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Home as a Conversational Nexus to Life as a Real Teen: “How are Things at Home?”

by

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## ABSTRACT

The experience of home is such an ordinary one that its influence may be almost invisible, yet this experience may also have universal meaning. Arising from the practice of community mental health nursing is the question: What meaning does home have in the lives of teens with mental health issues? With a hermeneutic phenomenological approach the author engages with the literature and with youth from clinical practice, identifying both ideological and expanded meanings of home in the experiences of 'real teens'. In an unexpected way, speaking with teens about home brought up much more than the expected ideology and it arose that home connects us to our being in the world. Threads of meaning from much of everyday living meet and touch in the topic of home, and home emerges as a conversational nexus in clinical practice. To ask 'How are things at home' may open many unexpected therapeutic possibilities.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Greg, who brought me to Calgary, created a home with me, and by doing so brought me to the question of home. Graduate school should never be a solitary undertaking, thank you for so willingly and enthusiastically accompanying me on this journey.

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EPIGRAPH

*Space that knows her...Space lit up with her thoughts... This place. This place in which she breathes and which she takes into herself and which is now sleeping inside her. What sleeps inside her?*

Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This inquiry into the meaning of home has been raised through my own move to a new city, a new life, and a simultaneous engagement with youth in a community mental health setting in that city. Bringing the particular experiences of home into question led to asking more generally what it is we mean by 'home'? As questions linger, they flavour our interactions, and now home resonates in many of my encounters – forever shaping new questions. How does something so mundane, so 'invisible' shape our lives, our questions, and most particularly, this work? The following is a presentation of thoughts that situate myself as a researcher in a particular time, and contexts that inevitably influence the direction, the pauses for reflection, and the very question of home itself. We are embedded in human community and its structures and aims shape our experiences of living (Gadamer, 1999). In writing, reading, and rereading the thoughts contained herein more questions will be raised. As the researcher, the questioner, I am in the very questions I ask, and I invite you, the reader, to ask questions of my questions along the way.

Gadamer (1999) awakens us to the idea that in human science “a conclusion based on universals, a reasoned proof, is not sufficient, because what is decisive is the circumstances” (p.23). To engage with a question, dwell in the possibilities, and linger in the process of asking as much as answering, I selected hermeneutic phenomenology as a guiding philosophy, or method of inquiry. I use the word 'method' with some caution, as Gadamer (1999) reminds us of the limits of method, that those of us involved in human science need to contextualize any inquiry into human experience. However, with caution, and for the purpose of describing the circular, dynamic interplay of multiple texts, hermeneutic phenomenology may be broken down into four procedural activities (Valdes, 1998; van Manen, 1984).

First of all, this inquiry into home began well before the participants were selected, or even the proposal completed. Throughout the course of such an inquiry there

is a turning and returning toward a phenomenon of interest. In taking up the question of home, talking of it with others, writing of the possibilities, there is a contextualizing of home. Important in the process of such an inquiry is an acknowledgement of the researcher's existing prejudgements related to it. Laden with preconceived, often negative meaning, prejudgements herein are meant to openly situate the beginning of a journey, a journey that will ultimately be shaped by where it began. Acknowledging these assumptions, is an attempt to promote openness to new understandings of the phenomenon (Valdes, 1998; van Manen, 1984). Secondly, in this turning and returning to home there is a focus on lived experience (van Manen, 1984). Critical to evolving our understanding of what it is to be human we need to dwell in particular experiences in order to open ourselves to that which we take for granted (Gadamer, 1999).

While turning and returning to the phenomena of home, and considering particular experiences of home, as the researcher I had to risk, or put forth newly generated ideas. In offering ideas through conversation there are invitations to and a widening of the hermeneutic circle, as it encompasses not just the available texts of participants and myself, but other texts and those of my colleagues. This reflection on the themes generated in the emerging texts is the third activity outlined by van Manen (1984). The fourth activity is the construction of textual meaning, an interpretation, that can be presented to a potential reader as only one of many possible constructs (Valdes, 1998). Herein these activities are constrained by the structure of written language and thus have been described in a linear, separate manner, but it is significant to note that there is in hermeneutic inquiry a construction of meaning through the simultaneous attention to all of them.

#### The Question

The impetus for the following thesis was the question: What is the meaning of home to adolescents experiencing mental health problems? Adolescents and teenagers are

herein to be synonymous terms used to describe individuals according to their age, ranging from 13 to 19 years of age. Through many therapeutic conversations I have come to believe that the meaning of home may have some significant clinical value. “The power of place – in cultural and social processes can provide another layer in the understanding and demystifying of the forces that effect and manipulate our everyday behaviour” (Cresswell, 1996, p.11). Our cultural expectations of home are dominated by ideals of home that are difficult to live up to, and may be emotionally hurtful when we assume they are universally experienced, or even attainable (Fitchen, 1989). Dominant ideas of home may be nurturance, protection, physical and emotional shelter. In our everyday experiences what are the myths, the beliefs and the particular, even subordinate, cultures of home? We live in a world of meaning, but which meanings of home are **shouted**, and what others are *whispered*? The purpose of this thesis is to generate new meanings of home, to expand our understandings of the lived experience of home beyond taken for granted expectations of the North American ideology of home.

#### Turning Towards Home: Coming to the Question

While some elements of home may be in the places we call home, it is our relationship both with places and the people we interact with in them that help create our meaning of home. This assumption endures through the course of this study. Many of the young people I have encountered have spent time in numerous different places in their short lives. These youths describe living with biological family members, in blended-family situations, group-homes, emergency shelters, sharing a room with a friend, locked in secure treatment and prison, or even on the streets. There are many assumptions underlying these statements, and at the same time as I acknowledge them I am questioning them. Can home be many places, and if so, how are they home? Is it possible that home is paradoxically a part of us and at the same time separately sustaining and limiting to us?

### Encountering Ideology

As meaning intersects with socio-cultural and personal expectations, so ideologies are constructed (Cresswell, 1996; Rakoff, 1977). As questions of home first arose, I noticed differences. What was in these differences? I am an educated, Caucasian, middle-class nurse, and woman. I find my context shaped by particular friends, particular experiences, because I am a woman, a nurse, a citizen of a city, a North American nation. Relating in both the particular and the general, influenced by expected social norms, it is possible to idealize home in a manner that precludes questioning (Cresswell, 1996; Fitchen, 1989; Rakoff, 1977). As I embarked upon this process two years ago my own experiences of home included a loving family in my home of origin, and an embracing growth of my extended family as I constructed a new home with a loving partner, planned our marriage, and spoke of children. In our particular experiences of home we may miss meaning, particular and general, to which we are not attuned. *Poverty, ill health, emotional and physical abuse*, these may afford experiences of home that it is more comforting for us to forget. Yet, they bump against me, these errant meanings, I become attuned to them through my particular privileged access, as a nurse, to people's stories.

Home may reproduce the beliefs that produce it, making these beliefs appear natural, or 'self-evident' (Cresswell, 1996). We may begin with ideas of particular people that populate the places we choose to call home. But how are the general ideas of home of our broader culture reflected in the particular? The shape of our particular context is itself shaped by larger ideas of who we are, who we can be, where we fit, and what we should and should not call 'home'. How can we encounter in a new way what already holds us? The challenge is to position oneself in relation to the world in a hermeneutic manner, not as narrator – claiming separation from a story in which we are truly immersed – but mindful of our own thoughts (Griffin, 1995). Gadamer states that "thinking is a dialogue with the soul itself", as we listen to the answers we give ourselves

we may ponder the incomprehensible (1996, p. 167).

In coming to the question of home, my ideology of active helper intersected with my ideology of what home *should* mean. Like much that is ideological, my consciousness of home was not raised when all was perceived to be going well, but like snow in July, perception became heightened when I considered something to be out of the ordinary (Cresswell, 1996). Encountering these ‘differences’ in my practice, I began to awaken to my habits of thinking. Inexorably mixed are clinical and cultural meanings of home that form particular expectations of home, and translate into goals of treatment. However, Rakoff (1977) warns us that ideology offers promises of fulfillment that often lead to disappointment. In questioning my questioning I have awakened to the danger of ideology that constrains our thinking related to clinical possibilities (Griffin, 1982).

We can only conceive of something, remember things, or exchange ideas through language (Gadamer, 1999). The very language of home is already steeped with ancient meaning, and to engage further in our conversation of home we must first flush out some of those prejudgments. “Even as I write, the progression of words, sentences, ideas are social, and arise from history, a history that burdens perception at the same time that it enables vision” (Griffin, 1995, p.10). Home has many meanings. The language of home, and being at home in language. Sometimes, to speak of what we feel – words do not come, or become twisted in our mouths into other words (Griffin, 1978). In my practice of mental health nursing with adolescents, as I considered mental suffering together with questioning home I began to experience these ideologies of helping, and of home as limiting. There is much meaning in home, meanings that have arisen in our particular North American culture, in particular times, ancient, unquestioned meanings. In the questioning we do not discard them, we add to them. Rather than rejecting one ideology for another, we engage in expanding our understandings, breathing new life into the experiences, the very word ‘home’.

### Home as Heaven

Searching for popular cultural texts that have shaped our interpretation of home I found the word in hymns – used as a synonym of heaven. “Home, by and by, when our duties are done, Meeting again with the lov’d that are gone; Joy for the heart when all trials are past; Home, by and by, home in Heaven at last” (Hawthorne, 1875). This lofty meaning of home was a new one, but one that I encountered too often to disregard it. My own limited religious experiences may account for my surprise. Home, a place of everlasting, unparalleled happiness, what a burdensome meaning for such an everyday experience! Yet, like an answered prayer, what an acknowledgement of the spiritual essences of places we call home. However, there are spiritual and personal trials and great suffering missing from allusions to heaven – perhaps these whispered meanings may also linger in our understandings of home.

### Home in Our Family

Family, familiar settings, home in and of the people we know and love. Home as a loving embrace emerges. “Growing ... touching new points of land ... yet a family is like an island: a sustaining place of return nestled in the wide blue world, where one is at home with what one knows and celebrates” (Waller, 1995, p.35). Even though it may be a long ago place of residence, home can be both in the naming of our return to that place, and the leaving of the place we usually choose to call ‘home’. Likened to our birth, a birth of self, home is both current, and an origin, as well as being about both people and physical space in either time or place. Do we go home to visit parents, even if they no longer live where we were once children? The spaces that embrace us in particular, positive ways become imbued with more meaning when we call them home. A partner, a friend, people move and home may move with and within them. Home evokes a sense of ease, of practised accomplishment, a sense of peace, or harmony. All the ideology of family – loving, harmonious, smooth and easy relating – also linger in our ideology of home. Unquestioned, quietly dictating, yet what home is ideal, what relationship

perfection? Ideology can help us forget the ups and downs, the rough texture of relating in the world with others.

### Home in Our Self

Visiting that place from which we come “is a spiritual experience, a confrontation with the self” that keeps us from becoming confused and lost (Miller, 1996, p.72). I am from my body – it is my instrument, yet it plays me, with it I may extend into the world. I am from my body – it moves me through the world, it houses me. With my eyes, I see, with my ears I hear, with my tongue I taste, my nostrils pull essences within me, and my skin encounters the world, touching, sensing heat, the tingle of little hairs in a breeze. I am my encounters. I am from everywhere I’ve been, or what I recall of those places. My mind mixes and sorts these encounters, memorizing some as more meaningful, while others may slip the hook of significance and fall into my heap of mundane memory (Wilson, 2000). Simultaneously, shaping us, our homes are also shaped, by our thoughts of them and in them, our feelings towards them (Miller, 1996; Jaggar, 1989). Not mere passive experiences, our emotions engage us actively with home, and even construct home (Jaggar, 1989).

### Home as Domicile

Home is a physical location, and the place we reside. Buildings are an intimate part of a particular place, the focus of their design is humanity itself (Rybczynski, 1995). Doors of a general height, windows at a level where we may see out of them while we are seated, and these things go unnoticed; yet we are there in the design. We arrange our physical environment to provide shade, coolness, rest, and shelter - particular visions constructed from particular needs. This assumption was reflected in what the participants had to say through our engagement about home. Constructed, formed by us, places may constitute the beliefs about what is appropriate, as much as they are constructed by them (Cresswell, 1996). “Because places are meaningful and because we always exist and act in places, we are constantly engaged in acts of interpretation” (Cresswell, 1996, p.13).

Places give us cultural cues to act in certain ways (Cresswell, 1996; Susanka, 1998). We pray in church, the act of kneeling implied in the places of worship we construct; We sit in rigid rows, gazing forward to the blackboard, the teacher instructs us – classrooms arranged to imply the structure of the student-teacher relationship (Cresswell, 1996). What are the quietly, invisible and yet powerfully shouted meanings of what constitutes the action of living in the places we call home?

Most of us mean the physical location, where we reside, when we say out loud that we are going 'home'. The house, the apartment, trailer, the spaces we live are as varied as we are – yet do we acknowledge such variation in our thoughts? We may ask, what of the street, the gutters, or a cardboard box? Taken too simply home as 'the place of residence' might leave us with the question, are we ever 'homeless' if we are alive and in place? There is more meaning in home than the spaces we find ourselves in. Are the walls of our dwellings the boundaries of our homes? Cannot the home extend out, into the garden, the street, the community, even the larger world?

## CHAPTER TWO: RELATING TO AVAILABLE TEXTS

What we come to understand about the phenomena of home comes from what we have understood, and do understand about home now (Gadamer, 1999). Researcher, participants, we are all contextually situated by our time, our culture, our experiences. We use the word 'home' in conversation quite casually, often to refer to the house, apartment, city, or even the country where we live. Yet, it is when we move past the casual meaning of the word that our conversations can become significant and even complicated. As a condition of human experience, home has value beyond that of simple location, but rather presents itself as both a meaningful center and a particular context of action (Entrikin, 1991; Cresswell, 1996). That is not to say that I discard the role of place in home, but merely that I open up the question of home to include more than place. As we engage in the action of life in any context, elements of home affect our thoughts and actions, because the places we come from inevitably shape us (Crews, 1996). "Most humans need a home in which they can be "at home", so the construct may be seen as almost universal in human society" (Swenson, 1998, p.382). Yet, while home is of great significance to humanity, there has been little research published on the meaning of home in nursing literature.

Home does not have to simply be a household, but I assume it can be a collection of the most meaningful places that together are referred to as home. Landing in an aeroplane, after a long trip, we may look at the landscape that greets us and say to ourselves "it's good to be home" before we have even left the plane. Our favourite places to shop, or the schoolyard where we taught our children to play softball, all of these places, our community, contribute to our sense of home. The meaning of home may be in the familiar field, in the evolving parent-child relationships, and in the teaching of a game that holds some significance to you personally. If we open our understanding of 'place' beyond mere location, home, however broadly defined, is one of the most significant places to our identity (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). As our identity forms

through our particular circumstances and experiences, thus our meaning of home can influence many everyday choices and larger life decisions that evolve our unique life story (Entrikin, 1991; Bender, 1996; Miller, 1996; Gaines, 1996).

### Adolescent Theory

We may be limited by generalizations of adolescence. Yet my voice in particular conversations cannot help but be imbued with the cadence of meanings of adolescence that I have come to know through my education and experience. Adolescence is described by Fulmer (1999), as a developmental stage that is characterized by a high degree of self-importance, idealism, and the use of relationships to define the self. Just one question that arises from this generalization is, do we ever *stop* defining ourselves through relationship? As human beings are we not social beings, constantly constructing our reality through interaction? However, one generalization that lingers with me is that there presents in adolescence a significant increase in the breadth of social interactions of which they need to make sense, and at the same time they are developing an increased capability for abstraction. It is a time of life when an intense amount of work is required (Fulmer, 1999). Educational, social and personal expectations including responsible decision making, all increase dramatically within only a few years.

In talking about experiences of home, and adolescence, I cannot help but be influenced by theories of the general, even as I try at the same time to be open to new possibilities through the particular. As an individual enters young adulthood the extreme perspectives are “gradually replaced by a more realistic view based on morality, disillusionment, a focussing of work interests, and a wish for a home” (Fulmer, 1999, p.218). This generalization first attracted me, because it acknowledges a wish for home. On further reading I ask what does this author mean by realism and disillusionment? For me realism is relative to the context, the circumstances, and I assume there are multiple realities – but this is not a comfortable assumption for everyone. Fulmer (1999) seems to imply, by placing the two ideas in the same sentence that reality and disillusionment are

somehow related, which seems to imply a general pessimism related to the world, a sad conclusion to me. Upon reflection, lingering in the author's ideas, I do ask another question. In adolescence, this often confusing and exciting time of life, do our ideas of home evolve and change along with us?

Healthy development through this intense life stage is dependent on a balance between "connectedness and separateness, belonging and individuation, accommodation and autonomy" (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999, p.9). These authors suggest that we are all a product of our time, and in the complexity of life today our social support system is no longer a given. To a greater degree than previously expected, the youth of today must find their own place in connection with an increasingly more complex social network. As a result, the problems that arise in relationship during adolescence are often as much the result of underconnection as a lack of autonomy or individuation (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Fulmer, 1999).

#### Ancient Meanings Influencing Our Context

Home is not a new experience, but rather one deeply imbedded in our socialization. In exploring the social historical foundations of the concept of home, it becomes apparent that living in community is not even limited to humans, and thus historically predates even our own evolution to Homo Sapiens. Consider the birds that migrate south in winter, mammals that hunt in packs, or both birds and mammals as they raise their young. It becomes evident that animals, including humans, are well known to depend on each other for survival. These basic concepts of survival, refuge and belonging in place and time may be foundational to the development of our assumptions about home. Our assumptions about home may be so ancient that they predate our evolution of language, and embedded deeply enough as to leave them largely unquestioned.

While humans had much in common with many animals that collected to live in groups, as we evolved, the places we lived were no longer the vast spaces of our nomadic ancestors, but became more rooted. In time our social organisations became more

complex as we defended our interests in particular places in order to raise crops and increase the numbers of our herd animals (Diamond, 1998). With a less transient existence, we developed fixed temples, wood and stone houses, furniture, and fences or city walls. By five or six thousand years ago, belonging to places or homes included not just a group around a fire, but a stone hearth, and not only vast plains and mountains, but houses, and towns (Diamond, 1998).

More recently, in the past two thousand years of Western history, the evolution of home has been less related to physical factors, but rather to political and social structures (Somerville, 1997). Western ideas of home can be traced back to the Roman Empire, and while the Roman way of life enhanced social stability with elements such as literacy, organized state religion, and enforced lawfulness, the accepted concept of home reflected the societal values, and evolved as a patriarchal family household. In a period known as the dark ages, following the fall of the Roman Empire around 400 AD, the western world was essentially a lawless place. Illiteracy, lawlessness, war, rampant disease, homicide, as well as suspicion engendered by all these factors, ruled the lives of most people (Manchester, 1992). “One consequence of medieval peril was that people huddled closely together in communal homes. They married fellow villagers and were so insular that local dialects were often incomprehensible to men living only a few miles away” (Manchester, 1992, p.6).

As we consider the fast-paced changing modern world it may be hard to fathom that for almost a thousand years social expectations, and life at home remained essentially unchanged. The expectations of home, the experiences of home as we know them today have existed for relatively little time. It was not until a millennium after the fall of Rome, during what became known as the renaissance, that the eventual reemergence of more complex nation states stabilized social life in a manner that again supported the nuclear family household (Manchester, 1992; Somerville, 1997). Exploring historical ideas in the construction of the concept of home illustrate that our ideals, assumptions, and

expectations about home are quite specifically situated in modern North American culture. Our ideas of home are not only shaped by the political and social events of our time, but despite great upheaval, they are also influenced by lingering historical ideals passed along from Roman matriarch to medieval serf, and through the ages to influence us even today.

#### Available Texts: Contexts for Questions

As my questions grew, I wondered if others might have previously written of the phenomena of home. I have asked how other authors question home as I encountered their texts. While not a phenomena of widely held interest, nor thoroughly researched, or hung about with many well-constructed theories, there is some relief that I am not alone in asking about home. Home has been considered by several disciplines, including nursing. Yet, it is from within the disciplines of environmental design/architecture and social psychology that the most research on the meaning of home has been published. However, as the purposes of most of these inquiries did not encompass nursing practice, or even consider mental health in their selection, their transferability is questionable. While some of what I have read about the concept of home is of interest, the reader must interpret a great deal to transfer the ideas to nursing practice.

