Maybe the only teaching we can do is by example. Our actions, our lives become the "living textbook" that we share with others. Maybe all we can do as teachers is, as you have done, be open, honest, and vulnerable about our struggle. If we do this we will be led to the truth. We will be led to the unknown where, like the prophets of old, we will be asked to travel in faith toward a greater reality. We are called, as teachers/prophets, to share this news of greater

reality with others. It can't be otherwise. We can't un-know what we now know.



For three weeks I've been attending this text. Sitting with it, listening to it, taking the shears to it to trim away excess words, making alterations and additions to strengthen those that remain. Comments have come in from three readers, with three more in progress. My reaction is mixed. I'm pleased when readers ask questions of the text and when they make personal connections to it. I'm disappointed when they "waste their time" (so I think), correcting my spelling and changing sentences. Beneath all, I'm afraid of their criticism, praying for acceptance—I've made myself vulnerable, first by writing, then by going public.

📖 A surprise note from England. Andrea, who did that rough edit four months ago, has just read the latest version, up to the meeting with Alex. She writes: "The ending . . . well! What a shift—and yet I am not surprised. Brave work. You are breaking out of a skin. Just as this text splits its skin and unfolds wings, cracks armour and touches the heart. Very fresh and real."

Zen teachings include the advice to "expect nothing". Difficult to follow, however appealing. Yet, every reader has given freely of time and care. Behold these gifts, I remind myself, given unconditionally by friends of long standing. I promise to attend to them in the same way Carl said a poet does to words. And recall Derrida's point that there is no one valid meaning of a text because, as Robert Fulford says, "language floats free of an author's intentions and will be interpreted in as many ways as there are readers" (1999, p. 103). The realization that this is no longer *my* text, that readers are not reacting to *me*, stirs me to become "wholly alive" in Buber's phrase (Greene, 1978, p. 46). It also alerts me to the (Zen)

possibilities of non-attachment, to accept things as they are, separate from my self. "A flower falls, even though we love it; and a weed grows, even though we do not love it," teaches Suzuki (1970, p. 121).

As on this morning, in a related instance, when an everyday occurrence caught me off guard, as it were, vulnerable and open to learning. Halfway through a sixteen week training regime leading to a half-marathon, today's schedule called for a 10 km run. Up to now I'd maintained that I "cannot" do long runs on my own, that I "need the energy of a group". This has meant weekly trips to Vancouver, with the cost and inconvenience of two ferry rides and an overnight stay. But last night, after missing the ferry, I saw two choices: don't run (and feel bad) or run alone. I did the latter and, to my astonishment, experienced the most enjoyable and strong run ever⁴³. Putting one foot in front of another for ten thousand meters, I had time to reflect. Look what happens when you suspend a firmly-held assumption ... which lead me to wondering: What other "truths" govern your everyday work/life? How set are you in your ways? Where are your blind spots? Which habitual responses "feel instinctive, natural and somehow preordained"? (Brookfield, 1995, p. 71). When teaching, how much do you rely on familiar gambits, imposing them on the group, shaping events to suit your routines? What might happen, I mused, if I were to take my "self" out of the equation, accepting events as they are? What opportunities would arise?

I am reminded of Jesus' words in Luke (17:33): *Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it*. I'm in the midst of decaying, a process of dying-to something. Jung says it occurs spontaneously and naturally (although many of us

are unaware as it occurs), this process of “maturation or unfolding, the psychic parallel to the physical process of growth and aging” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 107). Everyday—as I listen to this text, adding and deleting, caressing and discarding—I catch myself emerging from the “dark wood” which Dante⁴⁴ alludes to (Luke, 1975, p. 9). I resort to employing hackneyed phrases: I’m undergoing a re-birth at the brink of the evening of life. The “price” to pay, so it seems, is letting go, allowing to die. Everything begins with endings, Alex told me. The end of living with this thesis (the final draft is due in two weeks); the end of being a doctoral student; the end of teaching as I’ve known it hitherto, and the end to other things of a private nature. “Aging,” says Janice Brewi⁴⁵, “becomes a call back to wholeness It is time to begin the process of reclaiming one’s soul ... to let the inner man take over the steering wheel of our becoming (Brewi & Brennan, 1989, p. 11). Merton wrote his autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain* at age thirty-three—five years later he observes a changing self-image:

