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Feasting on Whispers: Life Writing Towards a Pedagogy of Kinship

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Feasting on Whispers: Life Writing Towards a Pedagogy of Kinship

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This work of life writing seeks to question the overpowering myths of progress, competition and domination that continue to story the educational landscape. In exploring the possibilities of metaphor as a possible response to these dominant myths, this collection of narrative and poetic pieces dwells within the relational truths of metaphor and poetic language that are often hidden in the dominant expository language of academia. In the context of Heidegger's (1977) notion of "language [as] the house of Being" (p. 217), the principles of hermeneutics, Indigenous knowledges and ecological pedagogy come together to explore some of the possibilities for metaphorical modes of Being. This work delves into the ways in which the work of life writing might break down the language of isolation and invite teachers and students into scholarly conversations of kinship —with our cultural and educational traditions, our histories, our topics of study, the more-than-human world, and each other.

Acknowledgements

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Latremouille, J. (2014). My treasured relation. *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*, Article 2. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10515/sy5d50gd4>.

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I sit in deep gratitude to my supervisors, Drs. Jackie Seidel and David Jardine, who lovingly and masterfully continue to remind me of my place, here, in the world. You remind me that “children are our future” (Smith, 1988, p. 28)! David, thank you for your cultivated, careful wisdom and inspiration to keep practicing. Jackie, thank you for your poetic kindness and patience, and for your scholarly attention to all of the important little details.

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I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of Treaty 7 on whose traditional territory the City and University of Calgary are located.

I also wish to acknowledge the following *Nlaka’pamux* peoples, on whose lands many stories in this thesis were lived and told: *Camchin* (Lytton Band), and *Scw’exmx* (the Nicolas).

This work is written in memory of my earth-cousin, Shelby Lee David Marriott (1979-1991).

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
<i>whispers</i>	1
INTRODUCTION: A HOMECOMING.....	2
Grandmother-stories.....	2
...finding myself already in the work.....	4
<i>hush</i>	10
AN INVITATION TO A FEAST.....	11
Welcome to the Feast.....	11
<i>a word on whispers</i>	15
Life Writing Towards a Vigorous Curriculum: Playing on the Boundaries.....	16
<i>an invitation</i>	19
“MY HEART IS SICK”: METAPHOR IN CONVERSATION WITH PANIC AND	
HYPOCRISY.....	20
Hypocrite	21
Metaphor in Conversation with “Narration-Sickness”.....	23
Schools in Service of Profit and Progress: A “Calling Out”.....	27
In the Real World	28
Fragmentation and Despair: Reflections (<i>On Being Smart</i>).....	29
<i>hush, child</i>	31
On Being Smart	32
TEACHING AND WRITING ON THE BOUNDARIES.....	35
Risky Conversations.....	35
Walking Away	39
(Un) Making the Grade.....	40
I Don’t Want to Make the Grade	43
Life Writing on the Boundaries: “The Price of Admission”.....	44
BEGOTTEN GENIUSES.....	46
Little Eruptions.....	46
just say yes.....	47
<i>found</i>	49
I am no genius	50
a proof.....	52
PLACE STORIES AS PEDAGOGY.....	54
“Back to Being Seen”: Introduction to <i>Stories of Men</i>	55

Stories of Men	59
EARTHLY KNOWLEDGES.....	65
(No) Frog-Stories in Your Backyard	66
<i>listen</i>	68
“Deep Earth Democracy”: Introduction to <i>An Organic Pedagogy</i>	69
An Organic Pedagogy	72
STORYING THE LANDSCAPE.....	78
Finding Myself in the Measure of Things:	
Introduction to <i>A Modern Hunting Tradition</i>	79
A Modern Hunting Tradition	81
Old-Growth Cultures: Introduction to <i>The Loon</i> and ... <i>sacred duties</i>	85
The Loon	87
... <i>sacred duties</i>	89
SMALL DIALOGUES	90
My Treasured Relation	91
Small Dialogues and Memory-Mediations	97
IMPLICATIONS	100
Winner	100
<i>listen</i>	101
Local Responses to Infinite Worlds: Life’s Curriculum Offerings	102
<i>a whisper</i>	106
REFERENCES.....	106
APPENDIX A-D	116

whispers...

There is an intimate reciprocity to the senses; as we touch the bark of a tree, we feel the tree *touching us*; as we lend our ears to the local sounds and ally our nose to the seasonal scents, the terrain gradually tunes us in in turn. The senses, that is, are the primary way that the earth has of informing our thoughts and of guiding our actions. Huge centralized programs, global initiatives, and other ‘top down’ solutions will never suffice to restore and protect the health of the animate earth. *For it is only at the scale of our direct, sensory interactions with the land around us that we can appropriately notice and respond to the immediate needs of the living world.*

(David Abram, 1997, p. 268)

INTRODUCTION: A HOMECOMING

Grandmother-stories

According to Keith Basso (1996), a cultural and linguistic anthropologist and Professor Emeritus at the University of New Mexico until his death in 2013, members of the White Mountain Apache tribe take great pleasure in reciting the native names of places within the Cibecue Valley, in Navajo Country, Arizona. They repeat these place-names because, as one Apache elder states, “those names are good to say” (Abram, 1997, p. 155). This reminds me of my elderly Grandma Gertie who likes to sit me down and go through old photo albums every time I visit her in her tiny assisted-living apartment at the other end of town. “Look, that’s me as a young woman with my younger brothers and sisters. I helped look after the littlest ones. See here, that’s your grandpa Lou on our wedding day. Oh, he was handsome. He built that cabin, there, see? There’s your Aunt Marie and your Uncle Nathan. They ran that fishing camp with your mom and dad. They really worked hard, running that fishing camp.”

“Yes, grandma, I remember.”

Keith Basso writes about the tradition of the “*agodhaazi*” (“that which has happened”) story (Abram, 2007, p. 156). These stories are usually very brief, and they always begin and end with a place-name: for example, they will say that the story “happened at ‘men stand above here and there’” (p. 156). When a member of the community has behaved offensively or perhaps needs a reminder of their place in the tribe, an elder will wait for an appropriate moment, and “shoot” the person by recounting an “*agodhaazi*.” Although the offender is not identified or named aloud, she will feel the “arrow” story make her ill and weak as it penetrates her skin. The story will then work outwards from within, making her desire to “re-place herself,” to live right. Her behaviour changes, but the story stays with her, in her repeated physical or mental encounters with the place. “*The place, it is said, will keep ‘stalking’ her*” (p. 158-159).

Grandmother, I am shot with arrows.

...finding myself already in the work

And so... I grew up in a small town in the interior of British Columbia, called Merritt. In my early childhood years, it was a relatively unknown place to outsiders. Now it is somewhat more well known as the intersection of the three legs of the Coquihalla Highway, the home of the Country Music Capital of Canada, and the place where you stop for gas and a bite to eat on the final stretch of the drive to Vancouver. My childhood was spent on a little 5-acre mountainside hobby farm in a rural development called Fox Farm Road. I grew up surrounded by freely breeding cats, rabbits, several pet dogs, a donkey named Jake, pigs, chickens and four horses named Syrie, Nipper, Chona and Leah. My sister Sarah and I climbed trees, built forts, planned overnight camping trips in the hayloft, learned how to fish and hunt and track animals in the bush. We also played school, put on plays, and did quasi-scientific experiments on our old black cat, Emma, that involved homemade parachutes and the law of gravity. I learned how to see the big picture while attending to the details on family hikes; I would scan the sky above the treetops for signs of an impending storm, while keeping my other eye on the next step lest I fall and slow down the group's progress in my carelessness.

Moving to Calgary for my undergraduate degree in Education was a bit of a culture shock, but I was determined to embrace the big city lifestyle. I wanted to become savvy, to be on the leading edge of innovation, to be immersed in the excitement and culture. After two years of self-reflective and challenging work in the Master of Teaching (B.Ed.) program at the University of Calgary, surrounded by the language of inquiry, authentic assessment, and inclusiveness, and blessed with two excellent and challenging practicum experiences in "tough" schools where I felt at home as an

educator, I felt, like many new teachers do, that I was embarking into an exciting profession where I could have a positive impact in students' lives.

My first full-time teaching assignment was as a Social Studies teacher at a high school in the northeast of Calgary, where in yearly student surveys you could measure the cultural diversity by the 50 languages spoken by the student body, and the 100 countries of origin. I *measured* this diversity by the richness of our classroom conversations. I had known from the moment I first set foot in that school as a substitute teacher in April of 2004 that I wanted to be a part of those conversations. In one day of substituting, I had found my connection: I met the athletics director and volunteered to coach junior girls' volleyball in the fall. By February of the following school year, I was *in*.