#### The Meaning of Home: A Process

Wiesenfeld (1997), a social psychologist, suggests a process of developing meaning in relation to home. Although Wiesenfeld's (1997) study is not culturally or selectively representative of Canadian adolescents, her broad definition of the concept, and her attention to multiple psychological and social ideas about home open the phenomena of home to questioning, and potentially new ways of thinking about home. Wiesenfeld (1997) reports that meanings related to home are "not restricted to the physical structure that keeps the family, but also includes the nearby surroundings" (p.57), the neighbourhood, its people, and the transactions occurring between all of these elements. The social need filled by one's home may initially be one of shelter, but as

physical space is acquired, so the meaning quickly transcends the physical to consider the social space, and matters of belonging (Wiesenfeld, 1997).

Proshansky, et al. (1983) identify the great significance of place-identity in the process of developing self-identity, yet relay that it is almost completely neglected in the area of human psychological development. Distinguishing ourselves from others and our surroundings is one of the earliest tasks in developing a sense of self, and it is proposed that place-identity occurs throughout an individual's life course (Proshansky, et al., 1983). These authors define place-identity as those "memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behaviour and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being"(p.59). The process of place-identity, and its reciprocal relationship with self, evolves as we do through time, life stage, and experiences.

#### Home as Environment

From authors in environmental design two literature reviews on the meaning of home were found (Despres, 1991; Somerville, 1997). Themes identified include physical security and control, material characteristics of dwelling and neighbourhood, ownership and investment, and cultural and symbolic meanings associated with self-expression (Despres, 1991; Somerville, 1997). Also identified were themes of emotional security and social status, social meanings relating to friends and family, as well as temporal meanings of permanence and continuity (Despres, 1991; Somerville, 1997). Despres (1991) identifies limitations in the scope of research that only considers traditional households, and single-family dwellings. The literature overlooks "the impact of societal forces and the material properties of the built environment" on the experience of home (Despres, 1991, p.103). Despres (1991) concludes that research needs to encompass non-traditional populations and settings before integrative theorising is possible on the concept of home. Somerville (1997) in a review of the literature six years later, agrees with Despres (1991), and identifies biases in the literature that consider the meanings of home. Expanding on

the nature of the limitations described by Despres (1991), Somerville (1997) suggests that studying the concept of home without considering multiple realities of home overlooks many of the ideas that may significantly contribute to the meaning of home. Research that is not limited by one way of considering ideas, but rather opens up more possibilities of meaning is recommended.

#### Adolescents and Mental Health

An exploratory study, by Vissing and Diament (1997), estimated that from 5 – 10% of high school aged adolescents in the United States experience housing distress. They defined 'housing distress' as "the lack of a physical structure in which the adolescent feels he or she emotionally belongs" (p.34). This particular definition was chosen to be inclusive of homeless adolescents, and those who had a temporary place to live, or a permanent place of residence, but experienced a sense of potential risk of losing that shelter. This study brings forth ideas relevant to an inquiry involving the meaning of home with an adolescent population.

Conventional norms that situate adolescents in a home with one or two parents may be limiting as many live with other relatives, friends, or independently (Vissing & Diament, 1997). As places of residence for many adolescents range, the nature of their housing situations also range from supportive and developmentally advantageous, to far from the ideal. A stable place of emotional belonging, or home, is considered by these authors to be critical in preventing the incidence of personally and socially risky behaviour by adolescents that may lead to the development of mental health problems. An inquiry regarding the meaning of home may have particular relevance in expanding the clinical knowledge regarding adolescents already experiencing mental health issues.

#### The Relevance of Home to Nursing Practice

Much of the non-nursing literature on home is biased towards North American ideology, considering only healthy adult populations, primarily including home ownership, and limiting the experiences of home to those living in middle class single-

family dwellings. Home, while often a context in research, does not appear to be a subject of inquiry usually explored in and of itself by nurses. However, the interest in this area of inquiry is developing, as three publications were found pertaining to home and elderly populations. Katz (1989), Rubinstein (1989), and Swenson (1998) all identify the salience of personal meaning and the link between personal identity and home for the elderly. While the themes described by these authors likely have little transferability to an adolescent population, their conclusion that the meaning of home contributes to nursing knowledge and practice supports further nursing research into the concept of home with other populations, such as adolescents with mental health issues.

Though not a nursing study, Stern, Smith, and Jang (1999), in a longitudinal investigation of multiple effects of social and economic disadvantage, provide particular insight into contextual aspects of adolescent mental health. Focussing on multiple domains, testing a large (800) stratified sample, with reliable and valid instruments; these researchers make a strong case for considering their conclusions. They found a strong positive correlation between contextual adversity and those adolescents experiencing clinical mental health issues. They recommend that considering multiple contextual factors in clinical practice will not only lead to more accurate identification of problems, but will also help identify the unique strengths and interpersonal resources that exist in even the most impoverished environments. Identifying concerns and planning interventions both rely on adequate assessment. It is possible that further inquiry into the meaning of home to adolescents with mental health issues may provide nurses and other clinicians with broader ideas of clinically contextual themes to consider in both their assessment and the development of practical nursing interventions.

Much like painted scenery behind the action of a play, the existing knowledge of home is somewhat flat, or one-sided. Exploring the phenomena of home with non-traditional populations, in non-traditional settings that challenge the adult, middle-class, North American ideology of home will open up greater possibilities for the meaning of

home (Despres, 1991; Somerville, 1997; Rakoff, 1977). As nurse clinicians in outpatient mental health settings, or possibly in many other settings, we may improve the scope of our practice by attending to the meaning of home with our clients (Gadamer, 1996; Fitchen, 1989). In the knowledge gaps of the meaning of home exists an opportunity for nursing science to contribute to the collected knowledge of several disciplines.

### CHAPTER THREE: I CLEANED BEFORE YOU CAME

The meaning of home is deeply imbedded in our history and culture, and has evolved with humankind. Together the social, spatial, and personal perspectives of home affect the meaning of home in varying ways (Somerville, 1997; Cresswell, 1996). These three elements of home are so intricately interwoven that attempts to separate them detract from the overall concept, and become misleading (Somerville, 1997; Cresswell, 1996). A hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology that considers human knowledge in a unifying manner is most appropriate to explore the intricately interwoven meaning of home with adolescents experiencing mental health issues (Parse, 1995).

“The essence of human being lies in its existence – that is, in its possibilities to choose different ways of being” (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p.144). Challenging the notion that reality simply exists for us to uncover, phenomenologists generally believe that realities are generated through the application of our stock of knowledge (i.e. values, beliefs, and assumptions) to particular experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). The purpose of phenomenological inquiry is the development of plausible insight that brings us in closer contact with the lived world of our clients, rather than explaining, theorising about, or controlling some aspect of their world (van Manen, 1984).

In the practice of clinical mental health disciplines there is always a balance of understanding the client from a rational stance, and yet recognizing the enigma of what it is to be human (Gadamer, 1996). “The concern with things that are not understood, the attempt to grasp the unpredictable character of the spiritual and mental life of human beings, is the task of the art of understanding which we call hermeneutics” (Gadamer, 1996, p.165). By searching for meaning that does not immediately present to our intuition, analysis, or description in hermeneutic phenomenology we go beyond what is directly given (Cohen & Omery, 1994; van Manen, 1997a).

Each of the participants cleaned before I came. I was a visitor, though of a particular kind – a nurse, allowed access to places and conversations that do not often

present to the public. I was still presented with a tidied environment. Could their ideas have been tidied too? Were they going to answer questions with what they expected I might want to hear? As we speak we try to fit it all into conversation, like a complex jigsaw puzzle we tend to speak of what 'fits' with the moment, the company we are joined with, and the question. What we relay by words is part of the message, the manner of the delivery another. However, in hermeneutics what is left unsaid, but implied, must be interpreted from both the words and the manner. Sometimes it is the unsaid that speaks most eloquently, and opens new possibilities.

### The Philosophy of Hermeneutics

Relaying our understanding of the lived experience is accomplished through our use of written and spoken language, and these "social interactions construct as much as convey meaning" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p.263). While recognising that language is embedded in human context, and we cannot separate ourselves from the context, language is the means by which "everything comes to expression" (Gadamer, 1999, p.165). The human capacity to attend and listen to one another through our common world of language is the universal dimension of hermeneutics that contributes to our reason and thought, distinguishing us from other animals (Gadamer, 1999). In a circular manner, "there are always new questions, and with every answer a new question is raised" (Gadamer, 1999, p.167).

There are various schools of phenomenology, the distinctions of which are the focus of notable debate in the literature (Cohen & Omery, 1994). However, what most distinguishes hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology from other primarily descriptive methods of phenomenology are the goals of inquiry and the importance of language, rather than particular research techniques (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Pascoe, 1996; Schwandt, 1984). Understanding the meaning of lived experience is one of the most essential goals of hermeneutic inquiries (van Manen, 1997a). Assuming that the meaning of experience in the life world can only be fully understood contextually, it is expected

that from a hermeneutic stance both the subjects' and the researcher's contexts contribute to and generate new meaning of phenomena in question (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Valdes, 1998; van Manen, 1984). "Lived experience is itself essentially an interpretive process" (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p.148). Hermeneutic inquiry seeks to "depict the structure of individual human experience as it is lived" (Valdes, 1998, p.94).

Heidegger is considered one of the modern originators of hermeneutic phenomenology (Caputo, 1987; Cohen & Omery, 1994; Macann, 1993; Valdes, 1998). Heidegger (1966) describes and distinguishes between two kinds of thinking. Calculative thinking, involving rather one-sided planning and investigating, and, meditative thinking, a reflective process wherein "we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all" (Heidegger, 1966, p.53). Meditative thinking is Gadamer's (1999) dialogue with the soul.

#### The Hermeneutic Circle

One of the significant contributions to hermeneutic phenomenology is Heidegger's idea of the hermeneutic circle (Caputo, 1987; Szondi, 1995). Acknowledging the hidden meanings that pervade our contemporary world, and that which "shows itself, and at the same time withdraws" (p.55) from our thoughts is essential to the ongoing process of generating understanding of the human condition (Heidegger, 1966).

As a beginning of presence, encountering the presence of a boundary "we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1984, p.1). Tensions between that which is unique and that which is shared between particular and transcendent meaning, and between reflective and prereflective modes of being opens us to new possibilities, and new understandings. (van Manen, 1997b). The hermeneutic circle acknowledges that every question comes from somewhere, a starting point (Caputo, 1987; Macann, 1993). However, maintaining

openness and acknowledging tension means that in a circular manner we often understand the meaning of that which is nearest to us by the most laborious detour of first understanding what is furthest (Macann, 1993). Experiencing “at once a vision and a construction – that takes you beyond yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction” imparts the circular nature of generating understanding (Bhabha, 1984, p.3). By breathing new life into our ways of thinking, by reflecting and reconstructing, there may be an openness to mystery without which we would be in peril of losing our essential humanity to that world (Heidegger, 1966).

A turning of a circle can appear endless. In asking myself about endings, considering when to close the circle, and conclude my research, I encountered the nature of hermeneutic inquiry. Consider a beach, as a metaphor for the landscape of hermeneutic inquiry. The questioning arises in a manner particular to the questioner, the questioner is in the midst of the inquiry, and in the sound of the waves is a dialogue with many texts. This metaphor, while only an inexact replica of ideas, moves us through inquiry from beginning to ending.

*In encountering this place, and living near this place she begins to wonder. The sound of the surf has become familiar, a thoughtless sound that is missed when she is away from this place, but taken for granted when she is there. In a moment of reflection she pauses to hear the sound again, and for the first time she begins to encounter that what she knows of the beach is less relevant to her than what she does not know. In the wondering she forms a question. She asks what is this place? Now each turning and returning of the tide opens new possibilities, starfish, shells, rubbish from passing ships are all laid out for her to explore. Trailing out from every piece is more meaning, the fishing boat that dropped an old tire, the seagull that dropped a shell to the rocks below, to smash it, leaving behind the fragments after consuming its occupant. There exists a tangled web of meaning that shifts as she tugs on one piece and trips over another.*

*What she knows, her prejudgements, ascribe to some pieces beauty and worth,*

*while others are flotsam. Some things escape her notice entirely, others she may only 'see' in her mind's eye after she has left the beach. The beachcomber goes from piece to piece. How do I value this, why have I picked up this and why not that? Perhaps holding the piece, feeling its texture for a long moment, eventually discarding it to be returned to the sea at the turning of the next tide. All the while the beachcomber is leaving footprints on the beach, touching and moving the pieces, herself altering the whole. Not just in the midst of wondering, but within the inquiry itself. Frequently she leaves the examination of the pieces and moves to a contemplation of the whole beach considering its complex unity. Turning to see how the sky meets the water, the water that thrusts itself rhythmically onto the beach, creating ever retreating, and embracing fringes of foamy surf. Sometimes frighteningly loud, blocking out the cry of the seagulls, other times a softer sound, the surf changes. Finally, after several turnings of the tide, and days of exploration the beachcomber leaves the beach.*

Eventually there is a telling. By relaying new understanding developed in the time of exploration, of reflection, there is constructed one possible understanding of the beach. So, after much contemplation of the many texts, the whole and the parts, the circular analysis ends by choice (Valdes, 1998). The texts of the beach, and of the beachcomber herself led to the choice to explore the beach, and in the construction of new understanding, to leave the beach.

#### The Study: Welcome to My Home

Qualitative inquiry is flexible in its design, as the researcher responds to the data generated in relation with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have been privileged in the course of this inquiry to work with the population that first brought me to the question of home. Interest in the adolescent population, with whom I primarily work, centres my inquiry in practice. By locating my research in practice I may generate understanding that opens new possibilities for my clinical mental health practice. In sharing those possibilities new understanding may become more widely interpreted.

### Ethical Considerations

The proposal to undertake this particular study was submitted, and approved by the Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board. The participants were selected in order to minimise the ethical problems encountered with any vulnerable population. The participants and their guardians were informed of the risks, including, but not limited to, emotional response to sensitive questions that may uncover issues that are uncomfortable. My extensive experience with mental health populations, as well as a history of supportive interactions in past sessions with the participants may have been helpful in reducing the immediate risk to participants during the interviews. However, all of the participants were informed of available counselling backup, though no referrals were required.

For ethical reasons the participants had concluded their therapy with me prior to initiating any research interviews. As the participants had knowledge and experience of my role as a clinician, I was careful to emphasise during informed consent the distinction between researcher and clinician. In research the manner of engagement, and the assumptions related to why I am there are different. As a clinician I am most interested in what it is the client hopes to take with them from our encounter, whereas in research I am attentive to what it is the client says, we question together, it is what I take from the encounter that is primary. During the interview processes I was acting as a researcher, while interested in their experiences, ongoing counselling with myself would have been both a conflict of interest and potentially very emotionally confusing.

Upon concluding therapy my clients are always informed of the choice to contact me in order to reengage if they so choose. However, their participation in this inquiry confuses this general practice. Upon conclusion of the research process in its entirety, including interviewing, analysis, and the final writing, clinical follow-up with me will be possible with certain constraints. As the future is impossible to predict, and I believe I have a responsibility to former clients, certain safeguards of protocol will be established

for cases of reengagement. The process of the research itself must not be the reason for re-referral, and in each case I will consult with the director of the practice regarding the particular circumstances of the case, with the view to exploring issues of conflict of interest.

#### Human Subject Protection

In the study both the guardian's consent and the participant's consent was sought for those participants under the age of 18 years (Appendix A). The nature of guardianship varied among the participants. One participant was an emancipated minor, whose mother was aware of, and agreed with her involvement (but whose consent was not required); one participant was a minor child, whose mother consented to her participation; and, the third participant was 19 years old, and a legal consenting adult. Both participant and guardian signatures of consent were sought directly, rather than by mail, in order to provide opportunity for questions, and to confirm that guardianship status has not changed since the last therapeutic contact.

As previously noted, the participants of this study had been previously clinically accessible to me, and as such had already consented to and completed counselling at the private practice. Though the consents clearly stated that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time, because the nature of the contact was protracted, this written consent was only considered initial consent. The participants' ongoing verbal consent was sought at the beginning of each interview, and as any difficult question arose I offered the option not to answer it – none of the participants took me up on these offers, and they all participated with enthusiasm throughout their interviews (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality the participants of the study were asked to choose a pseudonym that was used for all transcripts, journal entries, and will be used for any submissions for publication (Mayers, 1999; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). In addition to their personal anonymity, the descriptions of the setting (such as the city,

neighbourhood, or house) are only detailed enough for the purposes of generalizability of ideas for the reader (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Finally, to ensure confidentiality is maintained, the collected data has been either destroyed, or stored as per the University of Calgary ethics of research involving human subjects, policy 3.4.1. The tapes will be destroyed upon the conclusion of the research (following my oral Masters thesis defence), but as they are relevant to the audit trail the transcripts will be maintained for 3 years in a private, locked filing cabinet.

### Ethical Thinking

There is an element in this inquiry, perhaps in any inquiry, of the essential question: *How can I live an ethical life?* In my practice of mental health nursing I am acutely aware of the moving, and deeply personal nature of the stories relayed to me through the course of my work. I have access to such beauty and complexity. Mingled inexorably with my sense of ‘not knowing’ and curiosity that underlies my questioning about home, is also an enormous respect for the diversity of experience in ordinary, everyday life. In my research, shaping it, are my encounters with human participants, human souls, my respect, and my ignorance, and as I do in my clinical work, I have striven for ethical encounters in my practice of research. However, I also recall that to have not done this work would have placed me in an ethical quandary. I wonder how many questions are never asked aloud? I also wonder how can we better understand what it is to be human if we do not ask of others “How is this life for you?”

### The Participants

The clinical population at a private psychological practice includes those adolescents who have been previously referred for either individual or family counselling. Examples of some of the issues cited for referral include depressed mood, behavioural concerns, substance abuse, or challenges with personal and family transitions, such as parental divorce. While these issues are of clinical concern to the adolescents and their families who present for treatment, they are not necessarily

diagnosable by DSM-IV criteria. The co-directors of the practice have supported this research (Appendix B).

To recruit a convenient sample from the available population, letters of invitation were addressed to three potential adolescent participants (Appendix C). They were mailed following a phone contact to ensure their address information was correct. The potential participants were selected from those who had attended, and concluded counselling with the researcher. Concluding therapy was considered to promote choice in participation, so that the participants did not feel obligated to take part in research in order to obtain services. Further letters of recruitment were not required, as all of the first three participants contacted the researcher. The participants expressed interest in participating, consented both in writing, and verbally in the course of engaging in two interviews each, and expressed pleasure at being involved in research. In fact, the topic of home seemed secondary to their interest in participating, but rather being asked to contribute to research that focussed on the experiences of youth was most appealing to all three of the participants.

The decision to situate the research within my clinical practice was made in the hope that the results would more naturally evolve practical implications. With close attention to ethical considerations, as previously noted, I believe that recruiting from previous clients had other important implications. In particular, the participants previously demonstrated abilities to articulate, to share views that did not always concur with my own ideas, and to talk about pain as well as joy contributed a great deal to the richness of the data. It was a privilege to meet with them, and they have all been thanked in writing for their significant contribution to this work.

### Shorty

Shorty was 17 years of age at the time the study began. Since I have known her (a month before her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday) Shorty had lived in two different group homes, eventually moving back in with her mother and older sister a few months before

concluding our work together. Prior to my involvement with her, Shorty had lived with her father, stepmother and their two children for 9 months when she was 13 – 14 years old. Before Shorty was placed in the first group home, and referred to me for counselling, she had run away on two occasions, staying out with friends for several days. A few months before we did our first research interview Shorty moved in with her 19 year old boyfriend, his father and sister and 3 paying roommates, bringing the household total to 7 individuals. By the time of our second interview the household consisted of herself, her boyfriend, his father (who owned the house), and one paying roommate (a friend of her boyfriend's father).

Shorty maintained positive contact with her mother and sister while she resided with her boyfriend. She spoke with her mother every day by phone, and visited frequently as her mother and sister both resided in a house only one neighbourhood away. Shorty continued to attend the same high school she had since grade 10. Shorty had minimised her contact with her father, as he had verbally threatened to hurt her, because he strongly disapproved of her choice to move in with her boyfriend. Shorty was looking for part-time work to supplement the small allowance her mother continued to give her. She had previously worked at a fast-food restaurant.

### Phoebe

Phoebe was 15 years of age at the time she was interviewed for this study. While involved in counselling with me, Phoebe ran away from her mother's apartment (where the two of them lived alone) and several foster placements. Phoebe spent about six months AWOL (absent without leave) from one foster placement. Travelling about the country, she lived with people she met, in hotels, and on the streets from time to time. She had also resided in custody at a youth detention centre on several occasions, in a locked Child Welfare treatment facility, and in a foster placement that she still describes as 'home' for her. At the beginning of the study Phoebe had been living with her mother and her mother's boyfriend for five months. She was close to 9 months pregnant at our

first interview, and gave birth between our two interviews.