It is sometime in June. At a rough guess, I think it is June 13 which may or may not be the feast of St. Anthony of Padua. In any case every day is the same for me I have become very different from what I used to be. The man who began this journal is dead, just as the man who finished [the autobiography] when this journal began was also dead, and what is more the man who was the central figure in [it] was dead over and over. (1953, p. 328)

⁴³ A week later, I ran 13 km, on my own and in fine form.

⁴⁴ The *Inferno* line goes like this: Midway this way of life we’re bound upon, I wake to find myself in a dark wood, where the right road was wholly lost and gone.

⁴⁵ Janice Brewi and Anne Brennan, Sisters of Saint Joseph, have taught widely on Jungian and spiritual perspectives. Anne’s 1991 inscription in one of her books reads: “Dear Peter—Bon voyage on your second journey!” Nine years later, I’m under full sails.

All this talk of dying, decaying, ending and, yet, I feel more awake than ever. Mircea Eliade, who has researched passage rituals across time and cultures, writes that no rite or myth treats “initiatory death” as final, but always as “a transition to another mode of being, a trial indispensable to regeneration; that is, to the beginning of a new life” (1967, p. 224).

Barthes tells us that “the Greeks entered into Death backwards: what they had before them was the past” (1981, p. 71). As I look back on this writing journey, I take Rick’s disdain for my initial “self-indulgence” as an apt descriptor and early marker. That attitude—which led to an almost fatalistic exposing and disclosing—served as the energy that fueled my writing to about the half-way mark. A tiny event heralded a shift, from inside to outside of my skin: dashing into the stormy night, naked yet unafraid, I retrieved the tarp that had blown off the wood pile. From there, the trek wound its way in increasingly confident steps towards a state of not-knowing or, more aptly, not-worrying-about-not knowing. By then I was travelling in Schön’s “swampy lowland” (1983, p. 42), an environment distant from linear forms of Western thought, outside the “technical rationality” which is the “dominant epistemology of practice” in professional education (Schön, 1987, p. 21). For thirty-one years, since that first verbatim reading of lecture notes at BCIT, I’d been hovering at the edge of said swamp, looking for the solid ground of abstract technical formulations and, at the same time, discounting my intuitive, artistic, and messy ability to dance on shifting terrain. This longing for external solutions, this “quest for certainty” (Dewey, 1929), which arose from the uncertainty of my early years, kept me, in Schön’s terms, from establishing a self-reflective practice. “But how will you look for something when you don’t in the least know what it is? How will you know that what you have found is the thing you didn’t

know?" asks young Meno of Socrates (in Tremmel, 1993, p. 437). Schön's response is that we must—as I have attempted here—move into the centre of the learning situation, into the centre of our own doubts (1997, p. 83). "Enter into the night and you will be enlightened", is the promise according to St. John of the Cross (Merton, 1976, p. 198).

Quite naturally, my journey has lead me to a junction marked "Zen Buddhism", which, according to Allan Watts "is a way of life and a view of life", neither religion nor philosophy, neither psychology nor science, but "an example of what is known in India and China as a 'way of liberation'" (1957, p. 3). Writing in the *Harvard Educational Review*, Robert Tremmel observes that the apparent lack of success with reflective practice training in teacher education may originate in the lack of "preparing our mind" as an initial step towards reflection (1993, p. 434). "Zen", he explains,

comes at the problem of knowing and reflecting from an entirely different perspective than those that currently inform discussions of reflection in education [and thus] makes its potential contribution to our understanding unique. As Schön points out, we are not lacking for traditional academic, technically rational views. What we do lack is the power to move outside the limits of such views, and Zen ... helps us transcend to a wider range of practice. (p. 440)

And here I drop anchor and interrupt the journey for another night. A month from now I'll be entering a month-long training program at a Zen monastery. During a preparatory telephone interview, the novice master advised me to travel light and forget what I know about Buddhism.