During my three years at this school, I saw and participated in many, albeit isolated, examples of excellent teaching and learning amongst what I was saddened to realize was the norm—the melancholy and management that characterizes much of the work that we do in obligatory education (Ferreiro, 2003). In my high school experience, I saw the clear divisions in the formal streaming and measuring of students, whereby at one end of the spectrum, some students were pushed to the limits of endurance, over-scheduled by tutors, exams, and extracurricular commitments as they stumbled and sweated along the university track, while towards the other end, the young people on the vocational/practical/survival track were simply expected to put in their time and not cause any hassle to the system. As high school teachers we were expected to personalize programs, assist with goal-setting, and make personal connections with our students. So, I asked what they wanted to do for a career. I asked about choices and options and core courses and credits and remedial homework. And yet, all along this spectrum, I don't

ever recall having been expected to ask any student if they were being offered enough opportunities to do what they *loved to do*. I never really had to ask if they were finding themselves *implicated* in the work that we were doing. Following David Geoffrey Smith, scholar of curriculum and interpretive studies at the University of Alberta (1988), I wondered with my students if there was anything beneath the smooth surface of rational, efficient teaching (p. 27).

I wanted to know why these languages and melancholies continued to dominate, after all the great examples of teaching and learning that I *knew* to exist, not only in my childhood experiences, but also in every school that I had ever taught in. I followed Dr. David Jardine (1998), hermeneutic scholar at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, in questioning what it meant to enact “a truly lived curriculum” (p. 73). Why couldn’t teaching and learning dwell at the heart of these great examples? In a series of open studies Master’s courses taken in 2006-2007 with Drs. David Jardine and David G. Smith, I began to see the possibilities at the heart of hermeneutic work, and the world around me began to open up into an “*otherwise place*” (Greene, 1988, p. 3). The seeds for this scholarly work had been planted by these two elders and my thoughtful cohort; my work in the classroom began to shift. Starting in my early days of desperately copying binders and thinking that this was curriculum, I shifted to rebelliously throwing out all worksheets and despising them completely, until finally—after long debates with myself and colleagues, nights of tossing out entire lessons and starting again, days of struggling to keep good conversations going—I realized that I no longer had a desire to ask which method was *the best*. After these Master’s courses, I was left pondering only,

“Is this the right thing to do” (Berry, 2103) under these particular circumstances? The challenge of asking and trying to answer that question on a daily basis became... *enough*.

I moved back to Merritt in 2008 with my husband, Jason, after our first child, Taylor, was born. I had the opportunity to team teach in the French Immersion program, as well as to teach English and Math at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, B.C.’s Aboriginal public post-secondary institute. My work in these programs allowed me great freedom to engage in the inquiry-based teaching that I wanted to do with students.

Teaching basic English and Math skills to Indigenous adults was an experience in humility: my students, often much more experienced than me in the ways of the world, especially Indigenous worldviews, would call me to account on a daily basis, questioning my racisms, challenging my assumptions, and breaking down my conceits. I would return to the work each day, fearful of what new blunder I would commit, but with a renewed resolve to stop talking so much and to listen more carefully. We created some profound examples of scholarly work in our time together: in listening to each other; in challenging each other; in creating conversational spaces around difficult topics.

My early classroom conversations with high school students in Calgary around social and environmental justice had also provided the spark for my home-based business, an organic produce delivery service called Footprints Harvest, which I opened in 2009 with the help of two close friends. I noticed that in Merritt, located in the heart of the Interior of B.C., with excellent farmland extending in all directions, very few residents had consistent access to organic or local produce. Our dream was to build a community around healthy living and healthy food, and we hoped that our community would start to take up the conversations around caring for our bodies and extend those to

the importance of taking care of the earth and those who grow our food. A member of our community might start to feel implicated in the life of the worker in Mexico who would receive a fair wage because our business bought Fairtrade grapefruits, and in the lives of the bees who would have a better chance of survival because someone from Merritt chose to eat a pesticide-free apple. We might start to see our actions as connected to the world, not just as isolated, free and clear consumer choices.

Although my experiences in the classroom gave me a glimpse into the possibilities for meaningful learning, I continued to feel distressed by the dominant stories of education: cynical staffroom conversations; the business language of accountability and time-on-task; and the media's disrespect for educators as well as youth. I did not like to see how these stories affected those most intimately involved in the work of education. When I walked away from teaching in the classroom in 2013 and moved back to Calgary to study for my Master's degree at the University of Calgary, I did not know what stories I wanted to tell about education. All I knew was that the current stories were insufficient to the re-enlivening of educational spaces, and that different language might break open the conversations around the purpose, methods and theories of education. There was something in the language of ecology, hermeneutics and Indigenous knowledges that was swirling together, interacting, and shaping beautiful, complex, inter-textual lifelines. If I appreciate that "language is the house of Being" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 217), and "the way we treat a thing can sometimes change its nature" (Hyde, 1983, p. xiii), then how might language be treated as a *practice* of re-enlivening the landscape of education?

I wanted to treat students, teachers, and education in ways that would allow space for them to become more beautiful, more scholarly, and more attentive to their place in the human story. I wanted to learn how education has come to be the way it is today, in all its complexities and disagreements, its dominant discourses and debates. And I wanted to provide small stories that might rekindle a sense of “wonder and awe” (Huebner, 2008, p. 1) in our work with students. I wondered... how might education, our lives, our world, be “otherwise” (Greene, 1988, p. 3)? The stories that follow document this journey, and bring to life my learning around what curriculum can be, if storied in a language of bloodlines, potentialities, and kinship. In this self-reflective work of life writing, I am only just beginning to articulate the ways in which I have been shaped by my place, my family and my history. The curriculum of my life informs my identity as an educator; I am beginning to see the careful hermeneutic pedagogy in the practices of my parents and grandparents, my aunts and uncles, and now in my relationship with my own children. I am beginning to see the ecological pedagogy in caring for chickens, casting a fishing line, or coping with an ailing young cousin. I am beginning to see the Indigenous pedagogy in a talking circle where the teacher does not need to have the last word, and in the stories that ask of me a different reading.

This work is a homecoming.

This work is an invitation.

hush...

Now she stands in front of her classroom, reaching for this ineffable sense of kinship with things, pointing and hoping, not for explanations, but for the right kinds of questions, for what *calls for questions*.

(Michael Derby, in press, p. 1)

a question...

What might education be when it is seen as abundant, convivial, enmeshed in those whispers trailing back/from/into/within worlds of relations?

and a question...

What happens when the stories we tell of education are grounded in rich histories, live topics, real people, and earthly potentialities?

AN INVITATION TO A FEAST

Welcome to the Feast

A **feast** (n.) c.1200, is a "religious anniversary characterized by rejoicing" (rather than fasting), from Old French *feste* (12c., Modern French *fête*) "religious festival; noise, racket," from Latin *festa* "holidays, feasts," or *festus* "festive, joyful, merry" (Online etymology dictionary).

The notion of a feast lends a sense of abundance—not of unearned or excessive abundance, but of harvest time, celebration, to hard work and sharing. A feast conjures up images of celebration, repeating rituals. Every fall, my organic produce delivery service, Footprints Harvest, and a local restaurant called Brambles Bakery, team up to host a “Fall Harvest Dinner.” At this event, parties are not permitted to book a private table. Local farmers are invited to sit and eat with customers, everyone mingling together at long, familial tables. Courses on the set menu are brought out in a seemingly chaotic yet carefully planned sequence, as the family of cooks and volunteer servers in the kitchen scramble to co-ordinate homemade loaves, fresh greens, roasted vegetables and the highlight of the evening, a whole roast pig. Strangers become friends over the course of an evening as they pass the communal platters along, reach across the table for a piece of homemade sourdough to sop up the sauce on their plates, and split the last serving of apple crumble from the final plate to travel around the table, dividing up the crumbs carefully and fairly.

Conversations rise and fall in time with the appearance of new delicacies—in appreciation, in excitement, in nourishment. Farmers testify to the trials and successes of

the season, as their neighbours listen and feast on the evidence. The latin, *convivium* (a feast), is the ancestor of **convivial**, "to carouse together." This derives from *com*: "together" + *vivere*: "to live" (Online etymology dictionary). This feastly evening sends folks off into the crisp autumn evening with full bellies and a new friend or two.

American (and Canadian) public schools often operate as service-oriented places of management. William Pinar (2012) argues for the fundamental shift that is required, whereby "curriculum theorists... *invite* public school teachers to reoccupy a vacated 'public' domain, not simply as 'consumers' of knowledge, but as active participants in conversations they themselves will lead" (p. 42). In this shift from *curriculum* (noun: a course to be run) as a commodified service to be rendered, to *currere* (verb: a path) as an invitation into a "complicated conversation" (p. 47), he is opening up spaces within which learning can become more rigorous, intellectual, and... nourishing. William Doll (2002) describes this curriculum reconceptualization as a "shift from Erasmus' hierarchy of limited subjects [to] Rabelais' abundant 'feast for the intellect'" (p. 24). To conceive of education as a feast, an abundant meal, a celebration that exists in ritual, is to ask us how we shall live together "in the context of an ongoing conversation which is never over, yet *which must be sustained for life together to go on at all*" (Smith, 1988, p. 27). How shall we feed each other in these abundant conversations, in such a way that makes "communion—community—possible" (Richardson, 2001, p. 37)?