Phoebe enjoyed attending a special high school for girls who have experienced “street life”. She had recently completed the terms of probation for assault and theft, although she had new charges pending. Phoebe chose to move in with her mother and her mother’s boyfriend, and away from her preferred ‘home’, a foster placement. This decision was based on a strongly held belief that the Child Welfare system would be likely take her new-born son away from her if she was a 15 year old permanent ward (with a criminal history). At the time Phoebe made the decision to leave foster care she had been involved with Child Welfare services for long enough that if she wanted to remain in the foster placement (that she preferred) she had to become a permanent ward. She moved in with her mother to minimise the risk of losing her son.

#### James

James was 19 years old during the course of the study. He has lived with his father, and his mother in separate residences, as well as being incarcerated in a youth detention centre, and a kind of ‘halfway house’ for youth while attending a rigorous outdoor program for young offenders. James had completed a lengthy period of probation (approximately 4 years in duration). Originally his probation was instituted for breaking and entering. It had been extended over the years for absences from school, for associating with people he was not allowed to (by the terms of his probation), for being out past his curfew and for physically attacking his mother on one reported occasion.

James graduated from high school just after we concluded our therapy (over a year before he agreed to participate in this study). At the time of the study he was taking an advanced high school math course in order to apply for a diploma in computer programming at a technical college, or to the local university. He also worked delivering pizzas on weekends. He has owned his own car for about two years, which is required for him to do his work. James lived in a rented basement suite of a house in the neighbourhood he had grown up in. Ostensibly his mother also resided there, but as she

was a live-in personal care attendant she only stayed with James on her weekends off.

By addressing the letters requesting participation to the adolescent participants it was found that they chose to participate without being persuaded to do so by their parents. In all three cases it was the youths who contacted the researcher to express their interest in participating, and together with the researcher, made the arrangements related to the time and place to meet in order to review the study and read the consent forms.

### The Interviews

Each interview took approximately one hour, and they were relatively unstructured and open-ended (while maintaining the topic of conversation to the lived experience of home). The interviews occurred, in the participants' residences for five of the six interviews. The residences provided a convenient location for the participants, as well as significant context to the topic of home. However, not all of the participants felt entirely 'at home' in their residences, and the one interview that occurred in the practice office offered as much to 'the meaning of home' as the other interviews. While the physical space of a residence is a potential place of home, other possibilities arose in our conversations.

Inquiring into the lived experience of home can occur outside of one's residence, and what the participants *carried with them* of home emerged in the various settings. The participants did express concerns about issues of confidentiality and privacy in their residences. Preferably the interviews were scheduled when there was no one else present, if there were others 'at home' the interviews took place in a room the participant could use exclusively throughout the interview. In the case where one of the participants did not feel sufficiently comfortable with the perceived lack of privacy in her current residence the practice office was selected as the location of the interview for its privacy. By the second interview this participant had exclusive use of a room in the household, and the interview was held there.

Considering the need to keep the data manageable and to provide both variety and depth of themes, a sample of three participants were sought (Johnson, 1997; Sandelowski, 1995). Each of the participants (pseudonyms are used below, and will be used throughout) engaged in two interviews. As the meaning of home evolved through questioning, and with time, each interview evolved another text for analysis. Reflection for the researcher and the participants evolved different interviews with the same participants at different times. Interviews provided opportunities for the participants to reflect on their lived experiences and for the researcher to risk ideas and assumptions with participants, generating new understandings of home.

#### Generating an Interpretation

“Writing leads to careful attention to the details of experience carried in words to a kind of contemplation” (Smith, 1992, p. 255). Through the repeated processes of reflection, writing, and rewriting we may generate an interpretation (van Manen, 1984). Smith (1992) reminds us that meaning is not so much defined, as derived in reference...to time, to particular and general contexts. The writing and documenting of my own thoughts in the process of the research, the texts of participants, colleagues, writings of other authors, and my self all contributed to the process of interpreting. Interpretive writing is more about generating a range of possibilities, rather than the replacement of one ideology with another. Possibilities come through the deconstruction of texts (Griffin, 1982; Smith, 1992). Asking ‘where did this thought come from?’ and ‘what is at work here?’ we may stay mindful of the narrative structure of experience (Smith, 1992). Through attention to this invisible structure of experience we may generate new understandings (Jaggar, 1989; Smith, 1992). The thoughts and emotions that do not easily fit with the fabric I am both weaving, a part of and woven into, are opportunities, invitations to explore experiences in new ways (Jaggar, 1989; Bhabha, 1994). By engaging in conversations, attending to my questions, and writing thoughts down before they can be tidily swept away by the authenticated culture that structures my

mind perhaps I have encountered the invisible.

In this work the reader will encounter layers of text. The writing is my text, but interspersed within my writings are both direct quotes from the participant transcripts, as well as interpretive vignettes, written in *italics*. These vignettes are my interpretations. They are a combination of the participants' own experiences (taken directly from the transcripts, or from my journals of what was said when the tape was off), and my own observations of the physical spaces. They are intended to bring the reader closer to the lived experience of home for the participants.

#### Generalization

For most nursing studies, both qualitative and quantitative, the question of generalization, and relevance to practice become important questions to consider (Seale, 1999). The potential clinical audience of a study considered at the design stage, can drive the researcher's rich and varied descriptions of the sample, promoting potential generalization of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski, 1995, Seale, 1999). The reader may vicariously experience being immersed in the data with the researcher through the writing (Seale, 1999). To some degree in reading the results, the reader may decide upon their generalizability (Johnson, 1997). Considering how this research opens new possibilities for thinking about home is more relevant than how it applies across persons and time (Johnson, 1997). This interpretation has been influenced by my position as a nurse clinician. I have attempted to be deliberately transparent about my position and the inherent prejudgments that accompany it so that the reader may question my interpretation along the way. The target readers for the results of this inquiry are not only nurses, but also those with an interest in home, or those who work with adolescent populations, particularly in contexts that consider the significance of mental health. Teachers, social workers and psychologists may all potentially gain distinctly different insights in exploring this work.

### Credibility and Confirmability

The audit trail should encompass all stages of the research process to confirm the results were obtained in a manner that is consistent with scholarly research (Stake, 1994). Maintaining a written journal, recording personal reactions and observed elements of the interviews that are not audiotaped throughout the course of study contributes as both an audit trail and as a text for analysis. The assumptions of the researcher contribute to the generation of understanding, but need to be accounted for in this manner. Two elements critical to articulating the trustworthiness, or credibility, of the findings of qualitative inquiries are those of prolonged engagement and persistent observation.

#### Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement suggests that sufficient time is spent with the subjects to obtain a richness of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consenting subjects were all offered, and accepted the offer, of a second interview. Thoughtful, reflective time is a necessary part of the interview process, and as such it is possible for each interview to provide rich data. The participants all potentially had time between interviews for reflection on the process, and their experience of home. The second interviews with them provided another separate source of data. This prolonged engagement increased the richness of the data obtained.

Part of the process of engagement in interpretive research is to engage with the texts. Listening to the audiotapes, reading and re-reading transcripts, and risking interpretations are all critical in the generation of new understanding. To risk interpretations it is important to engage in dialogue with professional colleagues, fellow students, and as this work is the thesis component of my Master's degree in nursing, my supervisor. Each dialogue produced more text with which to engage, further enriching the process of generating new understanding.

#### Persistent Observation

Persistent observation is somewhat self-explanatory, but may involve using more

than one data source, such as video, audio, and written texts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this inquiry the interviews with the adolescent participants were audiotaped, and the tapes transcribed. To begin with I completed the transcription of the early interviews (the first two). Transcription of the interviews by the researcher contributes to persistent observation, as the time spent in this process adds to the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following these transcriptions the remaining interviews were transcribed by clerical support staff familiar in dealing with confidential information, and bound by oaths of confidentiality.

The interview experiences themselves, memories of those interactions, as well as both the transcripts and the recorded tapes contributed to the overall interpretation. The transcripts provided a written text of the specific words used, while the tapes offer elements such as tone of voice, and conversational pauses that can be difficult to relay in a transcript. When we speak with passion we punctuate those ordinary words with movements that stand out. While these words are captured on tape, what makes them stand out to the researcher may have been an unusual gesture or pause that cannot be conveyed easily with words on paper. The memory of the interviews, such details as facial expression, and gestures are a significant responsibility of the researcher, and were supported by journalling.

While engaging with clinical clients for the purposes of research is encountered in the mental health field, and provides clinically based research, it influences the credibility and confirmability of the results. My interpretation of the transcripts is part of the research process. How much was that interpretation based on what I already knew of these participants is impossible to determine, but it is safe to say that my knowledge of them influenced my interpretations. I believe that this previous knowledge not only provided interpretive richness, but also allowed for more ease of conversation, as our history of interaction had previously covered very sensitive personal topics. I believe that the previous therapeutic engagement with participants strengthened this process, and

would recommend it with future qualitative research.

In interpretive research, transparency in the processes, and translating those necessary personal details into the language of the presented text contributes to the credibility and confirmability of results. I believe practice based research is critical to producing work that can contribute to not only the practices from which it is drawn, but to related practices. However, I had to be constantly mindful of the nature of the interviews not being about therapy, and had to resist the impulse to ask therapeutic questions in order to maintain my position as that of researcher. My past experiences with these participants both hindered and helped the processes of involving them in research. I selected clients who had been articulate in our sessions, assuming they would be more likely to be so in my interviews with them. However, our previous conversations had been painful at times, and this history of interaction had some influence during recruitment. One of the participants reflected that she thought talking with me on the occasion of our first research interview was going to make her quite emotionally stirred up, but found the experience to be less threatening than she had imagined it might be. While my experiences in interviewing the participants were positive and productive, this fear of becoming emotionally unsettled could reduce the possibility of clients engaging in practice based research. The concern expressed to me was genuine, and though follow-up counselling was not requested, it highlighted the importance of being prepared to offer additional services to the participants.

## CHAPTER FOUR: KNOWING HOME

In preparing to interview the participants of this study, I thought that to question home out loud would be difficult. I have had ‘difficult’ conversations about sexual abuse, physical violence, feelings of shame, guilt, sadness, and anger, to name a few, so I thought I was up to what I perceived as ‘the challenge’. How would Shorty, Phoebe and James fare? As my letter of invitation states, because they engaged well in counselling, I believed that they too would be up to ‘the challenge’.

We jump at the sound of the tape popping. We both glance at the offending piece of equipment – we’ve been talking for forty-five minutes. We’ve been transported by home, unaware of the passage of time until the tape, having reached the end of its spool lets out a squeak and a pop as the recorder stops. Questioning home out loud, and in my writing, many months of questioning. With each passing interview it becomes apparent that silently, internal conversations about home had been occurring before I arrived with my spoken questions.

### The Language of Home: A Community of Thought

Thinking in language is predetermined by the very words that form the thoughts. What ancient meanings still linger in our words today? *Homos – the same (Greek); homilos – an assembly or crowd (Greek); homilein – to consort with (Greek) (Merriam-Webster, 1996)*. Being home is perhaps about being somehow the same, assembling and consorting with one another. Do we refer to sameness just in place, or do we assume that people from the same place share more than a history of that place? Living in the same place it seems unlikely that we would take on places in the same way, though, perhaps there emerges a shared quality shaped by that to which we are most often exposed. We may be assembled in place, an expected grouping together of people. Our experiences are

constructed by expectations.

James and I share a humorous moment in our final interview. We come from different cities in the same region of our country. The cities are often engaged in quite a significant rivalry in the National Hockey League. Though these cities share innumerable similarities, we are at times drawn to distinguish the differences. While questioning notions of home we look beyond house and neighbourhood, and begin to examine some larger ideas of where James comes from. He believes these larger ideas also contribute to his experiences of being home. We laugh a little at our tendency to tease each other about our two different hockey teams. Who will or will not make the playoffs, and who has won the Stanley Cup more times come easily into our relating about home. We know each other better than we know any of the various men who play for our respective teams, and though I have joined him in this city James jokes about my former home as if some of it remains attached to me.

Our communities come together in celebration when our 'home' team wins. Worthiness, values, there is a sense that when these teams play we attach more meaning to the playing of this game than mere entertainment. There is also an attachment to place, and a sense of pride in sharing a community with these athletes. We have come together by chance, but we may stay and join by choice more than circumstance. James is pleased to hear that I cheer for our home team more often than I used to, it speaks to my being a part of this city as much as I am from that *other place*. James is pleased by this choice, it joins me to him, and it is a thoughtful way of our coming together in this community.

We may be related not just to place, but to each other, further expanding our expectations of *sameness*. The familiar in our family, the group of relation expands at the same time as we journey back in time along similar genetic paths. There are also

assumptions of relatedness if we share a household – home in our families.

Being assembled, we are in company, the exceptional hermit is alone, unaccompanied in home. James lives alone, but speaks of connection. The meanings associated with being solo in a household seem to fade as being a part of a community is brought forth. It is assumed that a hermit chooses not only to live alone, but apart. This *apartness* seems more significant, a choice rather than a circumstance, or is there the possibility that being apart by choice may be about a collection of circumstances? It might be important when we encounter difference to ask does the hermit shun us, or do we shun the hermit?

*A homily - discourse or conversation on a moral theme – inspirational words (Merriam-Webster, 1996).* James seems to derive energy and motivation from familiar ways, familiar people and places – there are elements of the inspirational in home.

Carolyn: When I think about what your mom had to offer you, and what your dad had to offer you, some of it was stuff, and in your mom's case maybe not so much stuff because she didn't have a lot of money. But there was something essential that they did offer you that you actually still have now. Would you agree?

James: Yeah, definitely. That's where I got my morals from right, most of them anyway. I got some from friends, and maybe TV. The Hero TV show, all the good things that he did and everything.

James sees inspiration from multiple sources, his parents, friends, and the idealised television hero. Living everyday life can be touched by elements of heroism. James believes that he has been instilled with particular values that include ideas related to how we should act, towards one another, and more generally in the world. These ideas of home act like anchors for him. His home of origin contributes to a new construction of

being home every day that has a 'sameness' about it – reminders of the original.

*She sits on the bus, its rhythms shaking her gently from side to side. She reads her book, always bringing a book with her everywhere – a story to climb into, gazing at the pages they protect her from their prying eyes. The people on the bus are staring, her pregnant shape makes them judge her – 'irresponsible teenager, getting pregnant at such a young age' – though they don't say the words out loud she reads them in their glances.*

*She looks up briefly as the shadows of the buildings, taller now, touch the window beside her. Almost there, she tucks her book into her purse. Grabbing her brush, another essential piece of equipment in her bag, she drags it roughly through her hair. Phoebe's hair is long, and straight, if she keeps it brushed it shines. She pushes the brush down into the purse again as she prepares to stand and leave – hesitating, as her body has become more awkward in its pregnant state, making moving while the bus sways more difficult.*

*Her footsteps slap on the pavement. She moves towards the park. She notices the girls as their footsteps fall in line with hers, strangers. 'Nice pants' says one. Phoebe doesn't say anything at first, just matches the gaze of the girl, smiling, not dropping her eyes. 'Yeah, I like them, that's why they're mine'. Thinking to herself while she says this, 'they're gonna jack me for my pants'. The park was right there, and Phoebe kept on smiling, knowing safety in this place. They were here. Knowing her friends, they were always here. She smiled, raised a hand to the group in the park, and they raised their hands to her – 'who's gonna get jumped now?' She smiled again at the girls as their footsteps faltered, fading back behind her, and she kept up the slow rhythm of her pace towards her friends.*

We engage with Phoebe as she rides the bus, transported from one location to another. Phoebe is immersed in community, on the bus she interprets negative judgement by members of the community, and yet she also experiences acceptance and safety from a group of young people she knows in the park. What of home does Phoebe carry with her on the bus? She brings a book, and her brush, a bag for these things, herself, her clothing, and her thoughts. Her clothing attracts some threatening attention, yet she expresses some pride in wearing something 'cool', something she likes. Being 'at home' in community can have multiple, even contradictory meanings. Phoebe's experiences of community are related through her feelings of safety, fear, and rejection. She experiences 'home' in more places than the house where she currently resides. Knowing home and community for Phoebe is related to her thinking of it, she interprets people's glances, and the unsaid more than that which they say out loud.

How is thinking of home distinct from being in home? Thought may be considered reality. If we believe something, then for us that reality is lived. We reside in a world of thought. It is in language that our thoughts evolve. Being immersed in our thoughts is to be immersed in the world from which both we, and our thoughts, arise. Where we draw the distinction between the world and our thinking of it is in language. You are home if you interpret the relationships, yourself, this place as home. You are home if you believe that you are there.

#### Crossing Boundaries

James: Home is a place that you're supposed to be able to... you're supposed to come home, and relax, you know? It's a place, where you can go and, you know, you should be basically at peace with yourself, right? The relief we feel as we return from a day at school, or work, when we walk through the door may be

about returning to familiarity. Our public persona can be shed as quickly as a business suit, or a backpack full of homework. However protectively we may guard home in our thoughts, we are asked to emerge, as well as to invite the public in by our very existence in culture.

Like the tingle of a touch to our skin, when something ‘hits home’ there can be a realization that we are personally affected by it in some way. The sense of being ‘struck’ may come from an unanticipated crossing of a boundary. Just as we may sometimes believe that our physical body contains the self, and the skin becomes some *obvious* boundary of the experience of what it is to be our self – so the walls of our dwellings may be mistaken for the boundary of home. Through the public and the private – home is separated from the world. It can be a useful delusion. What goes on ‘in the world’ does not always personally affect us, yet we are at the same time embedded in that world. It can be a confusing, frightening world, a world outside our control. The very walls, doors, curtains of the house are a beginning of privacy, privacy from the outside world.

**James:** To have something driven home would be just like a wake-up call. It's like a reality check. Yeah... It arrives on your doorstep, right? Sometimes you don't realise what's going on after awhile, and then you need something really big to remind you what's going on, right? Everyone's home has a dark part, right? That's basically what it is. Like let's say you have this closet, and it's a dark closet, okay? Everything's in there you swept everything in there, all the dirt, everything's in there.

**Carolyn:** I think we can fool ourselves about how big that closet is.

**James:** We can fool ourselves if we're in there enough. Home is one reality at one particular time but it can be another reality later.

James highlights the historical notions of home. The idea that home can be many things to us, at particular times, and that some of those times may be dark and difficult. The ideology of home shines light on the supportive, loving, nurturing realities of home, and leaves the darkness for James' closet. Yet, he is willing to speak of that closet, its contributions to being home, and acknowledge that it is sometimes this darkness that "hits home". Hitting home improves our understanding home in multiple ways.

James reminds us that just as we may learn about ourselves in place, we may also delude ourselves too. It is easy to believe the ideology, to fall back on it. It may even be necessary at times – he does not reject an idealized version of home, he simply sees beyond it at the same time as he embraces it. There exists for James tolerance, acceptance of ambiguity, of multiple, simultaneous possibilities. James sees the contradictions, and he doesn't try to explain them away, he accepts them as necessary, as part of his everyday life. However, at the same time he recognises the need to see things one way at one time and another way at other times. He is fooled by this need in himself from time to time, and appreciates that wake up call – having life "hit home" at particular times.

#### In and Out of Home

James, Shorty, Phoebe, have all evolved their thinking related to home. They know home in different ways than they thought possible before their experiences in and out of homemade knowing home in different ways possible for them. While it might have been a particular place for their social workers, their teachers, their friends, home was not just the house where their family lived. Home had transformed in their experiences. They had questioned what they *knew*, and took for granted about home, in their experiences of being in jail, in a group home and on the streets. They described all of these experiences

quite distinctly as being 'out of home', but not just because of their physical relocation. Somewhere they had crossed the boundaries of home, and experienced that living in place was not all there was to *being at home*.

Carolyn: In those two years when you were away, where do you think, or what do you think home was about for you then?

Phoebe: Then, home was where I lived. Because I didn't know, well I didn't really know anything. I'm not saying I know everything, [laughing] I've still got stuff to figure out. I'm trying to do. Before, it was just where I lived. Home right away, this is my house, home is house, right? But it's not the word, you know, it's totally different.

The dwelling is hollow. Place or location is not enough to describe home. What has substance? I leave home for a while, explore its edges, as my participants have, feeling for what distinguishes it as home. I consider being without home. "Every... intentional experience always implies a twofold empty horizon of what is not actually meant in it, but toward which an actual meaning can, of its nature, be directed" (Gadamer, 1999, p.245). In speaking and writing of home we may engage around not being home, as though attempting to distinguish home more by what we do not say, than what we are saying.