Figure 15: Inward Bound

*Searching for the Ox*⁴⁶

Vigorously cutting a path through the brambles,
 you search for the ox;
 Wide rivers, eternal mountains,
 the path seems endless.
 With strength depleted,
 and mind exhausted, you cannot find it.

There is only the gentle rustle of maple leaves,
 and the cicadas' evening song.

⁴⁶ The image is based on a series of ten ink-paintings by Gyokuesei Jikihara Sensei on display at Zen Mountain Monastery, Mt. Tremper, NY. The corresponding poems describing a student's progress on a spiritual journey were composed by Zen Master Kuoan in the twelfth century and translated by John Daido Looi (1999, pp. 11-12).

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APPENDIX I:

Krall's model of hermeneutic motion

Florence Krall writes that

when we begin to understand the deep meaning of the complex milieu of personal life, we are able to see the unfolding, shimmering path of our intentional behavior. We move toward mature adulthood by accepting responsibility for our part in our circumstances, but more so for accepting the social consequences of our autonomous acts. (1988, p. 468)

Krall proposes a five-movement approach to personal history research and writing, based on George Steiner's four-fold "hermeneutic motion" (1975, p. 296). The five movements, or motions, can be summed up as follows:

Venturing. Students enter a disciplined writing regime to begin to discover and/or clarify central questions or issues. They begin by writing "thick descriptions" (after Geertz) of educational experiences in their past. This grounds them in their own experience and, at the same time, asks them to suspend opinion and judgement.

Remembering. The aim here is to recall what stands out and to get at its essence, to open and keep open possibilities (after Gadamer). Krall reports that students tend to be self-conscious in taking up too much time with their personal stories. Previous schooling has taught them to "dis-member content in order to master it, to respect the word of outside authority, and to devalue ideas that come from their own minds and feelings that come from their own hearts" (p. 470). As students attempt to be true to the facts of their life, their

writing easily becomes too literal and chronological. Krall suggests they “stand at the center” and convey the essence rather than the events.

Comprehending. Once students have gathered their “text”—eight to ten stories—they begin, quite naturally, to drift towards analysis. Description alone loses interest, but analysis brings with it self-doubt and tension. As Steiner says, comprehension is an aggressive act “invasive and exhaustive” (p. 298). By reading and re-reading the text, students locate the themes and major propositions their essays address. But “analysis is incomplete without comparison,” writes Krall, “... for exegesis to occur, the text, the description of experiences, must stand against other views” (p. 472). Students are encouraged to widely search the literature in libraries and bookstores, beyond their narrow field of educational practice.

Embodying. This kind of hermeneutic writing and analysis can be exhausting and discouraging. Krall suggests students take a break, step back from their work; conversely, those who drift away too far must be encouraged back to carry on. Steiner suggests that our being is being modified each time we comprehend something, he speaks metaphorically of “sacramental intake and incarnation” (p. 299).

Restoring. Creating the final draft requires careful crafting and polishing of what’s been discovered through excavation, analysis, comparison, and description. Having been thrown off balance in previous steps, the researcher must seek a new centre, what Steiner calls “restitution” (p. 301). The student is coached to address the “so what” question, to take a stand on what she now believes and values.

APPENDIX II:

Introducing the First Readers

Tom heads a team of organizational consultants in private practice. A member of the next cohort in our doctoral program, his research journey has just begun. Responding to fragments posted on my website, he writes:

📖 Just thought I'd say hello and how much I have appreciated reading your extracts and work in progress. I have found that it really has stayed with me -- you write with power and vivid imagery. The section on memories as personal creations is particularly evocative and powerful. Have you thought of doing some fiction writing too? It will be interesting to see how it comes together for your dissertation ... you set some good precedents for us in doing something that is definitely not a 'Ph.D.' but is doctoral level in the truest sense.