These writings are a feastly offering. Each creative writing piece is offered as an independent course, yet intimately interwoven with the flavours and textures of the whole. The pieces are written in non-traditional formats, single-spaced here and italicized there, sometimes offset, sometimes dropping, twisting off the page. In the

Table of Contents, the titles appear in bold font, to indicate that there is a story or a poem lying in wait, while the whispers and small reminders appear in italicized font. In the body of the document, the creative writing pieces are centered on the page, set apart from the other sections. Within these pieces and also in the rest of the work, there may be some funny citations, some strange, unusual, squeaky, perhaps barking voices. They are the voices of my friends, my colleagues, my sister. They are my cousins, the landscapes of my youth, and my dog named Buster. Sometimes, I even fancy myself on a first-name basis with the elder philosophers in my field, many long-gone yet still whispering to me, patient, waiting for me. My teachers are all around me.

This work is an invitation to dip into the narratives, sample here, return to there, rest and dip in again, or perhaps to read from cover to cover in one sitting. Perhaps this work doesn't quite fit the expected model, in that the topics and modes of expression are perhaps a little off the standard(*ized*) curricular research path. Some parts may feel familiar, maybe even hinting here and there at an academic style, whereas others may feel familial, traditional, intimate, like *A Modern Hunting Tradition*. Some phrases may jump off the page, swearing a blue streak as in *Stories of Men*, while others sit, quietly waiting – *whisper*, and *listen*, and *shhh*. Secrets and family histories are told to tease out the lived curriculum of our young and more-than-human teachers, such as those in *The Loon*, or *My Treasured Relation*. Poetic language is summoned to break open the dominant discourses of competition, exploitation and profit, as in the mourning of *I Don't Want to Make the Grade*, or the telling of *An Organic Pedagogy*.

We come together to feast and to live together. The place we are in together forms us and *in-forms* our work, in a convivial relationship. This is not a quick tour I am

taking in a classroom, in a life. I am a visitor in these places, these locales, these words; I have a responsibility to treat them well. The whispers of places—the more-than-human world, texts, colleagues making their way in their own work—remind me: we inhabit these places together. The “Fall Harvest Dinner” cannot guarantee that everyone will enjoy every dish, nor can it pretend to prevent all contamination of the food being shared so heartily amongst the guests. And yet, we hope that it will *nourish* us.

a word on whispers...

A recent e-mail exchange with a dear colleague, Rajan Rathnavalu:

JODI (Latremouille): *Rajan, do you remember the other day in class when you said that if 'something needs to proclaim itself loudly, there is something fundamentally wrong with it'?*

RAJAN (Rathnavalu): *Yes, I remember.*

In 1999, the year I ordained as a monk, I started teaching meditation classes at the U of T. I remember a conversation with a friend who helped sponsor the classes. We were walking by an aerobics class that had music playing loudly in the background. He said something to the effect that, "When we can't hear our own rhythms, we need the external to be louder." These are my words, but they express his general sentiment.

I think I was remembering this space when I heard about the Eyes High pep rally. Propaganda often seems to come through loudspeakers. A mind that is conscious of the ways of the world doesn't need exaggeration... as it has the proper measure of things.

There is a time to speak the truth loudly, but that often seems to arise in contexts where people aren't listening. I tend to think that speaking softly indicates a respect for the listener—that they have the capacity to "get it" without having to be hit over the head with the idea.

Further, I think good educators often will leave a lot unspoken. When students have to work for things, there is an inner learning dynamic that helps carry the meaning further and more deeply.

When we find ourselves speaking "loudly," I tend to believe that it is we ourselves who aren't listening. We haven't connected to the space the student is in, so we're trying to impose a particular reality (ours) when in fact, the student isn't ready for this. But they generally are ready for something—it's our job as educators to tune into these inner rhythms and meet them in a way that is meaningful.

RAJAN

(Rajan Rathnavalu, personal communication, March 28, 2014. Cited with permission)

Life Writing Towards a Vigorous Curriculum: Playing on the Boundaries

David G. Smith (1999) reminds us that all writing is autobiographical (p. 43). If we as researchers are already writing about our own lives, then life writing as arts-based research can be described as a way of exploring and refining the work that “qualitative researchers *already do*” (Leavy, 2009, p. 10). Rather than remove the creativity from qualitative work, arts-based research asks qualitative work to recognize and explore that creativity, including it within the realm of what is considered worth knowing. Narrative, as a way of linking theory and practice without prescribing solutions to the problems that teacher face, “is indeed pedagogical rather than prescriptive “ (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 6). How might life writing invite teachers and students into “complicated conversations” (Pinar, 2012, p. 47), to blur the lines between theory and practice, to try—impossibly—to “say” the unsayable?

The confluence of art and qualitative research requires an expansion of the definitions of “good art” as well as “good research.” A researcher who seeks to develop a certain degree of skill in and attentiveness to their chosen mode of expression is better equipped to utilize that medium to their advantage (Leavy, 2009, p. 17). Aesthetic evaluation is not based solely on the definition of “good art,” but rather on the value of the research and pedagogical functions within the work (Sinner, A., Leggo, C., Irwin, R., Gouzouasis, P. & Grauer, K., 2006, p. 125). Narrative, like other qualitative methods, is not properly contained by criteria such as validity, reliability, and generalizability. It is important not to “squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 7). In shifting the language of evaluation from “rigor” to “vigor” (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 125), the assessment of life

writing opens up spaces for an enlivening and transformative experience on the part of the researcher and audience. Leavy's verisimilitude and Richardson's crystallization come together as criteria for arts-based and narrative research. I propose to add conversation as a third qualifying criteria of life writing. The validity of crystallization is described by Laurel Richardson (1994) as follows:

the central image for "validity" for postmodern texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central image is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. (p. 522)

The metaphor of the crystal provides a beautiful and living language for shaping the notion of postmodern validity as complex, temporal, constitutive, shifting, and ethical. Postmodern knowledge, in making qualified "truth claims," must nonetheless be based on observations of something real in the world, and it must hold up to scrutiny. In scrutinizing a claim, "[p]aradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know" (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). There is a structure to it, even though it is not a fixed and permanent structure. Curriculum as *currere* (Pinar, 2012, p. 45), as autobiographical meanings (p. 43), and as a complicated conversation of social critique (p. 47), is "always a process of questing, questioning, and sojourning in words and worlds" (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 2).

Verisimilitude as a criteria applied to life writing is informed by the reactions inspired in one's audience: does the piece "inspire emotions, connections, create a scene that *feels* truthful, and inspire political or socially conscious action" (Leavy, 2009, p. 82)?

The conversations that may be inspired by a piece of life writing are of vital importance; my knowing something can prove to be transient, and I never can know in advance if it will be or not, but the process of coming to know requires scholarly research, open-mindedness, judgment, creativity, and rigorous self-reflection. Conversation with others expands the work into the public sphere, tests it, weighs it, speaks back to it. My reflections with regards to this process form an important piece of the evaluation of my writing. The process is not separate from the product or the evaluation of this form of research. There is a limit to the bounds of interpretation that will be defined in the sharing and the feedback, the reflection and re-writing, the return to the original story, and the circling back to the researcher narrative.

an invitation...

When you think intensely and beautifully, something happens.

That something is called poetry.

If you think that way and teach at the same time, poetry gets in your pedagogy.

If students hear you, it gets in their hearts.

If you think that way and listen to the world at the same time, then poetry resonates.

But poetry exists in any case.

The question is only: are you going to take part, and if so, how?

(Robert Bringhurst, 2008, p. 143)

**“MY HEART IS SICK”: METAPHOR IN CONVERSATION WITH PANIC
AND HYPOCRISY**

People whose governing habit is the relinquishment of power, competence and responsibility, and whose characteristic suffering is the anxiety of futility, make excellent spenders. They are the ideal consumers. By inducing in them little panics of boredom, powerlessness, sexual failure, mortality, paranoia, they can be made to buy virtually anything that is 'attractively packaged.'

(Wendell Berry 1986, p. 24)

Hypocrite

I know what you need, dear...

You need to be fully present with students, expand your sense of time.

*(Who is that kid knocking at my door?
Don't they know I'm busy writing dead-lines?)*

Good nutrition is essential. Practice moderation and the enjoyment of really great food—no regrets, no excuses.

*(And sneak chocolate bars after they go to bed
And only step on the scale first thing in the morning
And delay the next meal,
this gnawing faint weakness is called willpower—
oh, didn't you know?)*

You should try meditation. Time is not running out. Enjoy the moment.

(With knots in my stomach and shortness of breath)

Read. Re-read. Study. Learning cannot/should not be commodified. Sit with it.

*(And hear the knock on the door—is it my old friend?
Yes! It's Amazon Books! Come in, have some tea!
There's only one here—I ordered three last week, what is taking so long?)*

You are enough. Yes, you are. No, your work is not perfect. Indeed, it is so imperfect I don't even know where to begin. No, you don't need to stand against the ruler. Keep studying, keep writing.

*(And I think, if only I had been taller—what then?
Could I have looked down upon the fumbling, struggling mess,
breathing cleaner air?)*

Your daughters are beautiful—not models, not movie stars, not even a little bit. But beautiful curly-haired tornadoes nonetheless. You don't need model children. You need real children.