Phoebe lives with her mother, her mother's boyfriend, and while pregnant during our first interview, the household had expanded to include her newborn son by our second interview. The manner of coming to live in this particular place, and the meanings attributed to it are uniquely Phoebe's. What stands out from our conversations is how powerfully, and repetitively Phoebe stated that it is not enough to possess particular things, to live with family, and to have shelter, and privacy. These things contribute to

home, and in home they remind us of our being at home. Yet, the sense of being at home is also missing from some relationships, from some physical shelters, and even from some of the material things we accumulate.

Phoebe: Where's my home?

Carolyn: Is it about where? I'm putting the whole concept up for questioning, because sometimes I think home can be a where. Like that's often the first thing we think of right?

Phoebe: Yeah, yeah..

Carolyn: We think: Home is the place I live.

Phoebe: No, I live here, but this isn't my home.

Though we eventually encounter being at home later in our conversation, for a moment, **where** Phoebe feels at home becomes less relevant. In this moment we may wonder if Phoebe has ever felt at home. She speaks so matter-of-factly, her manner implies that she does **know** what home feels like, and this place is not it. How is it she knows what being at home feels like? What is life like for her living in a place she does not feel is home?

Ironically, it is this encounter at the edges of home – not being home – that distinguishes being at home from those things we ordinarily associate with the experience. How strange, this fashionably dressed young woman, her belly protruding with new life, her long hair clean and shining saying she lives here, but it is not her home. Ideologically, home should present to us visually; we should be able to see it. She sits in a large room, in the basement. At first glance the room is full of *evidence* that she lives here – it holds her imprint as her body leaves a dent on the mattress she sits upon while we talk. The crib next to the sofa bed is a reflection of her expected child – it is full of

toys and new diapers. Upon the dresser are several small mementoes that she points out to me before we begin taping.

Living in place and being home, they are wrenched apart by her simple statement. For a moment home disappears from our view, and it cannot be touched. In that moment it retreats, and it isn't there. It returns somewhat changed from that moment. Home is so often discussed in relation to **where**, and for good reason, that this is important is not what is in question. Who, what, when, how, and why are also relevant to questions, but what Phoebe's experience places before us so eloquently, is that if we get stuck on the **where** of home we may miss other important layers of meaning in home.

#### Seeking Comfort

Carolyn: You said that before, home was where you lived. What's interesting to me about that, is in those two years you lived in secure treatment, you lived at the Young Offenders Centre, you lived in some hotel rooms, you lived on the streets. Were those places home? Did you say to yourself 'when I go to the trashcan in this alley, that's home?'

Phoebe: No. Home to me, when it was there, was just everywhere. Because at the time I wasn't happy, but I was happy. Because I was with my friends, and I did whatever I wanted to do, which is pretty immature. But home was just always with me here [points to her chest]. Even if I didn't really have a house, a place to be, I sort of carried my home with me all the time. When the feeling was there, that feeling inside her, Phoebe believed she carried home within her. It was something – a feeling, a belief – that she knew she knew, or had known – knowledge of home. Sometimes that feeling connected her with the present, grounded her. Sometimes she recalled the people she missed and the feeling also came to her, but it

remained protected, nurtured kept in reserve until she found a physical place where she could let that feeling out – speak out loud.

*Lying in bed, her new room, she could hear the sounds of life from downstairs. Cooking smells, coffee, hung in the air. A foster placement, she resented that, but it was better than being locked up. The weak spring sunlight was full on the curtains, and she could tell it was late – probably noon. She stretched her toes towards the end of the bed, as she reached her arms up to turn on the stereo. No one had come to nag her out of bed on this Saturday morning – it felt good to just naturally wake. ‘Let’s see if this brings any comment’ she thinks to herself, as she flicks the switch. Drum beat, guitar music, and finally the throaty voices fill the room. Her music, songs of power, love, she thinks of her friends from the street – these were their songs.*

*Phoebe’s toes touch the soft carpet of the floor, another stretch, and her hips sway to the music. Dancing about the room, she gathers her shampoo, her makeup, selects her clothes, getting ready for the day ahead – she needs a shower, an outfit, a little makeup, then she’ll be ready. No comments yet about the music, her spirit soars, as the sounds of fun seem to be permitted in this place. Grabbing the ghetto blaster and opening the door, she brings it in to the bathroom with her. The pounding sounds will soothe as much as the hot jets of water. The food smells overwhelm her senses as she enters the hall, this shower had better be quick, breakfast suddenly seems like a fantastic idea.*

*Hair still wet, drying long and straight against the shoulders of her shirt, she enters the kitchen. Greetings, a mug of coffee poured just for her. She’s ready for a lecture that never comes. Her senses no longer jangle with irritation, or frustration. There’s little left, as the music usually banishes them, but now, that tiny tremor of fear*

*behind her mind, it slips away. "How was your night last night?" She grins and responds with a story.*

Does location become symbolic of those feelings? Once they are let loose can they linger in a place, and thus be recalled more easily? We may be comforted by a place, and that which was hollow may be filled. Feelings may be recalled as echoes of our self resound. Places may take up meanings if we let them.

When we encounter the loss of home it may be terrible, unimaginable at first. However, in recalling what we miss, we may encounter home in new ways. *Shorty rode the bus home from school. A longer ride, more time to think. She contemplated the recent journeys to her group home, compared them. So much shorter in distance, the group home was closer to school, but so much longer too – it was a harder place to return to every day. This journey home was longer too, months in the coming. As the bus pulled up to the curb she almost dropped her backpack as she eagerly launched herself up out of the seat. Holding the shiny pole she swung around it, and out the automatic doors, two quick steps and she was on the old familiar sidewalk. Familiar cracks smiled back up at her from the concrete. She walked in the front door – "I'm here, I'm home. Hi mom!" The door had just banged shut. She was home, she got a real hug, a real hug. She sighed and breathed in the air of home, the two of them there with their arms wrapped around each other – a real hug.*

Through our bodies we may access a kind of comfort. The physical feelings of ease, restfulness, and lack of pain, as we lie in bed at night, or feeling replete following a good meal, and the quenching of our thirst with a cool drink on a hot day. These experiences take us to feeling comfortable *in our bodies*. Shelter, sustenance, and ease, experiences we seek in a home. We may be sheltered in other places, and perhaps even

fed very well in some of the finest restaurants, but at home we are most at *ease*.

Home, I know it like the back of my hand (Shorty). Without effort, like breathing while we sleep, we immerse ourselves in these familiar places.

*Phoebe opens the door, leaving the dark behind, she moves into the warmth and light of the kitchen. Her foster mom sits at the table, face scrubbed of makeup, hair in a ponytail, wearing her bathrobe, fuzzy pink slippers under the table, her hand wrapped around a steaming mug – she reads the paper. Her eyebrows lift, her head tilts to the side just a little. Words of welcome, greeting, pass between them – the murmur of their conversation fills the room. Small details tumble out – stories exchanged, shared. Opening her pack of cigarettes Phoebe offers one, they both light up. They move to the living room together, the conversations trailing them like wisps of fragrant, colourful, beautiful smoke. They settle themselves, feet tucked beneath them, into opposite corners of the couch – her foster mom hands her the remote, the steaming mug still cradled in her other hand, and together they watch a dozen shows at once. Slipping, hopping, skipping, surfing from one to another – she steers a frenetic dance.*

Words matter less than the manner of speaking them. Questions are framed in curiosity, acceptance, caring, not harsh judgement – or bitter disappointment. In this manner there is room for the details, they spill forth between them. Details, everyday life is brought forth, it is shared, constructed together. Much meaning may be taken from these seemingly minor exchanges; they flavour our interactions long after we have shared in them. Meaning lingers in between us, things we have said are taken up, they create us, and we construct each other in our meeting – how we meet matters. We may lead as we follow, follow as we lead – dancing life.

Comfort, or tranquillity, perhaps at first a smoothing over of emotion. Is the idea

of emotion too rough, too disruptive to be tranquil? That cultural tendency to keep emotions hidden, and maybe avoid the conflict, it trips us up. Tranquillity can be emotive, and when not put on to hide, but rather emerging through our being, it brings about thoughts of contentment. Feelings are associated with being at home.

Phoebe: You know that saying home is where your heart is? Well, this kinda is my home because this is where I go, this is where I sleep, this is where I live, so still in that little way it's my home, but in every other way it's not. Why I still call my foster home 'my home' is because of how I felt when I was there, and how I feel when I'm there. How I'm so comfortable being there, you know?

"Home is Where the Heart is"

Central, both our home and our hearts are at the core of us. "Home is where the heart is" (Phoebe & Shorty). Sustaining them, the expected rhythm is hardly noticed. Until that rhythm is shaking in their breasts, or they lie entwined, her ear on his chest, they hardly notice its beat. Moments of fear, exertion, or quiet, contemplative times, these are times when they touch the core of the everyday, home, the heart. The seat of courage, strength, emotions, the heart is a crowded place. In this notion of home we encounter love, courage, strength, and truth.

*Tightness rises in her chest. Phoebe tries to control the feeling – the feelings? They roll over her, overwhelming. What overwhelms her? She overwhelms herself. Happiness, sadness, joy, they all begin to feel the same as they come at her, too much all at one time. Too much to keep the shell intact. The tears flow, as sobbing breaths that will not be choked back come bursting forth. What is she feeling? She needs to be alone, she doesn't feel understood in the presence of her mother today – who doesn't seem to see her tears. They feel so large on her face, why doesn't she notice?*

The heart held in the centre of the body. Pumping, pure and simple?

Circulation, oxygenation, nourishment – but who is to say ‘where’ the mind might be located? Despite our knowledge of anatomy and physiology, we still seat our spirit, that emotional self, in our hearts rather than in our heads. Emotions, sentiments – lodged in our chests, in our hearts, they lie waiting to be awakened through experience. Experience, emotion, shaping as they are being shaped - simultaneously.

*Phoebe lies on the gurney, her belly awkward in the orange jumpsuit. Her long hair, usually shiny, and tangle-free is sticking to her sweaty face. She can't brush it away. Her hands are shackled behind her. "Not now, please not now, not here, not like this" she pleads with her baby. "You don't want to meet your mommy like this – not this way!" Tears run down her face, mixed with the sweat, the pains, she is overflowing, she cannot contain the pain, the panic. Birth in this manner, with the trappings of her recent incarceration filling her mind, the small space enclosed by pastel curtains, filling with despair, foreboding. 'What will motherhood bring me if I let you come into the world here, now, with me in chains?'*

*The contractions wane, the baby doesn't come today. She is left limp, exhausted, still having to face the court, her mother, but she'll get out of here, and be ready for her son the next time he makes his presence so dramatically known.*

Mostly what we show of them just brushes the surface, but sometimes they burst through our shell – relief and despair gasping forth in the same way. As if in trying to keep them hidden they mix together, and begin to appear in the same manner. We learn that we are undone if we lose control. We must master our emotions if we are to be considered strong. Strength is there, alongside them holding them below the surface, controlling them, hiding them, keeping them locked away unshared.

Sentiment, emotion, home, linked in our minds, thoughts, and our experiences. Do we discount the sentiment? Emotional meanings breathe life into our knowledge of home (Jaggar, 1989). While the dwellings of home may be of bricks and mortar, homes are also constructed by emotion. Far from dispassionate, our experiences of home are woven into the fabric of our lives, to pull out particular threads is to destroy the fabric (Jaggar, 1989).

When we speak of knowing something in our heart there is an implied 'truth' to this sense of knowing. "I know it in my heart" – then it is a powerful kind of knowing. In connecting home and the heart there may be an implied 'truth' to our sense of home. The ideology of home locates 'truth' in home, yet what home is meant to be and what we understand of it may be different. Sometimes when the truth is implied rather than spoken out loud there arises a silence around that 'truth'. Home, arises as a location of implied *truth*, and there may also be feelings that it is implied we may not share. In a culture of privacy we may keep these feelings locked away. What may we talk about with others – those that don't occupy our home, strangers, whether present, caring, or prying – they are still strangers to our world of home? What of our feelings do we unpack for them? Do those that share our living space share in their own unpacking? *People shouting at one another on TV. The man with the microphone moves through the audience, they alternately stand and talk into the mike, shaking their fingers at the stage – where people sit and shift in their chairs – the focus of so much rage. The smell of clean clothes their warmth touching her fingers as she folds, tucks and rolls. Stacked in the basket, neat piles of white cotton – he will wear them again. Soon they will be balled, damp and smelly, in the same basket, awaiting renewal. The sound of the garage door interrupts this folding – a quick intake of breath, tightness in her belly. Phoebe turns off the television, and looks*

*quickly around the room imagining it through his disapproving eyes. Her fingers chill as she drops the basket of folded laundry on the floor, and quietly slinks down the front stairs to her basement room, as his footsteps clump up the connected garage steps near the back of the house.*

It might be said that between the physical spaces of our world and the relationships with people in it, emotional home comes into being – distinctions, between people and places, fragile separation. Being in relationship evokes shared meanings between people, and between people and place that is born of knowledge, expectations, and emotions. Evolving, moving, touching us, through us, around us are thoughts and feelings that shape our experiences in the world, of the world, and of our very self. Emotions are shaped by our experiences within a particular world, a culture of understanding from which we cannot be separated (Jagger, 1989). What if we do not want to be present to the unpacking of feelings? Our presence may be construed as a safe target; someone who will keep the household secrets, who can witness the messiness of the emotional worlds we do not express in other places.

#### A Culture of Home

*Stepping from the threshold, Shorty pulls the crisp night air into herself. She breathes shallowly, listening, monitoring the sounds she makes as she moves from the front hall to the front stoop, careful to move past the cigarette can that is always there without disturbing it. As she sneaks past it she recalls, the two of them, the two smokers in the house, she and her mom often sit out here together in the evening, laughing, teasing, sharing in their habit.*

*She closes the door with a soft click. Gently, so as not to wake her sister, or worse, her mom. She turns the key in the lock before tucking it into her pocket. Seeing the*

*can a thought has been triggered, and before she moves on, she pulls out a cigarette, only three left – she begins a silent conversation with herself ‘got to make them last, you’re going to want them later’. Grounded – 18 hours of time to serve at home, it’s just too much. A hopeless sentence, she’d rather face more trouble, and she doesn’t want to spend so much time away from him. The house remains comfortingly silent behind her; she’s made it again!*

*She follows the familiar sidewalks, past the playground. It echoed with games – not really so long ago. She slips across the street in front of the convenience store. The city trains have stopped running. The silent tracks, surrounded by prickly grated fences, run parallel to the street she walks along. As she moves along in the dark, following what she knows is the brown grass verge of a main street, strewn with pieces of garbage that look like strange black lumps this late at night. The street lights on the unusually quiet street leave a long shadow behind them, and she walks in this shadow. Kicking at a random piece of garbage she flicks her cigarette butt over a fence, into somebody’s yard. Her fingers are cold, and now that she’s done her cigarette she doesn’t need a free hand. She rams both hands deep into her pockets - his pockets? She’s wearing his old coat; the collar still smells of him when she puts it on.*

Feeling hopeless, Shorty does not believe she can meet the expectations of her family. These expectations become larger than she does, she shrinks next to them, and eventually moves on, trying to ignore them, but as she thinks of them they accompany her from place to place. Where do these expectations arise? Sneaking out of her mother’s house, rejecting some expectations, yet locking the door behind her – she risks being heard in this action, but to leave the house in a safe manner remains an expectation she accepts. Moving through a landscape, she is in the present, but at the same time she

recalls herself as a youngster playing in the same playground she passes in the dark. She also anticipates the evening ahead, conserving her cigarettes in her mind. As she carries memories and expectations, a culture of childhood, of family, with her, through the dark, she wears her boyfriend's coat. He too has expectations that they spend time together, that she participates in a social life with him. In the meeting of these multiple expectations, where are Shorty's? How does she make sense of some expectations, and reject others?

“Every finite present has its limitations” and our present thoughts are inevitably determined by our world (Gadamer, 1999, p.302). “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point... [and] to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it” (Gadamer, 1999, p.302). Like a sunflower turning to face the sun, leaving the shadows behind it, so the young perceive the future stretching before them – potential home arises in their thoughts. The reality of today may be influenced by that other reality of their dreams. Seeping into their spaces and their lives, are those things they expect to happen. How can we know the future? We may not have a crystal ball, but the message may be clearly stated *when you grow up you will leave home, create a new home, build a future independent of your parents*. Choices may come down to ideas unspoken but powerfully influencing because who can contradict the unspoken? As the sunflower turns to the sun it remains rooted in the soil, amongst its neighbors, green leaves still touching other familiar leaves.

*She walks across another field, next to a school. Folding and unfolding her body, she works her way through the small passthrough in the wire fence that surrounds it. From here she can already see, across the road, the flicker of television light through the*

*living room curtains. The walk has been good, settling her worries down safely inside. Enjoying the peace for a moment, she pauses. She's not ready for the walk up the driveway, crowded with several 'dead' cars. She pulls one of the three cigarettes out – the dry paper touches her lips, she breathes in the slightly sweet taste of unburned tobacco before she touches the tip with the lighter. The familiar motion is comforting. Another intake of breath, she slowly releases the smoke from her lungs – she's ready.*

*Flicking her ash, she stands at the door after swiftly rapping at the frame. It's late, and the doorbell might cause trouble – it would at home, although probably not here. His dad is probably still up, even if it is 1:00am – he doesn't have to work tomorrow, it's a Friday night. She can hear the shuffle of steps moving from the living room, up and to her right. They descend the stairs to the door in front of her. It's him, she knows it, his dad moves more slowly, and the steps quickly pound to the door. Another repetitive soothing draw on the cigarette, and the inside door opens.*

*Her eyes drop as she eases around the spring loaded front door that opens towards her, his long arm, far above her, propping it open over her head. Her back is facing him, his back to the door, as it slams shut behind him. The sound of the metal on metal, pulled too quickly by the spring set low on the frame, it's hardly noticed over the gun shots and tires squealing on the TV. There's several loud voices, blurry with beer that she recognizes from the living room. There's usually a room full of young people in this place on the weekends. His dad has a welcome disregard of noisy conversation, and music that accompanies their group. Something her mom never tolerates for long.*

*She turns to face him as she shucks off the coat, his eyes are serious, and he smells of soap, cigarettes and beer – 'Come on up. Wanna beer?' Space is made on the couch, a friend moves to the floor as every available seat is taken, their eyes on the*

*action unfolding – music, a familiar sound track, blasts through the new sound system. ‘We rented a movie – it’s just started’. She settles under his arm again, with her beer, stuffing the worry about mom’s reaction deeper into her chest she takes a swig.*

*Shorty takes some comfort from the fact that a place has been made for her next to him – she still belongs with him. Apart from the silent reshuffling to create space for her next to him, no one interrupts their own watching of the movie to greet her. It doesn’t feel rude, just that she’s been expected. She needs to be here – but it’s hard for her to spend enough time in this place, her being ‘out’ is closely monitored by mom. Things have been rocky for them lately, he doesn’t like to come over – mom doesn’t exactly make him feel too welcome – they’re “too young” to know what they want. But he’s nineteen, she’s seventeen, and they have been through so much together already. His parents’ divorce, her getting out of the group home, and moving back to mom’s. She knows what mom’s going to say – that predictable response, never seeing the relationship they have as something strong and good.*

Moving away does not have to be quick, or sudden. A gradual moving from the old into the new seems more likely; a comfortable movement becomes possible. We tend to remember drama, but life is not lived as a play unfolds. Theatrical scenes do not necessarily accompany changes. *Things have changed, evolved really. The two of them talk one night, not a night so different from the rest. On this occasion Shorty decides to stay the night. She’s been asked, she is welcome. They know now that she will not be going back in the same way she previously has. She repeatedly returns to this place, carrying more things back with her each time. Home to home, both places, meaning the same and different things. Comfort, in place, under his arm, on the couch, in a house where they are allowed to snuggle.*

*It had become too hard fighting her mom in order to be with him. She and Mom can't be close in the same place, and she can't be close to him if they don't live in the same place. Here is home, but being with mom is home too, an expanded home rather than one lost. The phone rings, it's her mom – they talk every day now. Conversations about details, life unfolding, but they laugh, she can tell her more now. After picking up the receiver, a brief "Hello" and then she shouts "Quit your cussing and swearing, it's my mom on the phone" to friends in the room. Through the receiver she hears "Good for you dear, you tell them! So how are things? Do you both want to come for supper tonight?" Daily talks, knowing mom is there, at home, but here is home now too.*

Home, a sacred place, of refuge, where we may be sustained, and shaped in familiar ways (Gruchow, 1996). Are we so differently restrained 'outside' home? Yet, even in home are we not constrained by culture? A happening, a sudden engagement, choices that are not choices in a consideration of social time (Bhabha, 1994). How is it that when enclosed we experience less constraint? Accompanied by the things we associate with the places of home, with our particular world is there more freedom? Our thinking is reflected in the acts of choosing, choosing what accompanies us on our journey of life, our thoughts reflecting our culture of experience.