Cindy is an island neighbour; we trade bread for eggs and both work as itinerant trainers. Her specialty is mediation, conflict resolution, and anger management. Her take on reading my very first draft:

📖 I have powered through your draft and thoroughly enjoyed it. There have been many snippets that have started my own thoughts - unraveling the how's and why's of what I do. I think that it is an excellent bit of work to make the reader ask questions of themselves. I am going to read it again, a bit more slowly this time, to savour the writing more, linger with the ideas.

Bernhard teaches English at a community college in Alberta. We met during a workshop on autobiographical writing. We both grew up in post-war Germany and found that, as children, had been sent to the same summer camp at the North Sea coast. He writes:

☞ I managed to read only about half of the draft in spite of my good intentions. ... Narrative research... narrative search... search of self... Yes, indeed, how does that fit in academia. You are fortunate to have such an open-minded committee. ... The conversations between Peter and the Sage are most intriguing. How clever a device. ... Peter, though I did not finish it, know that, all in all, your text speaks to me, moves me, causes me to reflect on my own practices. It works ... it works for me as *Mensch* [human being] and as *Lehrer* [teacher].

Rick and I go back about twenty-five years when we were part of a team designing a peer-based faculty training program that has since been adopted across North America. A highly-skilled organizational consultant, he now provides negotiation training to corporate clients. His remarks exploded off the screen with refreshing bluntness. For example:

☞ It took me three tries on three separate days to wade through the front-end stuff - gave me this awful feeling I was facing over 200 pages of mental masturbation. The verdict after 135 pages: there's a lot more here than just narcissism, although you get pretty self-absorbed and self-pitying at times - some of those segments could be tightened up considerably by a good editor. For a moment there I felt like I'd puke if I hit the word 'hermeneutic' one more time - took me back to my days in theology at McGill in 1968-69. ... [and later]: Thank you for the privilege.

Margaret and I used to be neighbours; she's hired me in various capacities and we've stayed in touch over twenty-five years. Her experience spans three decades of

volunteer management, youth and adult training, and, more recently, environmental education. Her hand-written notes—an eight-page letter and notes all over the draft—demonstrate her skeptical and caring reading.

☞ I actually enjoyed reading most of it (I'll tell you later about parts I didn't). ... I found your apprenticeship stories really courageous ... I wish you'd said more about relationship to your father—you hint but don't say enough ... What's with your self-doubt—why are you "surprised" when people thank you? ... [and later] Are you on a writing high? Do you really feel different? Are you being honest?

Rachel has been an electronic pen pal for some time; we've not met in person. After a career as nurse educator and palliative care provider, her current home care practice brings her face to face with the elderly, the lonely, and the dying. She writes:

☞ I have read your thesis and put it aside for a couple of days, to digest ... There was definitely a strong emotional reaction, but what? Lots of language and academic terminology I am not sure of, but ... So this is not polished, but it is true. ... The stories were the best part. They gave me glimpses of who you are and pointed out similarities and differences between us, took me from specifics to generalities. Some descriptions of your early years were heartbreaking. ... So, Peter, I thank you for your courage and trust. I am learning. P.S.: My absolute favourite image is the one of the middle-aged man tearing about in the wind and rain with only a pair of shoes on!

René works as a counsellor and organizational consultant. We met during a course I taught at the University of Alberta, when he drew my attention to the notion of "teaching

without teaching". René read a late draft while on vacation and writes that "the weather was cool and raining and I enjoyed being inside warmed by your manuscript." He continues:

☞ It warms my heart to see the transformation that has taken place in you since embarking on this journey called thesis. In the counselling that I do I always feel privileged to be a witness to the stories people need to tell and I lived your thesis in same spirit. ... In the sprit of Merton, I will rest on the faith that the comments I've made are simply a reflection of who I am at this point in my life and trust that you will hear in them what you need to hear at this time.

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