*(Some days I can smile at myself, a sidelong, “not bad” kind of smile.
Other days, I avert my eyes and wonder what it would have been like
in the days before looking-glasses.)*

You don't need to be perfect, no.

Good girl.

In the real world...

You are such a good artist!

How can I help you?

This is for your own good.

I am so sorry.

*(Our professional obligation is to care.
Cure? Yes, care, that's what I said.
It says here on page 32 in the manual.
You need to cure and be careful.
Yes, care, that's what I said.
Isn't anybody listening?)*

I know what you need! You need...
To care for yourself—first! A-ha!
No, really. Try it.
The world will not stop.
I promise. I know.

(...you go first! And report back to me)

Metaphor in Conversation with “Narration-Sickness”

“Education is suffering from narration-sickness,” says Paulo Freire. It speaks out of a story which was once full of enthusiasm, but now shows itself incapable of a surprise ending. The nausea of narration-sickness comes from having heard enough, of hearing many variations on a theme but no new theme. A narrative which is sick may claim to speak for all, yet has no *aporia*, no possibility of meeting a stranger because the text is complete already. (David G. Smith, 1999, p. 135-136)

The discourse of dualities and self-identified singularities suffers from narration-sickness. As educators, we are storied and influenced by this discourse—struggling under, resisting, played by—the “logical division of the world into subjects and objects” (Huebner, 2008, p. 5). We live in an educational milieu that privileges the measurement of ever-clearer prescribed outcomes, and on refining our ability to predict them. “To aspire for less is to court professional irresponsibility. We like our data hard and our methods stiff—we call it rigor” (Eisner, 2002, n.p.).

What’s that?

Shh, I hear a hiss!

rigor...

...mortis?

David G. Smith (1988) reminds us that “living with children means living in the belly of a paradox wherein genuine life together is made possible only in the context of

an ongoing conversation which is never over, yet *which must be sustained for life together to go on at all* (emphasis added)” (p. 27). The language of exposition cannot encompass all that this task, this living, entails. Metaphor is a possible response to the panic in schools. It does not pretend to hold it all, either, but what it might do is to allow the expression of wider, messier worlds of truths, poking at them, wondering, alluding, comparing and contrasting, playing a little in the worlds of language, trying on new ideas, casting them aside, engaging in the freedom of possibilities, creating some breathing room in the entrenchment and enclosure of schooling in the interests of pre-determined ends.

The naming of the world is a human right. Paulo Freire (2000) describes this work of naming the world as a reciprocal and dialogical act, when he says that:

To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection... saying that word is not the privilege of some few person, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words. (p. 88)

How might metaphor, in its changing, communal, constitutive and expansive naming, *take us beyond* the dominant single-story narration-sickness of education and progress?

In moving from prescriptive to metaphorical language, how might we, teachers and students, re-claim what Freire here describes as *our right* to story our multifarious worlds *back-together* through transformative (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 6), metaphorical dialogue?

This dialogue, along with its potential for social transformation, may also open up spaces for ecological healing. Michael Derby (in press), a scholar at Simon Fraser University and Associate Director for Ecological Education¹, notes that:

metaphoric thinking is a crucial skill and practice for educators to develop, especially in a time of ecological crisis. We have come to live and understand our lives within a cultural-historical context characterized by its fragmented relationality; exacerbated by, to name but a few of the more persistent toxins, the privileging of anthropocentrism, reductionism, linear causality, and dualism in modernist thought. (p. 1)

When I notice that “scientific validity is not the only kind of validity” (Huebner, 2008, p. 2), I may explore metaphor as a possible response to the overpowering myths of progress, competition and domination that continue to story the educational landscape. From the Greek *metaphora*, composed of *meta*, “changed, higher, beyond, in the midst of, in common with,” + *pherein* “a carrying over,” (Online etymology dictionary), the history of the word **metaphor** suggests the eloquent combination of two concepts in one word to shape a meaning that transcends the original meaning of both concepts. If “[a] poem is a place where affinities are discovered,” (Simic, cited in Zwicky, 2008, p. 47), what relational truths might be revealed through metaphor that might be hidden in the traditional expository language of academia? If “language is the house of Being” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 217), what modes of Being are we inviting into existence through

¹ Imaginative Ecological Education (Judson, 2010), based on Kieran Egan’s (1997) theory of Imaginative Education, brings the emotional and imaginative engagement of the child to the center of place-based theory and practice. See <http://www.iereg.net/iee/>

the use of technical, clinical, dichotomous language in our educational discourses? What modes of Being might metaphor welcome into the world?

Schools in Service of Profit and Progress: A “Calling Out”

The first two poetic pieces in this chapter, entitled *Hypocrite* (see above) and *In the Real World*, inquire into some of my experiences of the business model of education, whereby knowledge is a commodity and education is conceived of as a “service rendered” (Pinar, 2012, p. 36). Having lived and worked in spaces where students and teachers play the roles of both consumers and workers, as a student I have at times experienced my learning as the accumulation of credits towards graduation, the accumulation of info-bites, and an exercise in ac-customizing² myself to the routines of the work life for which I was becoming shaped and “trained.” As a teacher I have given in to the panic to create a better “product,” (lecture, lesson plan, rubric, student outcome) greedily gobbling up the latest curriculum package, PD technical workshop or textbook-to-end-all-textbooks with which to better serve the “needs of students.” In the foreseeable future, “most teachers will be trained as ‘social engineers,’ directed to ‘manage’ learning that is loosely modeled after corporate work-stations, focused on test preparation” (Pinar, 2002, p. 37). Schools based on market-driven business models have become “sites of endless competition, between students, between school sites, between teachers, and between communities” (Ayers & Ayers, p. 25). In trying to envision and remember how education might be “otherwise” (Greene, 1988, p. 3), I often feel compelled to call out the language and myths that might stand in the way of these imaginings.

² “ac”: to, toward, near, (English language roots reference) and “customize”: modify to suit a particular individual or task (Free online English dictionary).

In the Real World

Talking is crucial...
to development. Aha!
Call the specialist
You are in the 3rd percentile
Catch up
It's getting late

Count to 100 by next week
The next level depends on it
Your last teacher prepared you...
For nothing!
Start from the top. Sigh.

Who taught you this grammar-garbage?
"Who is Trudeau?" Good grief!
Here we go again...
Plan? —snarl
out the window

You can't do...?
a lesson plan—gasp!
IPP—snicker
report card—sneer
a rubric! —silence

This lack of preparation—
Abomination!
This "life"
is leading...
nowhere

Get this poor kid a refund
before it's too late!

Fragmentation and Despair: Reflections (*On*) *Being Smart*

The final piece in this chapter, *On Being Smart*, explores the possibilities that may emerge when subtle shifts in educational language are entertained. Obligatory education (Ferreiro, 2003) has been deeply influenced by the discipline of psychology, which, in treating every difficulty that a child may have as an internal, individual error that, if properly isolated, can be drugged, fixed, eradicated, and *cut out*. Academic psychology asserts its “epistemological arrogance” (Pinar, 2012, p. 41), positioning itself as the central discipline in education, claiming a definitive knowledge of “what works.” Psychology, “in its latest refashioning as the so-called ‘learning sciences,’ [...] facilitates education’s co-optation by business” (Taubman, 2009, p. 159-160, cited in Pinar, 2012, p. 41). This is not to demonize the discipline of psychology itself, but rather to suggest that as a dominant discourse—like the logic of self-identification and the myth of progress—psychology does not on its own, *live up to* the educational task at hand. Years ago, in 1959, Dwayne Huebner (2008) argued that, “It is not adequate that we base educational programs on psychological or behavioral science models” (p. 2). And yet, fifty years later, here we are. In the midst of things. The implicit and increasingly militaristic paradigm of schools is based on “the will-to-power and a form of thinking (Cartesianism) which cannot tolerate difference” (Smith, 1988, p. 26), which sees difference as a problem to be explained and mastered. “This way cannot articulate the way in which the full meaning of a child, *for us*, resides in the paradox of being part of us but also apart from us (p. 26).

In the despair of ecological and educational fragmentation, in a loss of confidence in schools (Eisner, 2002, n.p.), I notice that my *heart* is sick—sick of ecological crisis, of crowded classrooms and schedules, of traffic jams, of starvation lining up far behind conspicuous consumption, waiting for a turn to speak. But the psychologically-defined “service” (Pinar, 2012, p. 13) of school, in the name of profit, prosperity and teleological forward motion progress, knows only one response to the sickness:

Drug it, fix it, cut it out...

eradicate it

Drug it, fix, it, cut it out!

ISOLATE—

AND CUT IT OUT!

**JODI: “Stay away from my heart with that thing!
What is that, a screwdriver?
Thich Nhat Hahn, where are you, I am freaking out here!”**

In an online video clip entitled, “Do not let despair take over” (David Suzuki Foundation, 2011), Thich Nhat Hahn, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, offered words of wisdom and comfort to David Suzuki on mindfulness and environmental crisis:

hush, child...