Choice, while freeing, and desirable for growth, is also complicated. Sometimes the experience of having no choice is just as comforting as the freedom to choose. The obligation to those in your home, limiting choice, also contributes to meaning.

*Mom has to come and pick her up again. Take her home. She steels herself for the onslaught of disappointment. She considers the clipped tones that made her wince involuntarily on the other end of a phone. Was there anyone else she could have called to*

*avoid this pain of admission, having her mistakes laid bare before her? Not everyone she knew could make this encounter so terrible, but this is jail. Lockup. She had to choose. Only mom would have come, for sure. Mom had no choice – she had to be there. She was mom. Loving choice, no choice but to love. Home in those people we love, who love us, it is the place between us, linking us, overflowing with love, disappointment, sadness, there's always room for more feelings.*

When one has little choice there may be a comforting suggestion of having a recognised place in a group of people, to belong, and in choice exists the risk of rejection. Phoebe has come to expect her mother's disappointment, but it is not interpreted as rejection, she knows her mother will come and pick her up. She interprets her mother's obligation to a daughter, and a lack of choice, as a safer option than calling upon a friend, who may understand her situation, but at the same time is not bound by the same family choices. In our choosing we are shaped simultaneously as we shape our world (Bhabha, 1994). Culture does not exist simply in the wide world of 'other' places, 'outside'. Culture seeps into the walls, the spaces, the very words of home. Our culture presents particular choices; some may be experienced as constraining, and at the same time liberating. In being a part of something like a family, there are elements of both choices, and lack of choice. How we proceed with our choices is sometimes decided for us. Shorty believes she has to choose between living at home with her mom, or expanding home to include her boyfriend's – how did these particular choices arise for her? Are there other choices that reside more invisibly between those choices that present noticeably?

*The baby cries in the crib next to her bed. Glancing at the ceiling, wondering what he's heard so far, Phoebe eases herself off the mattress and pulls her son's tense little body from the crib. They are sharing a cold – stuffy noses, headaches. 'Feeling*

*miserable honey? Oh dear, it's okay, I know what you feel like.' Climbing back into bed she puts him to her breast, he snuffles and tosses his head a little before he takes it in his greedy little mouth. She sighs, the noise of his crying stops with his sucking. How long has it been, a minute, two minutes? Had she woken right away, or was this cold sitting too heavily about her too? Thoughts, worries swirling through her mind, finally she fades into sleep again.*

*She wakes in the dawn light shining through the small basement window above the bed. It must be late morning or early afternoon, this was the middle of winter, so the light means that mom has left the house. She eases herself out from under the baby, and tiptoes out to the bathroom. She doesn't flush the toilet; not wishing to alert him upstairs that she's awake. She hates it when he works the late shift. She climbs back into the bed, checking her baby's diaper, anticipating, trying to avoid the cries that anger her mother's boyfriend. She lies back against the pillows, softly easing onto the mattress again, dabbing at her runny nose. A couple of hours and he'd go out to do his flyers and she could run up and quickly jump in the shower.*

Phoebe, her son sleeping nearby, her new role as a mother reflects not only in him, but from the multitude of new stuffed toys, the white plastic car seat, the crib, the bag of necessities ready packed by the door. In conversations of criticism, she is recognised by 'others' and yet also comes to recognise herself. Out loud the words that most often arise in dialogue are critical, and this recognition rings of disappointment, and a lack of trust. She becomes a disappointment, and her experience of home, though shaping her, is not that of ideological nurturing. Where is her voice in these conversations? The choice to remain is shrinking, the packed bag by the door symbolic of a readiness to leave.

Cresswell (1996) reminds us that in the language of place, of which home is a part, there is a subtle language of expectation. We all have a place, and this statement is not just a reference to the universal need for physical space. It also reflects that we know our place. We have a position in the larger world – in our social network, society, and culture. So, embedded in the flow of our discourses are not simply the where of place, but the who, what, how, when, and why. What is it to be a teen, what expectations of place are upheld to youth, and how does that affect their everyday life?

“Life as a Real Teen”

*“You’re just like your father” rang in her mind over and over. Shorty considered this thought as the emotion welled up. It hurt, and mom had divorced him, so what did that mean for her? She had to go, her friend was running away, and she wasn’t going to let her go out there alone. Besides, it would prove to mom that she couldn’t control her every move. She couldn’t stay feeling rejected, being the misfit in the family; it was too hard to live the reality of it everyday. The intensity of this feeling wrung her heart like a huge fist – ‘I don’t belong here, I don’t want to be at home.’*

*Taking control, she was out of control at the same time. Fear rose in her throat, strangling the sadness that lingered when she thought of home, mom, and her sister. She felt more awake, startled into the beyond – beyond home, beyond the expected. Running away made the sadness, rejection, everything shrink. Small, behind her, she thought she could leave those feelings and take on this new intensity, this new fear – the streets. The people out here, some of them were scary, but some were her friends. They needed her, even if her family didn’t.*

Shorty: So, I realized you know — I was like 15 at the time — I’m like okay, well look, I’m 15 now, going on 16, I might as well just grow up, put up with

it and get out of the group home and live a life as a real teen, not some kid who has to live in some group home and listen to some other people telling me what to do.

Our expectations of what should happen in home often “remain unstated, and taken for granted” (Cresswell, 1996, p.3). However, they are implied by what we say, arising through language, even if the words do not directly state those taken for granted notions. Shorty invites us to contemplate the experience of *knowing* living beyond the implied horizon. Shorty conveys powerfully that her situation is somehow *unreal*. The *shoulds* of home ring like musical notes loudly in her reality at the group home – sending a clear song that she does not belong to an accepted whole experience of being a real teen. Through unacknowledged, unspoken experience, her life becomes *unreal*.

Carolyn: I don't know if you'll have an answer for this one, but let's think about it. Do you think that you had to kind of lose that feeling of home with your mom by having to go live in the group home, in order to figure out what it was you had?

Shorty: Yeah.

To have *others* directing her experience of lived life – these assigned individuals are beyond the expected bond of family – they cannot be expected to care enough to make that difference Shorty expects her mom to care. To live in a place apart from her family, in company with other kids like her, also living apart from their families, she is surrounded by people, and yet isolated from them. Her heartstrings don't make a knot with theirs. Her heart is tangled up with her mother, her sister, her home with them. Her life becomes extraordinary, and she feels very strongly that she must return to the ordinary in order to ‘grow up’.

That feeling of disconnection in this place, with its warmth, shelter, food, company, is emotional. Her emotional experience of home is beyond this place – the group home does not connect with her emotional reality – home is where the heart is (Phoebe & Shorty). To feel, emotional experience can be uncomfortable, but to engage passionately evokes a caring beyond directed authority. The expectation that you will tell me what to do, and *care* whether I go about it is considered, upon reflection, to be preferable to simply being told what to do because it is *expected*.

*They leave the school in a group. The grass has greened in the past few weeks, and their pace increases as they bound out of the doorway. Walking to the corner they plan to meet for a game of football as soon as they can change into shorts and t-shirts. They swiftly scatter up the alleys and streets on their way home. He ducks along the shade of the alley; it's warm on his jeans. He looks forward to the game with his friends. He slips around the loose board in the fence he'd noticed on his way to school – no barking had greeted his taps along the boards this morning. From behind the shrubs he watches the house for a short time. No movement in the kitchen. He creeps up to the garage, and sees no cars on the pavement inside. Jamming the basement window open he slips his youthful, slender body between the narrow edges of the frame.*

*Back at home James throws his school clothes on the floor, as he swiftly pulls on his cut off sweats, and a T-shirt. He slides the gym bag with the VCR, a video game, and about 30 CDs in it under his bed. Leaving the apartment he locks the door carefully behind him while balancing the bright BMX bike. He rides the bike to the playing field. Before the game begins everyone admires the shiny new acquisition. He doesn't know how much it cost – he tells them it was a 'gift'.*

James: [My experiences growing up] were totally abnormal. I grew up in

jail and you can't say it was normal, like everyone does that, right? I

grew up way different than anyone else, and I don't know, that was my choice, you know? When I was sitting there, and I was young, I didn't realise so much of a choice you know? I'm getting thrown in jail all the time, and it kinda wasn't a choice, but it was from before. It wasn't that it just popped up, and I'm getting thrown in jail because I never did anything wrong in my life, right? It was because I did stuff before, and then they didn't believe me, and they didn't care anymore 'cause my record was so long. Who cares about this kid his life's a waste right? Is basically what they were saying, right?

You are a waste, of time, energy, not worthy, the possibilities for you are limited. James heard this message very clearly from his interactions with the justice system. He also heard positive, strengthening messages, messages that opened possibilities. He came to every scheduled session when he was not incarcerated. He spoke meaningfully about his life, his dreams, and together we spoke those possibilities out loud. To answer the question about 'who cares about this kid', he turned to his family, and eventually to himself.

James: "And you know it's all about choice, it always is. You get caught, and then you get thrown jail. Then I spent a few years slowly stopping, and I changed the things I did. Then I got breached, thrown in jail for no reason sometimes. Then after that I stayed clean, stayed in my house for a year and made sure I didn't get breached or anything 'cause I stayed at home. Just to make sure - that's how serious I was. Because I didn't like it so much, you know something had to be done, whether it was going to be really hard, or impossible, right? But nothing's impossible, obviously, as we know. Now I know there's

nothing I can't do. I can do anything I want to do."

James experiences home as a place of solutions. Protecting him from his own mistakes, he lived home as a refuge, a place where he could stay out of trouble. His solution to relationships with probation officers, and police officers that bespoke of criticism, and little hope of change, was to prove them all wrong. Connecting to a place where he felt worthy, a contributor, a place where he belonged, he now feels stronger for his experience. Mostly James recalls the sustaining, the feelings of belonging in his family, in his group of friends. He prefers to linger in the ideology of childhood, playful times, jokes played on classmates, being popular and having friends. He recalls the moments of difficulty rarely, but when he does he wears them like a badge of honour, those past challenges make today's challenges easier.

Carolyn: So being a teenager is like the easiest and the hardest at the same time?

James: It could be, for me anyway.

Carolyn: What you're saying is it doesn't have to be like that for everyone? It could just be the easiest without having all those hard bits in there?

James: Yeah. I wouldn't recommend it.

Our feelings are reflections, reflections of our experiences in the world, with feeling others. How do they feel about us? Do they care? If they say they care, how do they act? Are their actions caring? James has come to believe in himself, and demonstrates self-respect. He was able to find people who treated him like he was worth their time. He believes that others believe in him, his mother, his sister, their belief is the foundation for his own. James' choices created some pain and restriction, but he would not be who is today, and would not change his life if he could. Could his lessons be

learned in other ways? While a risk he would never take, he offers his connection to place to other teens as his lesson, pleased to share his learning, hoping someone will take up the lesson without the pain his living of it created for him.

All three of the participants were pleased their stories were going to be shared in research. One of them was so interested in what the process might evolve that she asked for copies of her transcripts, which are in her possession now, and a copy of the final thesis. I assume that it is a little like watching yourself on TV, she is interested to see what comes of her contribution. Though all the participants believed that their choices had contributed to difficult journeys, and that the ups and downs they experienced along the way has made them appreciate home more than they previously had, none of them would recommend these ways of coming to know home. I suppose, they would rather tell their stories, with the hope that their journeys might be mirrored in conversations about home. Coming to know home not just in the being of it, but bringing forth possibilities in language – creating home in new ways by asking about it.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONSTRUCTING HOME

What are the quietly, invisible and yet powerfully shouted meanings of what constitutes the action of living in the places we call home? Entering the homes of participants, being present to some of the spaces they call home, I recall the chairs, all facing that modern hearth – the television. The blank screen, the silence, as we sit it calls us to turn it on. We may relax, and leave the everyday details of our life; it is possible to engage with stories that unfold so vividly before us.

Carolyn: Where do you think that we get our ideas about what home should be like? How do we come to understand home in a particular way, as like a place of peace?

James: “How do we like figure that out?”

Carolyn: Yeah.

James: “Like, what it’s supposed to be like?”

Carolyn: Yeah.

James: “That would be in like a million things. That would be like, your friends, that would be like, society, and that would be like you know, like TV, radio whatever, right?”

The living room is arranged as the other participants’ have been, focused around the television and the stereo. Although the TV is on when I arrive, it is turned off for my interviews. Perceived as an intrusion, a distraction, the television is politely turned off, but its’ influence continues to echo not just in the arrangement of the space – in those chairs, but as a powerful conduit of cultural messages. Thought it is not interactive, rather a one way stream of consciousness, our influence might at first seem great. We choose to turn it on, or off, we may pick from a growing number of channels, control the volume,

yet – there is no arguing with what we see, our voices do not join in the canned laughter, and the content is brought into the very spaces of home.

For a moment consider the portrayal of home on television. In the popular television show ‘Friends’ (the participant Phoebe’s chosen pseudonym is the name of a character on the show) the characters walk into each other’s homes without knocking, they make an entrance and it is apparent that they simply belong. Moving in and out of each other’s spaces, they also peer out the window at the ‘ugly naked guy’ in an apartment across the way. He is never seen by us, the viewers, we watch only the fascination and mockery of the visible characters. Despite being out of our view, we are aware of his place as a butt of jokes, a laughable character for his being naked, and fat. His privacy is invaded, and yet he hasn’t the sense to draw the blinds, and is thus considered open to ridicule. Somehow this invisible character highlights that being who *we are* at home and who we *want to be* in public may not be quite the same thing.

#### Presenting the Preferred Vision

*Mom hasn’t been here in days, and the place is starting to look a little shabby in the corners. He’s washed the dishes that had accumulated, and as they dry in the rack he sets about putting things in their place. He starts with the counters and the table, crumbs, a twist tie, and the half-eaten bag of chips need to go. The crumbs and the twist tie are all wiped into his palm, and shaken into the nearly full garbage. He puts the bag of chips into the cupboard above the stove – where the cereal is kept. The pop cans go into a recycling box; the money he’ll get from them will come in handy for gas. After a dusting of the furniture in the living room, vacuuming the rug in the living room, and sweeping the kitchen floor, the place looks presentable. A wipe down of the surfaces in the bathroom, and taking out the garbage – it’s ready, he’s ready.*

Everyone cleaned before I came. Phoebe is folding socks when I arrive.

She is a little embarrassed that she has nowhere to tuck them away, as her drawers are full. James tells me that though his mother does most of the cleaning in the basement suite they occasionally share, he always helps out. He then quickly blurts out that he cleaned the place before I came for this, our first interview. Shorty comes to my office for her first interview, and though by the second interview she has influenced her boyfriend to clean up the den, where we meet. I cannot see their room because it has not been prepared for my viewing it. I trace the patterns of cleaning as I waver in the flux. What does it mean that they clean before I come?

*She chops the carrots and celery vigorously – the sound of the television, though out of her line of sight, it's clear and loud. The voice of the news anchor is somehow serious and enthusiastic all at once – he describes the rising costs of utilities. The stories, happenings, news of other people's lives encapsulated in tiny bubbles of presentation before the voice skips to the next one. His back is to her, reclined in an easy chair. 'He cares so much about what's going on out there, and he totally misses the point of what's happening here, under his ignorant nose' she thinks as she slices through the flesh of the vegetables. She adds them to the washed and dried lettuce and sets them aside.*

*The water is boiling on the stove it's time to add the pasta. Phoebe checks the bubbling sauce in the smaller pot, gives it a stir before measuring out the spaghetti. A deep breath as another thought clogs her mind 'everything is his it seems -- everything except the work around here.' Her thoughts run on now, angry. 'He wouldn't starve if mom and I weren't around, but this is sure going to beat the TV dinners he probably ate before we got here – but he just takes it like it's his due, no appreciation for the work we do.' His feet walk across the same carpet, he spits frothy toothpaste in the same sink,*

*reclines on the same furniture – yet somehow it is she and mom who vacuum, dust, wipe, and disinfect, and he just uses. ‘Why does mom let herself – and me – get used this way?’*

Who do we clean for – for ourselves, for a sense of value? Cleaning for others because we must. What if the spaces we clean are always someone else’s? We cannot claim them? No one will look at them and see us reflected in their shiny surfaces, they would see this other, this person who makes us clean. We are nothing, chattel. Cleaning for others – for payment seems to be understood as dirty work, menial, meaningful, in a limiting, unacceptable manner. What does it then mean to do this work without payment, an acknowledged *place* for us in a household that means we are dependent, we are not heard? Reducing our acts to the menial limits their meaning to that of some form of payment for being offered the shelter this place provides. Belonging is not always a comfortable word if the message is that you belong in the kitchen, cleaning up after me, or out of my sight.

Phoebe believes that she is constrained in her residence. It is a place that belongs mostly to her mother’s boyfriend. She is criticized for not contributing enough. In particular Phoebe believes that the cleaning and other work that she does is in part seen as service, required to remain in the home, though she perceives her contributions will never be good enough. There is a sense of hopelessness as she describes feeling like she will never quite measure up, she will never be done – accepted. Cleaning as a commodity or a service does not make her feel the same way as Shorty does about the place she is cleaning. Phoebe does not claim the space through cleaning, but for the right to remain. While Shorty does the work without being asked, Phoebe is reminded daily what her tasks are to be for the day. She resents having to prove herself endlessly, and does not

believe that she *naturally* belongs here, as she did at her foster home.

### A Culture of Ownership

*She's alone in the house – her home. Her boyfriend lives here with her, and he says this is her home, but as much as she wants it to be, she's not sure she's 'home free' yet. His dad doesn't think she'll last. Her anger burns, rising to the surface. To think she won't last means she and her boyfriend won't last – and that's just not possible. It has to work this time, and so she has to convince this man, who says there's no place for women in this house, she has to show him she belongs here.*

*Shorty switches off the TV, and moves into the kitchen. She starts to sort through the dishes that have piled up on the counter. She washes them all, dries them, and puts them away behind cupboard doors. She wipes down the splattered stovetop, and chucks out the rotten food from the fridge. There's nothing much left in there, and his dad doesn't seem to be stocking it much these days. Lately there have been a lot of people coming by, eating and moving on. Murmured talk of getting rid of 'these scum' comes back to her. She has to distinguish herself from them.*

*She slips a jacket on, scrounges for some change – there's not enough money to buy much – but it'll pay for bus fare. She'll show them. She stands in line, the woman talks to her about her circumstances, and she hands over a box. The food bank, desperate not in the way you'd expect, but just desperate not to ask her mom for help (what an admission of defeat that would be). She brings the box home, and unloads the groceries, stocking the empty cupboards. They'll all see the difference when they get home today.*

*Every day she changes things a little bit more. She tidies, she washes, she quietly sorts the place out. Bit by bit she has left her mark on this place. Together she and her boyfriend talk with his father, she contributes she is told, she has a place there, it is her*

*home. Welcome home! In cleaning, providing food, she's done what no guest, and no 'lay about' would do, she's made it. She is recognized.*

“It feels as if in choosing this small sanctuary with its slanting floors and offbeat charms we have committed ourselves to love in some profound way” (Martine, 1995). Do you read ‘buying’ into Martine’s (1995) ‘choosing’? The context of her writing is the purchase of a cottage for her retirement. Home seems to be strongly associated with ownership in our language. Do we invent a new word, such as *home livers*, or *home dwellers*, to describe a sense of being home, without ‘ownership’ per se? Perhaps breathing new life into the idea of ownership makes some sense, but I feel somewhat daunted by the strong consumer society in which we are embedded. The particulars of ownership are important in our culture; can I swim against that current? I struggle with what to call these young people I interview, in places they call home. They aren’t homeowners, in the strict sense of ownership. Yet they experience a ‘possession of space’ their actions and feelings in it symbolic of their belonging.

James: You can’t like... you can’t worry about what other people think or like you know just the way society is right? Like the thing that is good about society is ‘cause you kind of need somewhere to go, right, to start. But, I mean after that you’ve got to make it right for yourself.

“Home is What You Make It”

Shorty: ...home is what you make it.

Carolyn: Home is what you make it?

Shorty: Yeah, it’s what you make it. Pretty much what we’ve been talking about.

As Shorty so emphatically claims “home is what you make it” she and I are

discussing the physical spaces of home. There is much to discuss about the meaning of the room we are in. Each object in the room has been chosen, discussed, and contributes to Shorty's home as she has made it. Talking, choosing together, she and her boyfriend cleaned and decorated the room together. The room is not just prepared for my viewing of it – it is ready for their future together.