THICH NHAT HAHN: *We have to accept that this civilization can be destroyed.*

Not by something outside, but by ourselves. In fact, many civilizations have been destroyed in the past. So, it's very important, our mental formation, our mind. I think if we allow despair to take over, we have no strength left in order to do anything at all. And that is why we should do anything that can prevent despair to happen, including meditation. So when we meditate on civilizations that have been destroyed in the past, and if we can accept, we might have peace, and become a better worker for the environment [and education]. Because people, people who know what is happening, but allow it to happen, and cannot do anything, there are so many of them, there's so many, because they have despair in them, and they try only to survive. And if we can help them to sort out the inside, if we can help them to have hope, if we can help them to have peace in themselves, and suddenly they have the strength can come back to themselves. And given a hand of contribution, and that person will be an instrument for the protection of the environment [and education].

(David Suzuki Foundation, 2011)

JODI: **Phew! Thank you... I don't know what they might have done with that screwdriver if you hadn't shown up!**

now breathe...

On Being Smart

Please
Don't tell me that I'm smart.
I've heard it a million times and so have you
Thank you, but I am so done with the platitudes

If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all, young lady!

At one time, I held onto it so tightly
As if being smart could show me the way, protect me
Navigate me through the wondrous, terrifying uncertainty
To that silent bubble of pristine, calm, collected control

But the language is the control, oh my god, no
Me
My classmates
My relations
My babies
Setting up the dichotomy, knocked down by the judgment

Rank us

And set us on the right path
The one pre-determined for each of us
Ordained by the Ministry of Aptitude (insert heavenly music, maestro)
You are on the path to nowhere, young man
Oh no! I wail at the sheer hopelessness of my life!
But you, young lady, can do anything you want
Thank you, oh thank you sir! Bobbing head, backing out

Are you in or are you out?
Just work harder, and you can play on the margins for a while
But you will never be really in
The desired label eludes you
I, on the other hand,
Am in the club
But don't forget, with every next test, I could be thrown out
Without a second glance
Turn back, nose squashed on a slamming oak door
All it takes is one mis-step and
Teetering on the edge, I tumble into the vast out
Only to claw back, redeemed, I hope, in time
Keep working hard

I learned to wonder, oh yes
I learned to wonder about wondrous things
Like how I was being judged
And if I was cutting it
Cutting myself properly
Could my grand plan outlast my life?
A war of attrition
That can only be won looking back
From the future of my past
And what good is it to me then?

So don't tell me I'm smart
I might be
Today
Or once upon a time
Or forever
But that is not what I want to talk about

We, here, now
We have better language than that
Beautiful, functional, shifting language
And isn't that the wonder of it
It is time to start existing in that space
The space of the collective
Collective brilliance, oh yes, friend, give it to me!
Give me that moment when our sheer genius is so overwhelming
That it bursts out upon our glowing, nodding faces
Gasps out of us in unbidden exhalations

I am part of something
Oh yah, bring it on, something big like an ocean of grains of sand
Something so small it is like a tiny newborn chick in the palm of my hand
A bundle of peeping yellow fluff,
flopping around and hoping for strength to stand
stand and take up its space under the warm glow
I can no longer ignore it
Too big to bury myself in
Too small and precious to cover up and leave
Leave it in the future, frozen

I can no longer hide from us behind my smartness
I am being called to listen, to act, to speak,
to be tongue-tied and insistent
As we all are, in our ways and places and spaces of being

Finding my voice does not make me unique
It does not make me amazing or special or wonderful
To say that I am special is to despair of my entire life of relations
My voice and your silence makes us part of something
Yes, together in our variousness
Our gut reactions and compositions
Please don't single me out as a martyr to the machine

That is their language

To separate and annihilate

To hold up one is to push down another

That is their language

Not ours
Let us Other the obvious
We build
We build with words
We build with words these beautiful,
terrible,
common uncommon understandings
We build with love
We build with love our connected,
Yes connected,
Simple,
Strange and heartfelt interpretations
We are not broken-down, isolated, smart pathologies
We are broken, yes
Broken traditions in the making
But not broken-down
Let us love that
Let us love words and wonder and questions
Let us be grateful
But not smart
Not me
And not you

Us

TEACHING AND WRITING ON THE BOUNDARIES

Risky Conversations

When I began my career as a high school teacher in Calgary in 2004, I would often rebelliously ignore the final exam until the last two weeks of school, choosing instead to have good conversations about complex, untestable topics. I would “waste time” on elaborate economic role play games. I talked about religion and advertising and gay marriage and... then, having moved away for several years, I returned to Calgary and learned about Bill 44. Section 11.1 was added to the Alberta Human Rights Act, requiring boards of education to notify parents where "courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation” (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 2009, Calgary Board of Education, 2014). Parents under this section are now entitled to give their children permission to “opt out” of controversial topics such as religion and sexual and gender orientation. Because my work as a teacher in Calgary ended in 2008, I never had to live under that Bill. I am still trying to understand how this Bill has and will continue to impact classroom conversations and our work as teachers. I wonder... whose human rights are being protected? And what are they being protected against? Who is silenced when these so-called “risky” conversations are considered optional?

In my first year of teaching, I threw out the lesson-as-planned (Aoki, 2005) out of sheer necessity, and we learned how to be kind to one another. They might have done better on their final exams. They might have done worse. I didn’t ask permission. I had

to tread lightly in the staffroom. Keep my projects quiet. If neighbour-teachers heard about them, they either wanted a copy of the template, or they would stare down their noses at me and wonder aloud how that fit in the curriculum. I had champions—those I could wind-whistle my secrets to after everyone else had gone home. And be nourished by their tiny cheers and their own twilight tales of transgression.

The next semester when I was teaching grade 11 Social Studies, we studied colonialism, and our thoughts turned to genocide. Sudan... Rwanda... Residential schools... World War II. I was researching, studying, trying to find my place in the topic of genocide, scrolling through the numbers, the faces, the horrors. The disembodied voices would murmur imploringly up from the depths of the Google Search Engine, “what about us? Don’t forget us...” So we studied stories. We took risks. We debated. We shared our own stories. And then... I showed *Schindler’s List* (Spielberg, 1993). One student left the classroom in tears. What had I done? Had I gone too far?

Perhaps I had gone too far. But what was the alternative? If I had, in the spirit of Alberta’s 2009 Bill 44 (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 2009) chosen to “opt out” of the risky conversation of genocide, I might have been able to tread calmly, comfortably and safely on the surface of this topic. And slowly, over the course of two years, I learned to do just that. Under the influence of powerful discourses of accountability and outcomes, I gradually retreated back into the well-known world of standardization and simple memorization. I faced cynical high school students who could see right through me as I choked on the trumped-up justifications for yet one more meaningless, future-oriented grammar exercise or 5-paragraph position paper.

David G. Smith notices that “young people want to know if, under the cool and calm of efficient teaching and excellent time-on-task ratios, life itself has a chance, or whether the surface is all there is” (1988, p. 27). I had fallen back on the insurance of bare-minimum teaching, and although it felt safer than diving into the deep territories of genocides, religion, sexuality, war, human rights and democracy, it did not feel alive. And my students knew it. And they wanted more. We were suffering under the language of efficiency, the accountability of supply and demand, and yet nothing real was happening in our classroom. Together, we were exhausted, bored, and angry at the demands being placed on us to re-produce ever-accumulating sound-bites of knowledge, and yet nothing was really happening. Nothing of consequence—to us, to the topics, to the world we were already in—was actually being *demand*ed of us. We were barely keeping our heads above the surface. We were not experiencing the topics as interpretable. It is our pedagogical responsibility to allow young people to experience the human world as a constructed narrative “that can be entered and engaged creatively; to have a sense that received understanding *can* be interpreted or re-interpreted and that human responsibility is fulfilled in precisely a taking up of this task” (Smith, 1999, p. 42). The faces of genocide didn’t want to be forgotten, they had said. I had a responsibility to them—and to my students.

No teacher education program could have prepared me for the heartache of once again going through the motions, and lying about it to my students. In *Bitter Milk*, Madeleine Grumet (1988) reflected on the ways in which schools were turned into shelters from industrialization and urban life. She described how students and teachers are virtually exiled from communities, reduced to passivity and isolation. In noticing that

a pervasive attitude of protectionism persists today in schools (Grumet, 2005, p. 53), she speculates that many teachers leave the teaching profession, having found this isolation from the world *unbearable*. The poem entitled *Walking Away* is an articulation of the unbearability of this isolation that I experienced, once I allowed myself to be taken in by this atmosphere of protectionism. When I walked away from high school teaching in 2010, I wanted to share, learn about and create ways and examples in which teaching and learning could be, not just bearable, but enlivening, in the ways I knew that it could be. I wanted to bring myself as a teacher, topics, students and the world back into conversations of lively, messy, kinship. I wanted to respond to my students' questions as to "whether the surface is all there is" (Smith, 1988, p. 27), in more truthful, more open, and more abundant ways.

Walking Away

Row upon row of dull, medicated eyes
Stare balefully back at me,
Challenging me to force them

To think

We dare you to try
Others have failed
What makes you think you are so special?
We are old before our time
You cannot convince us that this could ever be relevant
Our lives are wholly lived outside of this building
Even as we tread its halls, listless
Completely zoned in to anything
Anything but here, now
This time, this place

A dead zone

It dictates our future
Yet it is nothing to our present
The machine hums along, hardly skipping a beat
I walk away and my replacement nearly trips over me getting through the door —

Tenure!

Sorry. I meant,

Goodbye. Good luck

Outside these walls the real world awaits
And yet there is no shelter here in the un-real world
Only numbness
And warnings
You kids, got it so easy
Just you wait
Until we decide your fate

(Un) Making the Grade

Our knowledge of the world instructs us first of all that the world is greater than our knowledge of it. To those who rejoice in abundance and intricacy, this is a source of joy. To those who hope for knowledge equal to (and capable of controlling) the world, it is a source of unremitting defeat and bewilderment.

(Wendell Berry, 1983, p. 56)

As I retreated from the risky work of curriculum as a lived experience, and my practice shifted to fit the language of prescribed outcomes and standardized assessment, I noticed how my beloved discipline of Social Studies was rendered in the name of the institution, creating a culture of consumption and rushing, a culture of “covering” topics and moving on to the next task. Many tasks in schools are not worthwhile—they are not worth whiling over, they don’t demand our attention—when the task is not learning about the topic itself, but rather about passing the test on a topic. David Jardine (2008) asks, “what makes a classroom experience worth, not simply zero-sum school-grade exchange, but *while* (p. 1)? With many examples of work in my classroom, no matter what the topic was, the real topic often became, simply, ‘school’” (Illich, 1970). I was spending my days “caught in the rushes, exhaustions and panics of day-to-day school life and work” (Jardine, McCaffrey & Gilham, 2014, p. 5). The economic, transactional nature of a schooling of scarcity had trumped the *worth-while-ness* of the topics taught. The field had become lifeless.

When we come to conceive of disciplines as living fields (Friesen & Jardine, 2009, p. 39) that demand something of us, that are emergent in their interactions with the

players in the field, possibilities for a living curriculum, or “*currere*,” (Pinar, 2012, p. 47) become abundant. “The playing field on which the game is played, as it were, set by the nature of the game itself and is defined far more by the structure that determines the movement of the game from within than by what it comes up against—i.e., the boundaries of the open space—limiting movement from without” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 107). There are boundaries to the playing field that hint at the possibilities and risks. “One can only play with serious possibilities” (p. 106) and in so doing, risk being outplayed.

In my classroom, I was trying to inoculate myself and my students against this risk by avoiding the field altogether, by sticking to the apparent safety of the known rubric. A standardized rubric is intended to be insurance against the “worst possible scenario,” to prevent against any possibility for failure in teachers or students. A rubric, in its well-intentioned way, is created to prevent a situation whereby a student, isolated from their topic of study, paired with a teacher who has forgotten what it means to do or describe thoughtful work, all wrapped up in an environment of scarcity that encourages competition and increasing oneself at the expense of others, come together to try to “be creative.” What arises is an iatrogenic effect, whereby the strategy invoked as a solution to a problem ends up inadvertently exacerbating the problem. One result of this is that this worst possible scenario actually re-organizes itself to *become* the field within which students and teachers are now contained. The grading system *becomes* the field of play: loud, rude, insistent, elbowing out the lively, rich topic that is open to interpretation, arguing, and, of course, the risk of failure. The prescribed outcomes in educational documents allude to my well-meaning desire as a professional to *help* students, to fix

their wounds and to minimize our collective suffering (Jardine, Friesen & Clifford, 2006, p. 13), to protect us from the inherent difficulties of living in close relationship to topics and to each other—

“Wait! I bought the insurance, so now, who is *at fault* here?”

The treatment of a topic as something that can be *covered* by a self-contained rubric that knows all possible outcomes, also closes that same topic to possibilities of being shaped by the players; there is no room in a rubric for students to teach *it*—and teachers, others—anything new. The following poem, *I Don’t Want to Make the Grade*, is a reflection on how it feels as a student to be measured by the standardized language of schooling, which, when isolated from the world and the disciplines, “collapses into language for processes of communication between teachers and students” (Grumet, 2005, p. 51). Differentiation (read also: personalization) is nothing more than a “placebo,” an ineffectual treatment for the fragmented condition of topics, students and teachers torn asunder, “for their own good.” Madeleine Grumet (2005) asks, “how different are we from each other? Do individual differences become salient when the object to be learned is completely defined and static?” (p. 52). If there is nothing new to be learned about the topic, our attention turns on each other, seeking to isolate the source of our suffering. Boundaries are clearly defined. Limits are designated and measured. As in the poem, we are laid bare...

...and I wonder:

Is it me? Is it the student? The method? It can’t be the topic—

we buried *that* ages ago!

I Don't Want to Make the Grade

Dearly beloved instructor:

I love your class. And I know you think I must care a lot about making the grade. Maybe I am an overachiever who wants to stand out from the crowd. Maybe I just want to get in, get the degree, and get out so I can bump up the pay scale. Maybe it's all of that and I also want to learn something while I am here.

I don't want to make the grade. Because, you see, grades change me. They turn me into a nervous, gossipy, shallow suck-up. A resentful, brooding, disappointing/ed over/underachiever. The knot in my stomach starts to grow the moment I turn in a paper or finish a presentation. Will I make it? Or will I get sorted into the "almost" pile?

Grades turn me into a bare minimum. Now, my bare minimum happens to be 90% or an A, whichever is higher. Just so you know, if 86% equals an A in your class, then I am not happy with just an A. My classmate's bare minimum happens to be a credential. Let her be.

Skin and bones
Stepping up and lying, passive
Laid bare, eyes closed, passing time by counting the tiles on the ceiling
Judged, assessed, scrutinized
Answering only what is asked of us
Not even really understanding why we should
Only that it will help them understand us better
The trusted professionals
Somehow they get what they need
Pull shoes back on with dry, shaking hands
And sent on our way
Back to try again
Keep it up
Do better
Show your work
But at the bare minimum
Don't do any worse

But, you see, the A or the 46% are still doing the exact same thing in your class. We are both just scraping by. We could have loved this topic. But we loved the grade instead. Because we were told to. We also could have hated this topic. But we never got a chance to decide either way. The grade decided for us.

So, if you must, go ahead. Grade me. I just don't want to be there when it happens. I don't want to make the grade—but more to the point,

I don't want the grade to make me.

Life Writing on the Boundaries: “The Price of Admission”

When fields and boundaries open up to the world, the possibilities and risks expand exponentially. The work of writing that is conducive to “playing” in these fields is an exercise in meaning-making; this comes with the uncomfortable and exciting recognition that the meanings can never be complete, whole or defining. I notice that “[t]his ‘worded world’ never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying” (Richardson, 2001, p. 35). Writing as inquiry in a dialogical context allows the researcher to “write *for* meaning rather than *to record* meaning” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 213). As I write, meanings emerge, crystallize, retreat, show up once again. In merging the horizons between method and art, I may play on boundaries that encourage me to reflect on the nature of knowledge. Poetry is “both a style of representation as well as a vehicle through which the academic/research community can engage in larger questions about the nature of social research, truth, and knowledge” (Leavy, 2009, p. 84). My response as a teacher to the world and its meanings as infinite and constitutive opens out, then spirals back down to a thoughtful and intimate relationship with my students, our topics of study, our locales, and our selves. In developing my abilities to reflect upon and understand my own histories, I begin to read my “personal and collective pasts in a truly pedagogic way” (Smith, 1988, p. 27). In this way, I may become more able to foster dialogical and transformative (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 213) conversations with children that *tend to* learning in its own right, much more than simply as a means to an external end.

As a writer and educator who is “willing to endure failure as the price of admission” (Berry, 2013), I embrace a deep vulnerability that opens up spaces for transformation, but I also open myself to the pain of “coming up short” (2013). Since “we often do not know how others who read, listen to, and view our braided narratives will respond” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 7), life writing is in many ways an act of faith (Hendry, 2007, p. 492). When I open myself to the potential risks and ethical obligations of inquiring into my own and others’ lives, I may also create openings through which “transformation through education” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 1) is possible. Narrative as an enduring way of knowing the world (Hendry, 2010, p. 73) is irreducible to method and pre-conceived outcomes. In a similar vein, teaching curriculum as a story, which, experienced as not knowing the answers in advance, and that “can allow itself to be deeply interrogated by children and young people” (David Smith, 1999, p.135), is inherently risky and unpredictable. Not knowing the answers in advance can be perceived under one myth as weakness. Here, now, in writing and educating *for meaning* (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 213), a space is opened whereby we may re-story this work as an undertaking of *courage*.

BEGOTTEN GENIUSES

Little Eruptions

He was like a volcanic event. Stalking our English classroom like a predator. We were mesmerized, frozen, rapt. I knew he was onto something, just beyond my horizon, worlds of words, worlds of wilderness. I knew by the way he stalked the classroom, and how his piercing eyes just burned right into your forehead—sometimes, he wasn't even here, not in this mundane, real world. And then it would arrive—Greek, Latin, histories, ancient meanings, pounding at us, overflowing, webbing, reaching for us, flowing in hot, seeping streams in between our desks and forcing us to lift up our feet, stand on desks. We were engulfed in the field—*his* field .