*The den becomes even more untidy as they dig through the piles of posters and pictures, selecting one, discarding another. A small framed watercolour, a kitten playing with a ball of yarn, is held for a long time. Looking at it together, she is speaking earnestly, quietly, he listens. Concern crosses his features as he reaches out a hand to touch her shoulder; they pause staring at the simple picture. Painted by an aunt, who is dying of cancer, in pain at this very moment, elsewhere, but also here, in thoughts, in the little painting? It hangs on the wall – a reminder of both the pain, and the moments together with her. Though he's never met this aunt, he starts to know her, her history joins with his in the telling of her story. Her painting hangs in their den.*

#### Constructing Boundaries: Relating with Privacy

Home is a meeting of personal, private space, and space that is shared with *outsiders*. As I enter these spaces as a particular outsider I am encountering spaces that have been prepared for me. As previously discussed, there is a presentation of the best space for the visitor.

*Shorty carries the pile of dirty clothes through the doorway, from their bedroom into the adjoining laundry room. She feels resentment that this room, used by everyone in the house is only accessible through their bedroom. Often people use not just the laundry room, but their bedroom becomes a kind of TV room for people. Walking back out to their bedroom, she glares at the three of them, all inhabitants of this home together, but*

*unpopular with her today, at this moment, as they sit on their bed watching an inane show. She stuffs the words into herself and after a satisfying stab at them with her eyeballs she thumps up the stairs, and outside for a much-needed cigarette.*

*The rumble of her stomach intrudes; the cigarette is not helping it subside as it often can. Time for a bite to eat. The kitchen is awash with used, unwashed pots and pans. She opens the cupboard – what she prepares will determine what she must wash up in order to get the work done. She's thinking she needs something fast and easy, the rumble calls for speed, perhaps that macaroni and cheese she picked up at the food bank – but it's not there. Gone, her quick option, a one pot option, taken – she lifts and turns the sauce pan on top of the pile in the sink – clinging to the sides, little orange noodles, her macaroni and cheese! Someone is going to hear the sound of her voice raised – she'll get to the bottom of this! “How was lunch?” she bellows down the stairs. She's ready to roar her anger at the unsuspecting and well-fed group lounging in front of the television.*

*They all sit in the living room, overflowing from the furniture they sprawl on the floor, or intimately across each other. The phone rings, “It's for you Shorty”. It is Carolyn calling to arrange a time and place to meet. To begin their research interviews. Shorty scans the room, decides in a moment that this place is not suitable. They arrange to meet next week, they will talk together at Carolyn's office. The office is a place of familiar conversations past. Shorty expects that there she will not have to suffer the music on the stereo, or people everywhere. A place of no interruptions, she thinks of the possibilities and it is an easy decision.*

As one of many people in the home Shorty recognizes that she has little influence on much of the space, and she cannot prepare it for my visit. Shorty is also concerned that she will be unable to fully participate in our conversation if she is feeling constrained by

the presence of others. There are enough people in the household that the opportunities for her to be alone for an hour or more during the day are few. Her attention is constantly drawn to the need to direct others who make her feel encroached upon and to be open to consider that her presence might be a constraint on others as well. As a new member of the household her needs are often secondary.

### Sovereignty

We knock as we enter a room. We call out as we come down the stairs. We turn our music off as the hour becomes late, or if we are asked to. We close our door if we wish to be alone, leaving it open if others are welcome, and we are not making a lot of noise. We move about the spaces of home without breaking each other's belongings, or bumping harshly into one another. Privacy is both a factor of the physical space and of respect for those with whom spaces are shared. The everyday sharing of space allows us to show those with which we share it our respect for them in many little unspoken ways.

As the space of home becomes crowded, these small acts become difficult to accomplish – there is only so much space, and we are either offending others, or constraining ourselves, as we become crowded. Later, as people leave the place to the four remaining people, Shorty feels more at home in this place where she resides. She earns acceptance, and she is even given some space that she may alter to suit her. She feels recognized by those who live with her as being at home. These distinctions in space are more significant than the spaces themselves. Upon being given scope, Shorty experiences more opportunities to shape her home.

Who resides in these spaces with us? What occupies them, and occupies us is beyond the furniture, but that is not to say that these things do not hold meaning. In her writing as a young woman, Keller (1904) expresses anticipation of a life that includes the

freedom to do what she wishes to do in her own home.

*Unlocking the door he descends the full, narrow staircase. Throwing his bag on his bed, tired, and tense, he slumps on the couch and turns on the TV. It's beautiful out, a sunny late summer day, but the tension doesn't leave unless he's here, home, always a little dim, the basement suite is still a sanctuary. He'd spent the summer away from here, convincing everyone that he meant to stay clean. He'd convinced himself a long time ago, crime was too much trouble, too much pain, and he'd been clean for years. Now he was putting in the time, working with the outdoor program staff, chopping wood, hiking long miles, missing his daily shower – he'd done it all. But convincing them, being believed, it had been worth the effort to return.*

*The tension ebbed as he smiled to himself, skipping through the channels looking for something worth watching. All that was left was time, six months of probation with no breaches, that is what he needed to end this lengthy nightmare. He would just have to stay here, at home, especially on weekends. Too bad he had to go to school and work, but at least his boss was happy to take him back. After a summer in jail, in the group home, and out in the mountains in the outdoor program, he'd worried his boss would think he was a bad guy. If he wasn't at work, or school, he'd watch TV, have the guys come and visit, and try not to leave. The police couldn't find fault if they never saw him.*

Regardless of, or perhaps because of the relative smallness of its potentially defined physical space, home may provide less constrained experiences than those encountered in 'the world at large'. Keller (1904) reminds us that there is some sense of freedom in the spaces of home. We may become the rulers of our small castles.

Pollan (1997) feels a need for a space where he may shut the door, and enjoy enough sovereignty to maintain it in a manner that he prefers, despite the fact that others

might proclaim its state a form of chaos. He reminds us that what ever we do in a space that is ours, it becomes ours in the choosing too. By choosing to clean, or not, by playing our music loudly, or quietly reading a book with the window open to let in a cool breeze, we may also claim **sovereignty**.

Phoebe: I'm still at [my foster mom's] house, and that will always be my house, you know? I got really... I felt invaded, when I was on the verge of moving out, moving here, and there was this new girl. When I left, she ended up moving into my room. When I came... before I even got all my stuff, they took all my stuff out of my room, put it in the living room for me to come and get, and she moved into my room.

The many little things that were particularly hers meant painful invasion to her when they were piled on the living room floor. These things no longer had a place in the most important home she had ever had; they were just collected there, waiting for her to remove them. Phoebe made an enormous sacrifice for her son, removing her things from this place of home to go and live with her mom and her mom's boyfriend.

Phoebe: I go over, and I visit. I still go through the fridge, like it's my house. I grab the remote, and hold on to it, I watch what I watch, and everybody watches it too because I'm watching it.

Carolyn: And you have the remote!

Phoebe: Exactly! [Laughing]. That's the way it was, and now the only way I can watch what I want is if I'm down here, but I'm all alone. I can't talk to anybody, the way I can talk to my [foster mom].

#### Fragile Separation: Self in the World

As we come together in strength, we may draw *comfort* through presence. We

become part of a circle of shared emotions, private interactions, a place of vulnerability in the center, yet strength through shared vulnerability. Inner and outer, private and public, there are boundaries in being present, there seems to exist a fragile separation between people who share our home, people who do not. The fragility of the separation arises in the ever expanding and contracting notions of where home begins and ends, where we begin and end, and where the world presents – how do we explore a presence that overlaps and contradicts? Shared home, at first a living together, but perhaps a history of living together may remain long after separate residences exist? We may live alone, but with the presence of comfort through shared vulnerability. Shared experiences may occupy those spaces with us. When we reside alone there seems a tendency to draw comfort from some sort of presence.

*He opens the top of the tank, sprinkling in the food. Their bright bodies shimmer in the light, as they dart to the surface, the hum of the pump can be felt along the rim where he rests his hand. Moving to the kitchen rubbing his bleary morning eyes – the alarm felt like it went off too early. The northern morning is still dark, darker still in this subterranean basement home. He pours the dry cereal into the bowl, using the last of the milk and grabbing some lettuce leaves from the crisper, he moves back into the glow of the tanks in the living room. He drops the lettuce into the other two tanks, most in with the lizard, and a little for the frogs. He flicks the light on in the lizard's tall narrow tank, and settles himself on the smooth leather couch. He props a bare foot on the edge of the coffee table, and cupping the bowl in his hand, his elbow resting on his knee, he turns on the TV. The sound of voices, in the background the hum of the pump mixing the water, the glow of the light a presence next to him as the lettuce is 'discovered'. Quietly they chew together.*

### The Power of Place

The physical spaces of home seem to be symbolic, expressions of power. James has chosen the living room furniture, decorated the room with substantial, plaque mounted posters, and he expresses ease in this location. While Phoebe glances around the room in a worried manner, wondering at the presence she expects to join her in the space. What will they think?

Phoebe: There's a lot of times when I don't feel comfortable. When I hear that garage door open I look around and I see if anything is out of place or something is messy, or I didn't do something ... or I quickly run in the shower and have a real fast shower because my mom's boyfriend bitches about the water. I shouldn't have to worry about that... If this is your home, this is your happy place. You should be able to take an hour-long shower, and just stand there, and relax. Have a bath for three hours, put in more hot water and think of nothing but 'Aaaah this is so nice' - you know? I had a bath for an hour, and I got in shit because my mom's boyfriend needed to use the bathroom. There's a bathroom downstairs, and I got in trouble because I'm trying to relax.

The idea of a place grounding us, helping us retain our sense of self is powerful (Miller, 1996). There is a sense that where we come from is as much a part of our home as the places we have lived since. Yet, we can never return to the home of our childhood. Time is always moving us forward and beyond our past experiences. What Phoebe believes is that she needs to leave. Her voice is silenced by the presence of people who occupy the spaces with particular things and most significantly, expectations – ideas in conflict with Phoebe's own. She constructs herself through her discomfort, and through not wanting to linger, she is shaping her meaning of home. Her home is different from

that of her mother and her mother's boyfriend – a different sense, mood, and a place beyond their influence. Is there such a place? In reacting to a mood, rejecting it, there is also influence (Cresswell, 1996).

In returning to a place where we were once children there is recollection, shaped not only by the experience of childhood itself, but also by our distance from it. To illustrate the meanings he associates with recalling home, James uses the house as a metaphor for the meaning of home in his life. Moving through the house, from room to room, we may linger in the moment to look around at where we are, but the doors behind us close. Turning back, to return to a favored room, the door may open, but what we find is altered. A little like Alice in Wonderland, the meaning of home is presented as a fantastical maze. The rooms of experience are ever changing, and we, compelled to move through them. James' metaphor of the house resonates. He is able to explain a complex idea with the familiar experience of walking through ordinary spaces. The recollection resides in us, echoes of places reflected in who we are.

### Family

James: I want to go to like England and Ireland and that kind of thing. I've gotta see where like my family came from, you know?

Writer: Do you believe that there is something in the places that we come from that can tell us sort of who we are?

James: Well yeah obviously where you come from is [pause] but where I come from now isn't like, I come from Canada right? So I'm going to be Canadian no matter what, but the thing is if I move somewhere else I'll have Canadian in me, so it's you, that's where you come from right? And also part of me comes from, like I am Irish mostly right, so I think like it gets passed on – traditions and

stuff.

Where are we from? Who shapes us from the past, with traditions, rituals of everyday living, perhaps shaped themselves by a place far across the sea from where we are now. The green dampness of the Emerald Isle, does it reside in us somewhere? What of the world we've altered, are echoes of the time before European colonisation still in us? What do we not know, but still, somehow, suspect we do know? How to drag a fishing boat up a rocky beach, or how to find food in a wintry forest of evergreens. Are these things somewhere, dormant in us? What of this old knowledge informs us every day, without our knowledge? The threads of time stretch long into the past – we meet the shadows of ancient family reflected in our mirrors. To visit those places where they lived acknowledges connection, connections to the places we reside, and a shaping in them.

James: There are certain parts of you, morals and stuff that you'll keep, right? That's what shapes you into who you are, and that can't change. It's kind of like a big mountain, right? But it can get chipped away at, and pieces, certain little tiny pieces of it might fall off.

Belonging, being in longing, always seeking – longing, while at the same time no longer longing for it, but being in hope. Immersed in our expectations, we are home together, in company, being in place and not alone. We are born into this group, they occupy us, as they occupy our spaces when we are isolated from them – they never really leave us, we never really leave them. We are part of something larger than we are – a place, a family, a culture, and the world.

In constructing our self we look to those ideas we believe have the most meaning, and attach ourselves to those meanings – so that they become our own. In these constructions may be seeds of racism, other prejudices, but also seeds of being part of

something larger, an important belonging. A comforting construction to which we are attached – a loose grip, surrounding embrace, or chains of misery?

*Phoebe held his head so that he wouldn't choke on the vomit. It spilled out of him, smelling sourly of his insides, and the alcohol he'd had too much of. He is her brother. They could speak of things no one else was able to hear. Feeling sad, being a failure, rejected, harassed, then loved again -- too many words had been flung their way – they were starting to stick, like the vomit to the velvety nap of the couch. It is awkward holding him, with her stomach pressed against the solid edge of the couch he lies upon. Her baby inside, he is almost ready to emerge – to be born into this family. She reaches forward and brushes a damp strand of hair away from her brother's eyes – he would do the same for her.*

*At her mother's house the stucco wall provides the view from the kitchen window, the house next door. This is where her brother lives, and where she happens to be just now. She is a sometime visitor, but a sister too. She escapes the critical eyes of her residence, and slips next door. Taking care of each other, she and her brother, present to each other's weaknesses. She is an extraordinary witness to moments of despair. She's supposed to be 'home' before now, but she is compelled to stay, to care, she cannot leave. She anticipates a lecture, wishing for a small moment that she hadn't come, if she weren't here she wouldn't know. But she knows, and in knowing he has made himself so ill she cannot now leave. She's stuck here, for now.*

Life thrust upon her, emotions leading, shaping, and directing choice. Phoebe torn between mom's expectation to be 'home' and the larger expectation that *we take care of family*. Mom the messenger of both lessons at different times, Phoebe is in tension, between what she knows is expected, and what she knows is happening before her. She

becomes a part of what is before her in the knowing, and being more at home in that moment of knowing here and now, she both wants and doesn't want to return 'home' to her mother's house.

*His younger brother doesn't live with them anymore. James is on his way to pick him up from the group home. Take him to the mall; maybe buy him a CD or something. Spend time with him, be a brother. He's had problems learning in school, and a hard time keeping friends. His brother's high young voice had often filled their house with angry sound-- met with a deeper resonating sound. His own angry voice responded more often than not. They always could get each other going. His brother had been hard to live with, he could see now that perhaps he had been too. Maybe he still was? Sadly this was a possibility they could only explore now while they lived apart.*

*Dad wouldn't have either of them, or they wouldn't have him. It didn't matter in the end, they couldn't, wouldn't live with him. Too unreliable, though he was always there in the evenings, after work, on weekends, but how he was there just didn't work out -- it felt like there was no pleasing the man. They'd all been out of hand. Doors slammed in his mind. Mom had to live-in with her clients, and the social workers wouldn't let him take care of his brother. Nothing like a long record with the police to get people to judge you. As if he didn't care, what did they think being an older brother was about? The best he could do today was to make sure they saw each other, talked, and hung out. At the mall, in movie theatres, sometimes when mom was home on a day off they could have a meal at home together -- the way it was supposed to be.*

*His father, a few other relatives; they labeled him a bad person because of his criminal behaviour. They had offered no support while he was struggling, so he refused to have anything to do with them. His brother, the other family members who had been*

*there, through the revolving door of the Young Offenders' Centre, when he had most needed those connections. Now he tried to show how much they meant to him. It was never enough, but he knew they would do the same.*

Moments stolen in public places, rare meals together recalled like a treat, were noticeable, outstanding in their rarity. Being a family, apart, but together. Thoughtful about a role taken for granted in the moments of living together, James is sustaining connections – always responding to last minute calls with affirmative gestures, taking in the mail, or driving his nephew somewhere. Being a family has become a series of actions. Living alone in the basement suite, where his mother stays on her few days off a month, James reaches out for connections that remain important. They connect him to something larger than himself – family.

*The music of the clock radio blasts into their room, she moves quickly to turn it off, too quickly, and bangs her arm on the edge of the table. The pain has added to the noise and she's awake – he snorts his disgust at being awakened next to her. The fullness of her bladder gets her out of the shared warmth of the bed – walking through the piles of dirty laundry in the dimness of the basement room; she finds the light in the bathroom. On her way back, she grabs clothes from the piles. She dresses herself, and throws a shirt at his head, still poking out of the twisted covers on the bed. Pert remarks, teasing words, they call each other pet names, she calls him slow. Her stomach confirms it is after noon – cold pizza and orange juice await them upstairs in the kitchen.*

*She chose him. They chose each other. Finding herself she encountered him, and they touched each other in their need. Her parents were divorced before she could walk, but the anger had simmered between her parents afterwards, it still did seventeen years later. An invisible family member, this anger had defined them. His mother and father's*

*voices had once filled these spaces with angry words, so hurtful that his mother had left. Divorce, it sounds like such a short, small, division, but it had existed for some time before the word was even said, and now she expected it would linger like her parents' had for years beyond the mere word. Like an epilogue, divorce was just another fight, a small stone in the middle of a pile of gravel.*

*Shorty had already been his girlfriend when things started really unraveling for his parents. He'd come to her full of pain, and they'd had their own fights then. Sometimes nothing she'd said would set him off. Unlike his parents they had stopped fighting. Somehow in their own words they had figured out that they'd been fighting his parents' battles. The anger of his parents, and his own pain, had seeped into their relationship. Now it made them feel smarter somehow, like they'd figured out a nasty problem that could have torn them apart. They are still here, together.*

#### "The Big Picture"

James: You want to see where it all came from, right?... I think it's especially since I'm young and I'm learning about myself, right?... Just seeing the big picture, where you came from, you know? There's a time when you're going to settle down right, but when you're young you shouldn't be normal, or ordinary, or anything. You should actually go out and discover new things, and when you go to these different places, you'll learn so much more about yourself right?"

Both new discovery and old stability exist in James' quest. It would be ordinary to stay in one place, making it home. He hopes to find himself in changing circumstances, and to find in a place a sense of what was when his family traditions were constructed and transported to the New World. His journey reflects an earlier journey that influenced

how he had been raised.

*Through the open window she can smell the cut grass. The air is dry, with dust and dirt mixing with the grassiness. It smells warm, cold days don't take up the smells the same way. She knows she can wear a pair of shorts today, and maybe even a tank top. Walking down the steps, Shorty leaves the house, with a sweatshirt tied about her waist, just in case the day changes its mind. It so often does in this place – changes.*

The very unpredictable weather, and our being prepared, acknowledges that we are immersed in something larger than our houses, our family, even our community. The world is constantly testing us, and we may feel 'at home' on a warm sunny day, but betrayed by 'home' as the hail beats our heads in the late afternoon. Yet this unpredictability also defines us beyond the comfort and discomfort in the variations of the weather. We develop a sense of pride at having endured the changes, and so in some ways we accept the discomfort as part of our home here too.

James: We're all really proud [that] we can live in these tough winters... it makes us tougher somehow. Another thing I came to realise is ... you know, we think it's so hard here and it's so cold, but what would you rather have, wars? 'Cause that's what it's like in Europe, there's always wars over there, right? ...Over here we don't fight against each other, right? ... It's so easy for us to sit back and say... it's so easy.

James both takes pride in a sense of 'toughness', but he also considers the larger world, and perceives our difficulties in a new light. Everyone seems to have it tough some times, and he would rather deal with the vagaries of the Canadian winter, than the torn social fabric of human conflict. He perceives Canada as a sanctuary from the sort of toughness that comes from living in a war zone.

*There were a lot of people he knew whose parents hadn't been born here. They were different, but there were so many distinctions, yet so many people who seemed 'different', that difference itself had become ordinary. He felt proud of living here, in a country people wanted to come to. He liked feeling part of an enormous welcoming group of people whose families didn't stretch far back in time in this place either. Everyone's from somewhere, and we're all from here, even in our differences, there is still that about us which is the same.*

## CHAPTER SIX: HOW ARE THINGS AT HOME?

Knowing we are home, we may be comfortable, and we may be comforted. Shaping our world, we are also being shaped. Home is both within us, and outside us – both sustaining and limiting us (Wilson, 2000). The world has many landscapes to call home, some I know, some I imagine, and others never occur to me. Rising water, encroaching sand, buffeting wind, flowing mud, all may shape and change our world, our homes. Yet in the midst of change there is also a timeless sense of sameness, a recollection in the changes. Recalling the trees, as we grow and they grow with us. This world I call home is particular, a horizon stretching before and behind me, seen only through my experiences, my choices and yet at the same time can it be thrust upon me?