Desks lined up in rows. Marks posted on the wall, perfectly updated every two weeks. No talking without a smartly raised hand, that's for sure. But I switched out of every single high school English class from grade ten onwards—changed my entire schedule, one year—just to get into his. Three years of rapture.

This is why I returned to my old high school to teach in 2009. One day, my favourite high school English teacher walked up to me in the hallway and started babbling about Shakespeare and laughing maniacally, his swollen red nose pitted by overgrown pores and scrawled with broken blood vessels betraying his—as we say—weakness. He was whispered about across the staffroom but I never really knew if the rumours were true. I didn't ask. Long-term disability. Drinking. Stress leave. I see him around town, at the library, at the pool. He probably studies Latin in his spare time. Or maybe not. I want to tell him that I *got it*.

He *got to me*.

just say yes...

I have always felt, in the wilderness of my questioning, obsessions, depressions and rantings, just a little outside the boundaries of the “discourses of ‘normal’” (Seidel, 2014, p. 13), even as I was firmly entrenched in the curriculum of competition and success. I somehow felt that if I could be the best at everything, be everything that others wanted to be, that maybe I could feel just a little bit more “normal,” and they might leave me alone for a while. But I slowly grew suspicious of the language of economics, the measuring, the dividing, the ultimate success, the alluring “freedom of choice” —that tricky, disguised kind of freedom borne of the accumulation of wealth and social capital, directed always towards fulfilling manufactured needs. Like Dr. Jackie Seidel, scholar of ecological and contemplative pedagogy in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary (2014), “I grew weary of arguments for and against integration and differentiation. There is no argument. There is only yes and yes and yes. Yes to diversity. Yes to the fragile bodies and everyone being together. Yes to the interconnected miracles of life on this planet” (p. 13).

I hear phrases like “he’s so talented,” and “you’re so smart!” tossed around in the field of education and in our daily lives, and I often experience a slight frisson of discomfort when I hear this. It is meant as a compliment, I understand. But somehow, the “interconnected miracles of life” (Seidel, 2014, p. 13) are misplaced in this unquestioned, unfounded, technocratic language. Somehow, this language fails to adequately describe the difficult work that a student, an athlete or an artist does, in a tradition, in a field of expectations, in long, tedious hours of practice, of erasing and starting again, of attending to every detail. It fails to recognize the mentorship of

teachers, in all their forms, and the suffering of families who support and surround the one doing the difficult work.

The conception of **genius** as a self-identified personal quality is actually quite young: the commonly accepted meaning, as a "person of natural intelligence or talent" and that of "natural ability," came very recently into use, in the 1640's (Online etymology dictionary).

...new-genius.

When I cast my gaze backwards, I learn that **genius** in the late 14th century was rooted in the Latin *genius*, a "guardian deity or spirit which *watches over each person from birth*; spirit, incarnation, wit, talent;" also "prophetic skill." Looking a little further back still, I learn that the word **genius** originally meant "generative power," from root of *gignere* "beget, produce" (Online etymology dictionary).

...old-genius

begotten geniuses...

I got *it*.

Begotten: found by effort, attained, seized (Online etymology dictionary).

found...

he *got to me*.

"...yes," I reply.

found...

“To find one’s gift means to be found, but being found also depends upon another who is searching in the right way and in the right places”

(David G. Smith, 1999, p. 145).

The logic of self-identification misses out on the old-style “begotten-genius” —of simplicity, of love, of wondrous and other-*abilities*, of diversity—that is, those child-geniuses, in all their smallness and beauty, who can never be measured, nor perhaps even noticed, by a rubric. Dr. Allan Luke (2014), literacy and curriculum scholar at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, reminded us, in a witness address at the Kindling Conversations Symposium on weaving Indigenous perspectives into the Werklund School of Education, that before knowledge was commodified, it was a gift between generations (February 28, 2014). In the previous piece, entitled *little eruptions* and the following poem entitled, *I am no genius*, I consider what it may be to be *found* in a tradition of scholarship, to be nurtured and cared for and challenged to think deeply about a topic, to be part of something, to become practiced.

I am no genius

I am no genius-exception

I stand before you, an isolated, hopeful stranger
a product of my own talent –

a mirage.

But you do not know my family:
I come from a family of story-writers.

Artists, Musicians, Tellers.

My mother writes with perfect grammar, perfect penwomanship, and perfect love.

My father can recite Robert Service from memory and oozes rhythmic, poetic verse from every wrinkle in his serious, wise forehead.

My best friend, lover, only reads the news. His weathered work hands story houses into homes.

My uncle's arrow-stories chuckle up from behind his wry smile, and you never quite know if you got the message
...and he never tells.

My grandfather yodelled war and saddles and ghosts and love.

My sister callouses her fingertips on the same worn frets that he danced upon, strumming on his old polished bones.

My aunt is an elementary principal who debates educational philosophy in her sleep, and sits down at the kitchen table with me to welcome my new words with generosity and wonder.

My daughters clamour every evening for storytime, which somehow always seems to stretch way past bedtime.

I am adopted into a family of philosopher-writers.

Abrams. Aoki. Berry. Campbell. Carruthers. Chambers. Donald. Dewey. Eisner. Freire. Friesen. Gadamer. Greene. Jardine. King. Leggo. Richardson. Seidel. Smith. Steinberg.

In no particular order. As if the order didn't matter one bit.

Don't be fooled – this is not a precinct line-up,
not a number-calling scramble for rations.
This is a feast. All present? All accounted for. Called to account

They too, each and every, have their own webbed, outstretched, back-reaching families of
givers, of which I am be-come into.

An inheritance:

time-worlds of genius-relations,
my mothers and fathers who wanted me, here,
with each familial/r pen scratch and key stroke,
despair,
meditation,
miniscule mistake,
world of worry/ing,
with every silent gratitude.

I retreat into my long-lost family of teacher-writers,
Lamenting, hoping, challenging. Re-living our stories.

Testing the light of day.

We are the space,
we are the suffering.

We are the whisper that zips down your back
and sits at the base of your spine,
reminding you that yes,
this is something.

Nobody leaves. We try to preserve this in our scratchy scrawls.
Notebooks burst—preserving, suffering, spilling outside of space and time.
But I promise that you will never re-cover

this moment.

We are the afterglow.

I am the genius-maxim.
I cannot be excepted.
I stand before you, implicated in our be-coming –

a kindred spirit

with a gifted soul

a proof

I recently had a conversation with an old friend, of Mexican, Indigenous and European descent, raised on a cattle ranch, who was in my French Immersion class all the way from grade one right up through to graduation day. He graduated and passed all of his courses, but it was probably a “tweaked” kind of pass in everything except gym class and woodwork. He is a brilliant kind of guy, and his brilliance is expressed through his hands. His experience of school was worlds apart from mine, and yet in many ways we both experienced school, especially high school, as deadening. And we were onto something, indeed, for, (in teacher education), “in the name of inordinate concern for children, children themselves, as rightful persons in the total human drama, have been largely banished under a dense cover of rationalistic, abstract discourses about ‘cognition,’ ‘development,’ ‘achievement,’ and so forth” (Smith, 1988, p. 28).

We couldn’t find ourselves in the language of schooling. So we “made ourselves up,” to fit the language: While I was the kid who knew it all, he was the kid in the back who didn’t like to read or write, the self-described “cowboy-and/or-Indian” all rolled up into one who liked to disrupt the class with his homemade firecrackers or illicit pocket-knife desk-carving displays. Perhaps if our (well-schooled) teachers had experienced his disruptions as something that was speaking to them, calling upon them to act differently, rather than a nuisance, we both would have enjoyed school more. He was never a reader, resisting all attempts to force him to read in school, but after he graduated and discovered hunting manuals and agricultural “how-to” books. He just devoured them—five-hundred page tomes of dense, technical writing.

My friend said, “It took me ten years after I graduated to figure out who I was and to get over what happened to me in school.” I told him, “Me too,” even though an outside observer would argue that school had served me well. I can agree with that. It has served me well. And perhaps I had served school well in my suffering, too, and proven the system right. Now, in this work I seek to explore the possibilities of “otherwise” (Greene, 1988, p. 3). My own story—interweaving with the stories of these scholars, my teachers, friends, family, my own students—is unique, yes, and yet so deeply embedded in the space-time that we jointly occupy, trailing back—and back—and forward, back to here.

...my friend,

he *got* to me.

PLACE STORIES AS PEDAGOGY

“Identity means nothing without a set of relations”

(David G. Smith, 1999, p. 43).

“Back to Being Seen”: Introduction to *Stories of Men*

In October, 2013, my education graduate class had the great pleasure of welcoming Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt (2013) to visit our classroom. She came to do some guest teaching about her doctoral work, *New Media as a Tool of Decolonization: Digital Storytelling* (2011), and spoke of the work in her birthplace, the Fishing Lake Métis settlement, Alberta. Yvonne spoke of the need for a shift in perspective with regards to Aboriginal education. She said that “[t]he focus is now on closing the gap in pedagogy, not in achievement” (October 22, 2013).