In this ever changing dance of movement, ideas, thoughts, and positions, where does being home lie? What remains of us in places? How do we take up the new when the experiences of the old still reside in us? Perhaps there can be a continued movement, and simultaneous retaining, a constant new production through what has occurred. Embedded in language and culture – ideas are in motion, noticed, invisible, whispers heard, shouts ignored – they are in our very humanity. Ideas, thoughts, have a way of forming, coalescing, and just as swiftly reforming as new notions – until the latest thought bears little resemblance to the original thought from which it sprang. Understanding experience involves trying to understand the history of that experience (Gadamer, 1999). Though home is ancient, cumbersome in our history of thought – being at home, thinking of home comes to us in a familiar way. “To recognise one’s own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other” (Gadamer, 1999, p.14).

Trying to understand one another opens the possibilities we may create together.

Evolving out of language we shape one another's realities by the things we say – and do not say. Spoken out loud, shared in conversations new realities evolve and become possible. As a mental health therapist, a teacher, or a social worker it may be useful to recall Manchester's (1992) insular villagers. *"One consequence of medieval peril was that people huddled closely together in communal homes. They married fellow villagers and were so insular that local dialects were often incomprehensible to men living only a few miles away"* (Manchester, 1992, p.6). We too may come from the same city, or country, but can we claim to understand one another?

A traveller in the Gobi desert, far from his homeland, grapples with the frightening scenery stretched before him.

"In Japan the eye is never stretched, but pulled up short everywhere by mountains, hills, forests, cultivation. Everything is scaled down, knitted together, compressing the individual... Here the eye is pulled to its limit, there are no boundaries... I am frightened by this space. We Japanese are not used to such freedom. We are comfortable only where there are limits. We have a need for tight controls about us in all areas of life. In a larger figurative expanse we are lost and do not know what response is demanded of us" (Chand, 1996, p.72-73).

Residing in this thought is meaning in personal struggle, a reaching out to spaces and asking for them to define us. Culture in place, and place inspiring culture – wrapped up too tightly to unravel, but perhaps recognisable as a tapestry in which we move. Home, a sacred space nestled in our particular world. Recognising yourself in the world and your assumptions about this world begins the circular process of asking and answering questions about home.

To take you, the reader toward new possibilities I must take you backward. Highlighted herein are new thoughts presented and woven around some of the *original thoughts* that began this journey of inquiry. What we come to understand is related to what has been known. Without knowing home or constructing home there is no being home, yet being home can also be easily lost. Knowing, constructing and being all overlap, occurring simultaneously. The distinctions between being, knowing and constructing home are messy, tricky, and sometimes not there at all; however in being, knowing and constructing together we may leave the edges of home, where there is a tendency to linger. We may turn towards the experiences of living in home, being home.

“How Are Things at Home?” Clinical Possibilities in Home

*Home, a place of everlasting, unparalleled happiness, what a burdensome meaning for such an everyday experience!* The illusion of home as heaven may involve burdensome meanings, but it is also about the circle of experience. The starting point and the destination, to talk of home provides an opening to experiences, hope, and expectations. In meeting about mental health we are guided by the agenda of those who arrive with concerns, but we may better encounter them in our questions. When we ask, “How are things at home?” we ask a complex and useful question – underneath this question is the question “How is being in the world for you?” Isn’t being in the world what much of our clinical work in mental health is about?

*As nurse clinicians in outpatient mental health settings, or possibly in many other settings, we may improve the scope of our practice by attending to the meaning of home with our clients (Gadamer, 1996; Fitchen, 1989).* Before engaging further with you around the clinical possibilities I have encountered in home, I must first enlarge upon my prejudgements related to the

statement above. While in the proposal stage of this process, I thought that home had some clinical worth that we had not previously attended to in very deliberate ways. Is it any surprise then that I found what I was looking for? It is in the manner of this emerging understanding, and the nuances of it that I must linger in order to credibly relay these findings to you, the reader.

How was home presenting to me as significant before I began the process of researching it? In speaking with adolescents in my clinical practice, home seemed to arise in the actions of living everyday in ways that provoked significant responses in myself, in agents of child welfare and the justice system. Their behaviour presented as unusual and even alarming. These young people were running away from home, or assaulting their family members. Often I met these young people as they were being placed in foster care, or released after being incarcerated in various settings over which they had little control. While the 'where' of their everyday lives was such a constant question, the expectations I had of home, imparted through not just my personal upbringing, but also through my clinical education, seemed limiting. Assuming that home meant stability, being nurtured, loved, a place with people you could count on seemed to position the youth I was working with outside the accepted ideal most of the time. Most significantly, there did not seem to be many opportunities for these young people to return to a 'typical' place of home – and yet they still had expectations to complete school, maintain friendships, engage in some gainful form of employment, and one day have families of their own.

This sense of limitation led me to place the notions of home in question. While I considered that home had clinical value, it was from a position that young people were carrying on with their lives in meaningful ways despite their 'unusual' circumstances. Their journeys were not smooth, but they were not hopeless either, and that sense of hope

left me with the belief that there were things about home that I was missing because of my clinical assumptions.

Through the engagement in research I encountered home more easily than I thought I would. The popping of the tape recording startling both the participants and myself illustrates the sense that we were easily carried away by home together. The questioning of home opened new ways of engaging with these youth. The very manner of questioning something they had primarily heard about in idealised ways provided significance to our conversations. To pause and ask what their experiences of home had been, and most importantly what they thought about those experiences already lessened the influence of dominant ideas of home because these ideas include a code of silence. *We do not air private thoughts and experiences of home in public*: this belief exists in the ideology of home – contributing to notions of privacy that restrict possibilities.

Beyond the ease of our conversations lies another significant finding – that our conversations about home brought up so much. Home as a nexus to being in the world arose. *Staying on topic* became an interesting notion, because though what we were speaking about related to home, it was so much more than the dwelling places, or even family. Was it the ideology of home that held the *topic*? To question home I tried to keep the idea of ‘not knowing’ in my awareness, and as questions emerged – often steeped in ideology, I stopped and asked questions in different ways, or questioned the questions themselves. My participants asked these questions too, and we would catch ourselves using language that implied meaning that we had not intended. In preparing myself for not knowing I was more comfortable with the movement beyond the expected. The participants soon assumed this sense of not knowing and questioning assumptions themselves. Had they questioned home silently before? Our conversations seemed to give

rise not simply to tentative, newly generated ideas, but older private thoughts that confidently contradicted ideology seemed also to arise.

I assume that questions not only drive research, this practical occupation with ideas, but they are also deeply useful in practice. A question may resonate with prejudgements, but the tone of asking invites the mind to places it may have never been, or places it has only been alone, perhaps providing an opening for unspoken ideas. The notion of home as a nexus, a connection to experience leaves me with a new understanding. In asking about home, in an unexpected way, we open the door to questioning the system in which we are immersed, and of which we ourselves are a part.

To question home paradoxically brought more into home, rather than excluding things that had meaning. These adolescents had lived life on the edges of accepted social expectations of home, and had found meaning there, but these meanings could not contribute as powerfully as they might if they remained silent. To speak of home in new ways, out loud, was a powerful experience both for myself, and I believe for the young people who participated in this study. While, as you know from the first three chapters of this work, I began with some things in mind, it was the very questioning that emerged as a most significant therapeutic possibility. I had not expected this finding, and did not encounter it until I spent time immersed in the words, the transcripts, and began to consider them as a whole.

### Home as a Nexus

To speak of experience brings it into being. We may acknowledge ourselves, our position in the world through language. In home there exists ourselves, our world, and the connectedness of the two. Home presents as a nexus of experience of everyday life – through which our ideas are threaded. How often do we ask questions about home out

loud? To talk of home, the ordinary experiences can be lifted out of the shadows. Leaving the edges, of youth, or mental health, we may be drawn into being in the world. We arise in these everyday experiences, emerging through the language of home is the language of self in the world. When we speak out loud there is an implied thought that we assume occurs before the speaking. To ask of home, to question the ordinary we acknowledge that it is accepted to question these ordinary things – even that it might be important to do so.

The ordinary living we do everyday does not necessarily stand out for any of us, where do we even begin such a conversation? I suggest that many possible beginnings might be in the question: “How are things at home?” To linger in conversation about home is not a waste of time, nor simply an opportunity to form a therapeutic relationship. It is to speak aloud the notions of being in the world that may have begun the journey to join in therapeutic conversation in the first place. James’ life on and now off probation, Phoebe’s impending motherhood, and Shorty’s decision to move in with her boyfriend – these were important experiences in the lives of the participants. These experiences were all connected in a significant manner to home, and to being in home. Focusing on ‘home’ these significant ways of being in the world unfolded in conversations that began more easily than I had predicted they might, and they unfolded richly.

To ask about home and how we come to know home in particular ways is to open up conversation in a relatively non-threatening manner. We do not think about home as much as we might, and to talk about it in the everyday may at first seem to invite a level of detail that could take years to relay. However, what comes forth in a dialogue together tends to be constructed between the speakers – new ways of considering home, and its importance can be born in dialogue. To consider our past thoughts, our thinking then, is

to consider them in a particular way, particular to this time and place. As we consider what has been, and what we hope will be we remain in the present, our thoughts are contextualised by our presence in the world now. “The work of understanding and interpretation always remains meaningful (Gadamer, 1999, p.402).

Home is both a starting point and a destination. Large circles of lifespan development and small everyday circles arise in being home. In a circular manner we leave home most days to return at some point later that same day. To work, to school, shopping, or a walk, like the coils of a spring we go round and round. This leaving is not necessarily complete, because home extends to community, neighbourhood, and even to a nation. Moving through home, there is constant recognition of self in place. There is a constant leaving and returning, going from and towards home. This movement is not such a dramatic movement, but it is a rhythmic parting and reengagement. It is like breathing in and out, should the rhythm stop we'd be uncomfortably holding our breath or fighting to suck in the vital gasses, but in the constant and sometimes subtle movements we live and grow.

We pay more attention to home when it presents as missing, or a problem. Another way to think of it is that when home becomes open to question, this questioning seems to occur along its edges. There is much to understand in home when we ask how it is that we find ourselves inside experiences of home. As we move, feel, and are touched by space, people, things – feeling at home through our sense of comfort, and our actions to create that comfort should it be temporarily lost. We share ourselves with others, with the world. We shape the earth through the planting of seeds in a garden, and construct home in the rhythmic sweeps of the broom on the front porch. We are relating, welcoming, and permitted a dialogue with others, a shared contribution to space, to

everyday living. These feelings and actions, though not necessarily dramatic, speak of being home.

Precariously perched atop a circle of thought, being home is as much about dreaming as it is about the here and now. In one breath a conversation twists from then, now and what it is hoped will be. Perhaps these conversations are all too rare, or they may be conversations with the self, longing to be translated into sound. There are voices seeking, weaving, and wondering about home. In questioning home we tend to linger on the edges of being, but in being a youth, no longer a child, and not yet an adult, there is a sense of being on the edges much of the time. There is a sense of being home around the edges in youthfulness, and in being around the edges in mental health labels; there is also meaning accessible in everyday living.

Home threads through more of life than presents in the ideology. Beyond the ideology lies our everyday movement through the world. Perhaps because home seems to draw us to linger in its edges, so much seems to touch upon it. What surrounds and encompasses home has much to do with us, and to ask about home, and then to pause there rather than moving on too quickly, more meanings emerge. In therapeutic situations we may do more than touch on home, we may dwell there in conversation and therapeutic possibilities may unfold in a meaningful way.

### Being in the World

Home has acquired such enduring ideology that we do not usually think to question it. In researching and writing of home I am pulled in by the ideology, as none of us are immune to that in which we are immersed. Gadamer (1999) reminds us that living itself is interpretation. As Phoebe views disapproval in the looks of her mother, James hopes to find some answers about who he is in another country, and Shorty creates home

in a new place they are being interpretive. To speak of these experiences out loud the participants came to question how they had come to interpret their lives in particular ways. The language of the ideology is often implied, rather than spoken aloud, yet in our conversations contributing to this study, we spoke it aloud together. Where the ideas of home come from became open to question, and we started to lay the tapestry before us in language. What we wove included ideal hopes and expectations, but we could engage with them openly as we broke the silence of ideology.

The ways of asking about experience influence the conversations that unfold. To ask about home it is possible to ask the often intimidating question (how is being in the world for you?) in a very non-threatening manner – and to engage with emotion in a meaningful way. Home opens therapeutic possibilities, and if considered in multiple, complex ways, can take us beyond the address on a file, to the person being in the world in particular ways.

There is a lived contradiction in home. The sense of home evolving may paradoxically give us access to both our own stable nature and our evolving self. To speak of the everyday experiences of being home evokes not only the context, and possibilities to explore its influences, but also the possible reflection of self in that context. What remains of me from time to time and place to place? We may better access our selves through our interactions in place – and in home most significantly.

Dominant in our thoughts of home is the ideology--that home is unchanging, and stable, and that we are grounded by this reality and it forms us. Yet, paradoxically at the same time home may evolve with us. The invisible ideas related to home were brought forth more easily in my research interviews than I had thought possible. It is significant that the opportunity to explore these ideas invited so much more than ideology even

though a prevailing idealised version of home was often also present. In speaking of home in a questioning, open manner, there was more room available for these notions of home to be spoken out loud. To speak of comfort, the ideology, also brought forth discomfort, and confusion that might not have arisen in our language had we left home behind in our conversation.

### Engaging with Youth

What does it mean to be a teenager? The past and the future horizon are mixed, turning upon themselves. *Healthy development through this intense life stage is dependent on a balance between "connectedness and separateness, belonging and individuation, accommodation and autonomy" (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999, p.9).* Youthful, full of potential, considering the future horizon, the past horizon, and paying attention to how *now* is influenced by our thoughts of both seems to imply a sense of connectedness and separateness. Balanced precariously, we may be steadied, or completely unseated depending on that connectedness. Connectedness needs to be languaged, to be spoken out loud to be maintained. To be silenced is to be set adrift.

During adolescence the ways of being with others in the world are tried on in different ways, in different places; home becomes more and less at the same time. As the participants expected more opportunities to contribute to home, there was a simultaneous hope and expectation that what they had to say and do might also matter more. In adolescence, as we broaden our experiences of people and places, other spaces begin to open up and contribute to a sense of home beyond the original physical structure of home. There may be an expanding home, where sharing with others is as important as sharing with our biological family. Homes multiply, expand, shrink and change.

Emerging is adolescence as a confusing time, a time when the ways of being home are less comfortably familiar – less related to the ideology of living in home.

It is in seeking, having a sense of requiring more, and wanting change, that movement happens. In the flux of home, the messiness, the untidy experiences there is also much to contribute to the meaning of home. It is the mess that makes us question, that joins our conversations without an invitation, rudely awakening ideas of home that while hard, sad, or unpopular, shape us all the same.

While there may be ease in home, and seeking more ease at home may even be a goal of engaging with a mental health nurse, we must also awaken to the confusion and pain that also exist in our joining with the world. Language that speaks of home, as solely a place of ideal being not only misses the texture of everyday life, but evokes a hierarchical assumption. This language speaks of the ideal of the questioner, looking down upon the listener, and leaves the impression that anything less than ideal is problematic. The client may be left with the impression that problems exist in their particular experience – even if they do not experience them as problems. When we limit the possibility of movement, this is a sad and hopeless expectation to sit in the conversational space between a helping professional and a client. The ideology of a questioner resides in their language, and the meanings implied may be more powerful than even the spoken invitation to question. While the ideology of home resides in our very language, when we ask questions of our questions along the way, everyday life emerges.

#### Acknowledging Emotional Knowing

*Not mere passive experiences, our emotions engage us actively with home, and even construct home (Jaggar, 1989).* Emotional conversations are

touched by experience. Being evocative of home without emotion is like trying to swim without arms or legs – emotions are directive of both being home, and the process of questioning it. In deliberately engaging with teens about home the possibility of having emotional, deeply meaningful conversations unfolded. To engage around home, and to talk of being home, the simple everyday experiences of being emerged. Everyday emotions were accessible, and uncontrived conversation was possible about significant life experiences. Prepared for the rough emotional texture, without attempting to smooth it out, but rather to accept and ask more of it created more conversation.

Speaking the words that give meaning to our feeling world – when do we peel the layers of safety away to share the sound of self? Tender, fragile, we are vulnerable, as we perhaps wonder what others might do with our feelings. Will they be returned to us intact, even strengthened? Could these feelings be trampled and bruised, aching, bleeding heavy on our chests? Conversely, a silent singing feeling may rise in us as we are heard, and our vulnerability is reflected tentatively back to us – this feeling may compel us to share again. In the places where we have been fulfilled, and our hearts have sung to us, we expect to return, to repeat the experiences. In the repetition of them we are wrought. “Repetition which moves forward, which is prior to presence and productive of it, and which, as a kind of reading, is therefore free to produce as it reads” (Caputo, 1987, p.121). Emotions are producing us, producing home, and constructing those ideas of presence through the repetition of them.

The participants spoke about home being where the heart is. What meanings do we enclose with the heart? Are they profound, meaningful? To know something in your heart, and to feel it in your heart is tantamount to knowing and feeling truth. Truth becomes lodged in home. Truth, a friend of strength and courage, is highly prized, even

sought after. Truth may be closely associated with how we feel, rather than the unemotional facts as they present to some. We may consider more about the heart, and what we know of it. Situated, in this culture, in this time we may encounter more meanings. The heart is in our chest, and as our emotions overwhelm us, we may feel physical discomfort in the midst of our internal struggle to let those emotions out in a particular way in the company of others.

We must undergo that struggle because to show emotion too soon, or in an uncontrolled way is frowned upon. 'Don't cry, don't cry' we are told, as we are soothed. It is better not to cry, we learn. The location of that early, youthful struggle is in the chest. Feel the thumping of your heart as you try to prevent it all tumbling out for everyone to see. The heart working harder as we struggle to control our emotions, is this the seat of our strength? Notions of private and public – expected behaviour – regardless of feeling, in spite of feeling. A culture of silence closes the possibilities.

### Occupying Home

Early on, in exploring the ideas of boundary between private and public spaces in homes, I at first encountered a strange experience. I was searching for a word that did not come forth. Was it already there, and I just could not find it, or does it not come forth with the meaning I sought because it does not exist? How can I be thinking of being home, and not have a name for those who 'are' home, and yet have few entitlements as 'owners'? Words for visitor, guest, or even stranger come readily to my vocabulary, and can be associated with those public spaces of home.

Public spaces, like the living room, and dining room often seem to be reserved for guests, rarely used by those who live their daily lives in a place. These public spaces are relatively easy to write about. The language of our public home is well prepared for us.

The experiences of having visitors, and being a visitor despite the variety of circumstances, follow familiar rules. As a guest, I *know* I am not to wander the house, peering into closets. There are unspoken rules of conduct on the part of a guest. I must ask to use the bathroom, and the homeowner will direct me: "It's the second door on the right down the hall".

In considering the boundaries implied by the language of guest, or visitor, we encounter a gap in the language of home. What of the language of living in home, being home? Can we see the invisible strands of the web, going not only outward, anchoring home to that which surrounds it, but also inward, to the experience of being home? Sometimes, to speak of what we feel – words do not come, or become twisted in our mouths into other words (Griffin, 1978).

Home is in our experiencing of the spaces of this world, and those who share them with us. Shouts of joy unchecked, cries of pain that bring a scrambled response from those nearby – sounding the depths of ourselves in home. Quiet bubbling from the tanks does not fill the room; rather it echoes its emptiness. The TV is needed to fill the room with conversation. Filling this place with the sound of human voice, the meaning of the words don't matter now, just that the sound of them is there.

Noise, quiet, shouts, words spoken in soothing tones -- can we speak without a sound? Speaking volumes in movement, expression, in the doing, and being home our bodies tell the stories we do not always have to say out loud. There is language in our movement. Perception is assumed in posture, the emotioning of the movement – thinking and doing – simultaneous being. Creeping down the stairs at the sound of the garage door speaks volumes – withdrawal, rejection, and fear. So too does the cleaning of a space without being told – speaking of occupancy, assuming a role *within* a household. What

we do when we are not heard using words may create room for the eventual speaking of those words. Foretelling a claim is the language of possessing space, moving through it in particular ways that bespeak ownership or not. "I am home." This language in the doing allows us to possess a space alone, without conversation. Alone we may hear ourselves; we are heard through the actions of doing, being home.

To stock the fridge, to wipe the counters after a meal, to leave personal articles in place, or remove them to a particular room – these actions are in the language of home. These actions speak of occupancy and ownership. We occupy a space when we are in it, residing, but we own it when we leave it with expectations of particular return. Crossing boundaries of space of meaning, we repeat our actions in the space, coming and going, filling it with the meaning that we matter, it matters, and we are home. To be at home does not necessarily involve a room, or a building, but there is that about us which is physical, and we occupy space. To ask yourself; "Is there room for me in this space?" "What will I do here that will make this place mine?"

### A Preferred View

Home, as a collection of experiences in place, is more animated than we might first imagine. Turning to the ideology of home in a house, a cement foundation, smooth, firm, walls, and floors that speak a particular squeak as we step on old places of passage. A house, at first, a solid, unanimated thing, speaking through its floors as we pass. A dwelling cannot return a bright smile with a similar expression. But, as we move within its walls, and through its rooms, it speaks a comfortable, familiar language.

We are social beings, embedded in society – somehow still attached, and yet, in retreat, somewhere in between we may gain new insights, new perspectives on our location in the world. Cleaning the home is done in 'secret' – not something we do with

visitors present. Rather private work, tucking things like balls of clean socks away, they *shouldn't* be seen. Those things that remain, the furniture in which we tuck away the trivial, the details of ordinary living; they are polished, dusted, presentable, as things should be. Who cleans? When does cleaning become something from which we take a sense of pride, occupancy of the space, and when does it feel burdensome? These young people use the acts of cleaning to declare occupancy, but when their actions imply some obligation to others these acts lose some meaning.

Cleaning is something we would not do as a guest in someone's home. It would say without words that the place is not clean enough for us, and would be perceived as an enormous criticism of their abilities, habits, and their perceptions. Phoebe was never a guest, as she was asked to clean, but she did not feel a sense of occupancy as James and Shorty did through their actions. Cleanliness has long been associated with our character – it is next to godliness. To be clean is to be good. A good person keeps *their* place clean, it is part of what makes it *theirs*. I am home here – our actions shout without sound. I have something important to offer this world reflects in the shiny surfaces.

Cleaning is associated with work – reflecting worth in the puritan roots of our North American culture. I work, therefore I am. Discipline is required to do work – is it the discipline we admire in the work? Perhaps more admired than the work itself, discipline is demonstrated not just while we do it, but it is believed to be part of our character, evidence that we are worthy in other situations beyond that of cleaning – valued for who we are more than what we can do. Phoebe may have felt her character to be in question when she was told to clean, rather than assuming she would work without direction. Again, touching on the notion of character, James refers to his life now as 'clean'. Clean choices, thoughtful choices made to keep himself unencumbered with an

adult police record and the limited choices that a life of crime would eventually place before him. Free from the intrusion of probation officers, counselling, and finally free of the fear of being breached and sent to the Young Offenders Centre. Living 'clean' gives James peace of mind.

On the front of the 2001 IKEA catalogue, in bright fuchsia letters, is the statement "uncover your inner home". Turning the cover open becomes much more significant with this statement lingering, flavouring the simple action of turning back a magazine cover. "Make the best use of your living space and you create a better space for living. Freeing your home of clutter makes it easy to get around, find what you need, feel like you're in control – and, in a very real way, provides true peace of mind" (p.5, IKEA, 2001).

Control, peace of mind, and finding what you need, who has not felt that they were missing, and seeking these things at some time? Thumbing through the pages it might appear obvious that marketing is the primary reason the catalogue exists – buy these things and you will have peace of mind. Selling furniture and house wares, the people from IKEA appear to market a particular vision of home to get people to buy their products. Tangled in the notions of the consumer society. What are we interested in, the products or the ideas they are meant to convey?

Arising out of this culture of ownership is the reality of everyday occupancy in home. Can we purchase peace of mind? As alluring as that may be, it is doubtful. It is attractive however to arrange a space for ourselves, to be in charge of selecting this item to go there, and that to go elsewhere. Perhaps peace of mind is attainable through these many little choices. Why is this attractive? What are we experiencing as we choose? Perhaps the notion of *taking control* of our immediate world, or exercising some power over place is attractive? Choosing particular things, to be arranged in a particular manner,

may mean that we create a sanctuary from the places and things over which we have no control – echoing Shorty’s statement that “home is what you make it”. Some might say that our ability to influence our world is tenuous in any case, but our perception of having choices might be what most matters.

### Finding Comfort

Struggling with the words, the limits of experience and language can leave us helpless. Our thinking is shaped by our situation today, shaped by thoughts of what has been, and what will be. Distinctions between thinking and being are not clear except in the interpretation of them. Interpretation is “the means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language” (Gadamer, 1999, p.402). With thoughtful reflection upon the many texts offered in the transcripts, one word that comes up time and time again is comfort. Comfort is not simply a container in which home and knowing reside, neither are our bodies, or our dwellings. Nor does comfort always require a relationship with someone, but rather our own reflections may at times suffice to comfort us, to console us. Even thought may provide us comfort. Is home such a comforting thought that even in thinking of it, we may draw comfort from it?

To be ‘left alone’ is much cherished in our society, because it is assumed that without that right we cannot truly be free (Etzioni, 1999). Freedom to choose to relax when our bodies or minds seek it out, and to be at ease in our everyday life, this is a kind of comfort. The notion of comfort seems most often to be drawn forth in combination with familiarity and privacy. What we *know* is in the familiar and what others do *not* is in our privacy. This knowing and not knowing emerge, but at times the very word home means what we know, while *other* experiences of the world take us up to the edge of the abyss (Levin, 1989). “Encountering the abyss in terror, in excitement, the thrill of not

knowing can still so often lead us back to what we know. The reasonable person needs to claim at some time that they know, in reference to *not knowing*, and return to the comfort of 'home', the comfort of ideology. Despite the discomfort, without questioning our ideas of what we claim to know of home, *does home then become the abyss*" (Wilson, 2000, p.14)?

Phoebe knows that this place she lives in is not home, and this is largely experienced through her discomfort in the place. While Shorty and James move through the act of living everyday with consideration towards those with whom they share the spaces of their residences, this considered reflection dominates Phoebe's experience. The comfort of everyone else who shares the space is interpreted by Phoebe to be so much more important than her own comfort. While she may physically recline upon a soft couch, she moves silently from the room when joined by others – she finds that comfort in relating is as important as her physical comforts.

Comfort fits well into the ideology of home. This notion arose often in my conversations with the participants. At times we may draw comfort from the ideology of home. Constructing home as somewhere beyond the world, we may feel protected from the world by being in such a place. Yet home is more than a place, and to acknowledge that home is immersed in the world can explain a lot about how we feel when we encounter discomfort in home. This reality is not acknowledged in the ideology. To leave the world disconnected from home implies that the problems in home are particular to the people in it.

#### New Directions for Future Inquiry

It is hoped that there are more possibilities residing in those who read this work than I can imagine and impart herein. To some degree those possibilities contribute to the

purpose of interpretive work. However, I do perceive a few possibilities that arise from this work. Both being home, and being an adolescent were brought into question here, and future research could include both or either phenomena in useful ways.

#### What Do We Mean by Adolescence?

To begin my first interviews with each of the participants I asked what it was that had caught their attention, and made them decide to participate in the study. I had expected them to talk of home, but what excited them most was that the study was about teenagers. They were pleased to be asked to talk about their lives, and that an adult would take the time and energy to focus on them. While together we turned to home, and my attention to their ‘youthful’ perspective was maintained, the question “What is it like to be a teenager today?” remains in my awareness. While we spoke of what it was like for them as teenagers relating to home, and home became much more than I expected it to be – I wonder where their responses to the more general question would have led us.

“I don’t enjoy coming home”... because my family treat me like a schoolboy. I’m on my own, and “then I come home to, like, prison...” (Gavin in Lewis, 1996, p.341). Imprisoned by place, by the history of interaction in that place, as a child – repetition of experience in other places cannot be disregarded, and what was once comforting becomes restrictive. Being an adolescent, neither a child, nor an adult, but sometimes a child with the responsibilities of an adult. Phoebe is a mother, and an adolescent. Shorty has left her mother’s house, though it still contributes to her being home at times, she is choosing to go or not to go to school, to work, and she is contributing more than a presence in her current household, she contributes a small amount of rent. James is now legally an adult, and yet he retains an enjoyment of the freedom of youth while he expects that it will become eroded as his adult responsibilities inevitably mount. Expectations, assumptions,

growing, changing, maintaining our sense of self, these all contribute to the notions of adolescence in particular ways. What does it mean to be an adolescent today? It might be time to linger in adolescence, question it, and expand the possibilities.

### Homelessness and Youthfulness

“Homelessness... has become one of the most intractable social problems of the last decade. While estimates of the size of the homeless population vary, there is broad consensus that the numbers are growing, with no abatement in sight. The adolescent homeless population remains the most understudied group among the homeless, *barely present* in the current portrait of homelessness” (Cauce, et al., 1998, p.611).

The authors seem quite concerned about numbers, both the increasing number of homeless people in general, and having an accurate estimate of the number of homeless youth specifically. The numbers they find, after careful searching, only represent those who use shelters. They know that “many other youths ‘squat’ in abandoned buildings, live in makeshift housing, sleep on the streets, piecing together an existence migrating from one unstable situation to the next” (Cauce, et al, 1998, p. 611). A pieced together existence – transient, unrooted, is presented as unacceptable, unhappy, a problem.

Cauce, et al. (1998) choose to promote a more accurate counting of homeless youth, measurement of a perceived problem, and with standardised tools, measure mental illness within this population – answering the question of ‘what’ they are dealing with in a particular manner. It is important work. It is my hope, in the future, to turn and return to valuing the experiences of everyday life, that Cauce, et al seem to imply, even if they do not linger in them. These authors call youth *barely present*, and I wonder at what meaning home plays in the lives of these youth they refer to. I believe that we need to

access youth in a variety of spaces, and continue to bring forth their presence in what we know of home.

In a very significant way, Phoebe is as homeless as any street kid is. As we encounter homelessness we need to recall the where of home, but remember that it is an echo of home. In opening ourselves to the notion that home means more than being alive and in place – we may come full circle. To acknowledge that to be homeless in a space that holds all the assumed trappings of home (family, relatedness, a comfortable house) is perhaps an even more invisible experience than living in foster care, or on the streets. To speak to youth on the streets, in the schools many of them attend, and to look for them in vulnerable positions, such as Phoebe's, we may further expand our notions of home in youth.

### Expanding Home

The health system in this country seems to be in a state of constant flux, responding to the changing needs of our population. Most often I hear concern expressed about the aging 'Baby Boomers' potentially draining the resources that it is assumed they will require as they age. Though we know something about the physical health of people, do we know about how their health intersects with home? How about the Baby Boomers in particular, what of their lives are distinct from that of the generations before them? By exploring home we open up more possibilities of being in the world. While I encountered clinical possibilities for working with youth involved with the mental health system in home, I wonder what might be encountered in explorations of home with other populations.

I am a part of a community of people who know me. They know I have been engaged in research, and have often asked in passing about how I am doing. In these

informal conversations, with other mental health clinicians, friends, and family it has emerged that to question home with other populations would likely invite some interesting possibilities.

We live in a world where it is increasingly expected that we will ‘pull up stakes’ and move as our employers require us elsewhere, or as new opportunities must be sought when old ones suddenly withdraw. In this world economy we encounter fiscal restraint, repeated layoffs, and then so soon it seems hiring bonuses are offered again. In the wake of the corporate bottom line, people’s lives are being constantly redefined. They seem to be coming and going, leaving, returning and engaging in leaving again. “After we left, being homesick took on a new, reverse meaning for a while. Although my own country eventually became interesting to me again” (Greene, 1995, p.146). Considering great movements that influenced history there are the Crusades of the middle ages, Ghengis Khan’s mobile army of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and whole generations of young people moving about the globe as they fought in the First and Second World Wars. These periods since the fall of the Roman Empire stand out as having brought significant social change in their wake. What social expectations arise out of this relatively new need to repeatedly transport ourselves to locations of employment in various places throughout the world today?

The question of home seems to evoke a great deal of curiosity – and the variety in just these passing conversations leads me to assume that on the topic of home there is much more to say than has been said herein. Home seems to just be, and yet it is often where we are much of the time, and it may be in our thoughts even more. We think of home, but we usually forget to think about our thinking of it. Gadamer (1999) piques my curiosity when he states that “only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of

total renewal, the capacity to see things with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity” (p.16). I do not know what influences our culture has forgotten over the ages, but it seems to me today, at this time, that arising between us are greater possibilities of home.

#### Limitations of the Study: An Invitation to Dwell in Home

In the course of this study I have engaged with three teenagers whose very experiences made me question the limitations of home. To engage with the population with which my question arose was a significant privilege, but also a limitation. What might other teenagers have said about home as we spoke? To engage further with youth and home is a recommendation for future research to some extent because it is unclear if this question has relevance beyond my community mental health practice.

To some extent the limitations of this work arise in language. Moved to share our thoughts, which unfold in words, we are guided by what we already know of the words (Gadamer, 1999; Griffin, 1995). To write these thoughts upon the page, rather than speak them aloud, leaves the reader alone with the words of the writer – unable to ask what it is that might be meant by them should the question arise. The reader then must interpret some meaning that makes sense within the context. When the writer leaves some thoughts as questions as their eyes scan the page, the readers may be compelled to answer the writer. While the words have been ‘fixed’ in writing, “bringing [their] hidden history into every age” (Gadamer, 1999, p.161), the reader may give them new life as they are seen through eyes located in their time and place. “Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either” (Gadamer, 1999, p.163). The words and the ‘spaces’ between them interpreted in reading are both limitations and strengths – these words are limited by both the writer and the

reader, yet they may expand ideas in ways unimagined by the writer. This unfolding relationship between the reader and the words is to a very great degree something beyond this writer's control.

While expanding the possible ways of considering home may contribute to practice, and to future inquiry, this study is not meant to present a theory or model of home. To 'apply' some formula of home across populations and across time is not the intention of this work. "How are things at home?" may be asked in our practices with people on a daily basis, but to linger in home with those people, and to ask questions of our questions is a beginning. I invite you to consider that what you encounter in your own thoughts as you ask questions of home, and what the people you encounter in practice have to say about home may have more to contribute to our notions of home in the future. What you come to understand of these ideas may have even more to say than you can imagine.

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University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing (letterhead)

Research Project: What Does Home Mean in the Lives of Teens?

Investigator: Carolyn Wilson, BScN, RN, Masters Student

Sponsor: The Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this research is to understand what home is like for young people.

Research Design: Did you know that no one has ever undertaken a study with teenagers like this one? This study is designed to increase the knowledge of professionals, such as nurses, social workers and psychologists, on the experience of home for young people who have had mental health problems.

To begin, Carolyn will meet with, and interview young people. Several interviews may be done with each person. These interviews will be recorded, and afterwards what has been recorded will be typed out by Carolyn and the staff at Sirota Psychological Services. Carolyn will use the tapes and the typed copies of what was said to write about home. Carolyn will write about home, with the goal of publishing the information. Home will be written about by using both individual details and by putting all the information together in an understandable way. At times Carolyn may use quotes (the very words you say in an interview), but other times what is written will be her ideas of what you mean when you talk about home.

The participants of this study will be asked to help increase our knowledge of home in two ways: 1. To be interviewed by Carolyn for about one to two hours. 2. To consider the possibility of being interviewed a second time for a similar amount of time.

There are several things you should know before you agree to participate:

1. As Carolyn asks you about home you may find yourself getting emotional, and feeling uncomfortable. The interview will end if you need it to, and in the event that you suffer injury as a result of the research, treatment will be arranged at a public counseling service (such as AMHB), or will be provided by another clinician at Sirota Psychological Services. You still have all your legal rights. Nothing said here about treatment or compensation in any way alters your right to recover damages.
2. A possible benefit of talking about home with Carolyn is that you may think about the idea of home in more detail and in new ways, and gain personal understanding of something that might be important to you.
3. So that Carolyn can talk to you without stopping to take notes, each interview will be recorded with a small audiotape recorder. Once the study is complete, the tapes will be erased.
4. Your identity will remain private, and to help with privacy you will be asked to pick a name (not your own) that Carolyn can use in all of her record keeping – sort of a code name! Carolyn is the only person involved in the study who will know your real names.
5. The ideas you share will be shared with experts, and may be part of a published paper one day. This information may contribute to changing the understanding professionals have of home.
6. You can be interviewed wherever you wish. Carolyn would most like to interview you where you live, and get a personal tour of the places you call home, but the location of the interview is up to you.
7. If you are interested, after your first interview, Carolyn will contact you to set up a second interview.
8. If you are less than 18 years of age a legal guardian must also agree with this study and sign this consent.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject, or agree to your child's participation as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study, or withdraw your child from the study, at any time without jeopardizing your/their health care. Continued participation should be as informed as the initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your, or your child's, participation. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:

Carolyn Wilson  
255-3773  
Dr. Dianne Tapp (Thesis Supervisor)  
220-6332

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a possible participant in this research, please contact Pat Evans, Associate Director, Internal Awards, Research Services, University of Calgary, at 220-3782.

This consent is to be signed

1) by the participant,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's DOB

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness' Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

2) by the guardian of the participant, if the participant is a minor child, and not an emancipated minor (please note DOB of Participant above).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Guardian's Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness' Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX B : Letter of Agency Support

Sirota Psychological Services

#212, 8180 – Macleod Trail S.E., Calgary, AB, T2H 2B8 Tel: (403)255-3773 Fax: (403)255-3719

Dr. Dianne Tapp  
Assistant Professor  
Faculty of Nursing  
University of Calgary

Dear Dianne,

For your records, I am writing to acknowledge the support our organization has offered to Carolyn Wilson in undertaking her research project: The Meaning of Home to a Population of Adolescents with Mental Health Problems. Carolyn has been an associate in our practice since September 01, 1997, and we are pleased she will be undertaking a research project with former clients of our services under your supervision. Carolyn has made a copy of this proposal available to me, as Clinical Director, and we have discussed her research plans. Our services such as reception, phone messaging, office space, and clinical backup are at her disposal until the completion of her research project. We look forward to hearing about her research as it proceeds, and eventually reading her thesis.

Yours truly,

Dr. P. Sirota,

## APPENDIX C : Letter of Invitation to Participate

University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing (letterhead)

(Potential participant name)  
 (House address)  
 Calgary, Alberta  
 (Postal Code)

(date), 2000

Dear (Potential participant),

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project I have recently begun. Your participation can make a difference to how people understand teenagers. Did you know that one of the most important things people do to learn to become social workers, nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists is to read about research? But in my experience there is not enough research that asks teenagers what they think!

As you have already showed your commitment to therapy through the services available at Sirota Psychological Services, I believe you have the ability to talk about your life in a meaningful way, and so I am asking you to talk to me as part of my research. I believe it is important for people like me, working as mental health professionals, to *stop* and ask questions about life. Teenagers today have to deal with a very different world than I did, and than their parents did. I am asking for your help to keep me in touch with life as it is for you these days.

Home can be one of the most important places in our lives. Yet, home is so different for each of us. I am interested in interviewing you in order to get *your ideas* about home, and how it affects *you*. If you agree to help with my study I will interview you, either at home, in my office, or in any other location you prefer. Similar to therapy sessions, these interviews will be kept confidential (very private!). To help keep your privacy I will have you choose a code name (only I will know your real name). I want to make sure we have lots of time to share ideas, so I will offer you the option of speaking to me more than once. Each interview will be audiotaped, so I can concentrate on our conversation instead of taking notes. The tapes will be used to type up a record of our conversation for me to read and analyze later. After my research is done the tapes will be erased.

When I have finished all the interviews, I will write about what I have learned, making sure *no one who reads it will know your real identity*, and share the ideas with other professionals. This study will give you the opportunity to have your story heard, and I hope it may make a difference to other young people like you. Please contact me by phone at 255-3773 before (date) for more information, or to let me know you are interested. I'd be thrilled to talk to you about this research. Only a limited number of interviews can be done, so please call early to get involved!

As this study is official, ethically approved research it is particularly important to get a guardian's consent before I start any interviews. If you are under 18 years of age, please talk to your guardian (parent, relative, social worker, foster parent) or show them this letter. If you call me, and are interested in participating, I can send another copy of this letter, and a consent form to your guardian if they do not live with you. Let me know if there is anything I can do to help you participate in this study, I really want to hear what you have to say.

Yours very truly,

Carolyn Wilson, BScN, R.N., Masters student.