The Western Apache say, “wisdom sits in places” (Basso, 1996, p. 2). Dr. Cynthia Chambers (2006), a curriculum and Indigenous studies scholar at the University of Lethbridge, with Narcisse Blood, a scholar, storyteller and elder of the Kainai First Nation in Southern Alberta, have taken university students to *visit* Chief Mountain, *ninaiistàko*, in the Rockies, the buffalo jumps, sites that are thousands of years old. She contrasted the notion of *touring* with that of *visiting* (p. 33-35).

A **tour**, in early 14th century usage, was “a turn, a shift on duty,” from the Latin *tornare*, “to polish, round off, fashion, turn on a lathe” (Online etymology dictionary). Contrast this with the word **visit**, meaning, in early 13th century usage, “come to (a person), to comfort or benefit,” from the Latin *visitare*, “to go to see, to come inspect” (Online etymology dictionary).

The word tour for me evokes military images, tourists in resorts, and the museums of grand narratives. A visit makes me want to sit awhile, have some tea, take care of a place, feed it. What does it mean to visit a place, to have a responsibility to that place

and to those who inhabit it? Cynthia Chambers (2006) reflected on this notion of visiting:

In the North, where I grew up, visiting was the primary social activity; and children learned the stories by listening, and they learned the art of telling those stories and the art of conversing from listening (rather than participating). In the communities where I lived, the people visited places as well as people; and the absence of places and their inhabitants were missed like family. (p. 34)

A place story is of the past but it also lives on in us. It treats time in a different manner, whereby we can be of all times at once. “[P]lace stories connect — to other worlds and other places—and yet they are deeply local and embodied, participating in the materiality of local places” (Somerville, 2012, p. 68). Place stories represent a shift from a scientific, objectified external “environment,” to a conception of place as an embodied locale. Place stories “bridge the local and global, the material and symbolic” (p. 69).

Yvonne told us of men and women. She said that women, rising out of the roots of a matriarchal society, are moving “forward” more quickly than men, because they have a lot more invested in their communities. “The true power lies with the women even as they wear the face of patriarchy. Men are still caught up in the dysfunction” (Poitras Pratt, October 22, 2013).

I went home that night and I couldn’t sleep. I had visited a place of men that had required my comfort and seeing. In my recent work at an Indigenous community college, I had had the chance to work with exactly the men she was talking about. I couldn’t stop thinking about these notions of pedagogy, sacred places, the power over one’s own story, the women and the men. These threads were fraying, tangling, outplaying me (Gadamer,

2004, p. 106). I finally gave up the battle. I wrote some quick, urgent notes, tossed and turned in frustration, and eventually went to sleep.

But in my dreams I remembered them, and they wouldn't let me go.

The concepts of “decolonization and “re-inhabitation” are central tenets of a critical place-conscious education (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9). Decolonization is defined as a process of identifying and deconstructing the stories and practices through which people and places are exploited and destroyed. Re-inhabitation is described as the process of “identifying, affirming, conserving, and creating those forms of cultural knowledge that nurture and protect people and ecosystems” (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9). Yvonne (2013) spoke of storytelling: “I had to de-colonize myself before I could continue in my own education. Use storytelling to guide your own path in lifelong learning” (October 22, 2013). She spoke of needing to hear the story behind the story. She spoke of the sacred space of stories.

We were reminded of Wendell Berry, in an interview with Bill Moyers, when he said that “there are no sacred and unsacred places, there are only sacred and desecrated places” (2013). I was caught up. These men’s sacred place stories called for my telling. I woke up in the middle of the night and fired up my computer. I started writing, and didn’t stop. My senses were overwhelmed with their faces, their chortles, their gentle teasing, their story-telling. Each man had an animal spirit, and I could hear each voice erupting from deep inside a hungry belly, calling for my attention. Quietly, sidling up to me in the middle of that long, sleepless night. They reminded me that “those who do not

have power over the story that dominates their lives – the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change—truly are powerless”

(Rushdie, 1991, p. 480). Our visitor, Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt, in her musings about storytelling, power, sacred places, and pedagogy, had somehow drawn these stories of men back to where they belonged...

back to being *seen*.

Stories of Men

Oh my, these men are raw. Twenty-one of them, eyeing me. Two slight ladies who are sitting, eyes-forward-ridge-backed-tall in their seats. Another woman, she dresses sturdily, and is a helluva second basewoman. She wears a pink ballcap with the word “Bitch” on it. Funny, she ain’t no bitch. That hat scared the heck out of me the first day, but underneath the wisecracking ballcap, she is more like a gentle, sturdy, chortling young-old mare, just easing her way through life. Yes, I feel it too, ladies, I hear ya. Twenty-one men in a too-small room.

In eight weeks’ time, there will be nine left standing. Seven men. Two women.

This community-based English/Math crash-course-in-catching-up is for some the only thing standing between them and what they really want to do, which is to work in the mine that is already under construction on their land. The program I am brushing them up for is called “Bridging to Trades,” and is sponsored by the local mine trades association. The mine has agreed to hire local band members and to fund courses which will help them qualify for those jobs.

I have been given the challenge of teaching them advanced algebra and essay-writing to prepare them for the plumbing, electrical work, and pipefitting they will be doing next semester.

But guess what people, when you are an hour and a half drive when-there’s-no-construction from the college, where the grew-up-on-a-rez-down-the-road Director drives up the winding, single-lane gorge-snaking highway from town in his white SUV on the first day, does his rah-rah-go-team! and doesn’t glance back on the way out the door back to his Director life (well, don’t tell, but), you will never write an essay in an English class for tradespeople. Not even on the final exam. I have other things in mind for you.

I walk by the parked quad—whose is that? *Oh, that’s the student who quads it down the mountain from the reserve on the other side of the river, takes the morning ferry across, grinds up from the valley floor, takes about an hour or so, pretty cold trip some days.* I step into the unheated portable. Next week, they say. Funding will get sorted out soon.

Latremouille—what tribe is that? Oh, um, her name was Ma, on my grandfather’s side, who was, oh, 1/8th Native, from Little Fort, I don’t know if that means much—oh, does it count... I never got my status, I don’t look... I don’t identify... Nope. Not enough. And the air in the room changes, the gaze shifts warily. I know that will change again. It always does. They don’t know me yet. This isn’t my first time stumbling through, beyond the story of who I am not.

This surfer-man loves Tofino. He took a long-ago remember-when trip in a van with some buddies. They surfed all day, smoked a lot of weed—but he shouldn’t talk to me about that, should he—oh well man, it was great, right on. He has a baby girl and she is a smart little thing. Already says the alphabet, only two! Her mama, his lady, gives him the gears every night when he gets home, no time for homework, man. He goes to school-works all-night, bleary-eyed exhausted, making-it.

Let’s talk about language and community, I say. What are some languages we are a part of? Excluded from? What does a quadratic equation say? What does a story say? What does LMFAO say?

Watch what ya say, teacher-lady, or we will howl-roar you off the rez right back to where you came from, not-here town. We like to drop the f-bomb here. The LMFAO-bomb.

Allrighty, then, gentlemen. We are going to read *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2009). And yes, we are going to laugh our fucking asses off. Get this, move in close, I whisper: he says boner. And I will say boner. “Boner!” More than once. In a classroom! And I am going to make you read it right out loud in front of the teacher-lady.

That is, unless you say, “pass.” Because here, well, everyone has the right to “pass.”

Not today, thank you very much. Because I am not feelin’ it today. Because guess-what-I-can’t-read, and everyone-knows and will ignore me, it, for me. But Mr. Smart-Ass over here will do more than his share of the talking, don’t you worry, and don’t we just bug the hell out of him about that.

Until teacher-lady shuts that down, right quick. We are allowed to be smart here. Nerds, Geeks, Suck-ups. Packing-briefcase, opening-doors Teacher’s pets. Can’t-read-Geniuses.

This survivor-man remembers. Face-scarred-burned, broken-teeth survivor. *Seven years old in the Kamloops residential school. We worked hard. We toed the line, sat up straight, ah, worked real hard. And if we didn’t...* He looks skyward and his eyes flutter closed as if his eyelids cannot bear the weight of this memory. *I was a basketball player. Real good. Short and skinny, just like the kid in the story. I’m getting ready to tell my story at a hearing. Ah, that’s gonna be real hard.*

A coupla young boy-men. A coupla gangstas. Fresh out of high school. *Make that grade eight*, says the black-hoodie-slouched-down-hunched-over-tough-not-tough guy. I want to tie him down in that chair, tell him, this is not that, you are free! Yes, I would. Tie him down to tell him he is free.

You are here. You choose to be.

So please, please, please, choose to be here.

Be present. That is all I ask.

No.

Your deep, smouldering eyes and bulky black headphones answer in advance.
But I still treat you as if I don't already know that.

I beam at you when you arrive two hours late, sulk in and flop down, glossy-eyed,
book closed in front of you,
no pencil,
no homework,
no lunch.

I push, keep pushing, nudging, teasing, smiling, reprimanding. You are welcome here.
But we don't do that here. Yes, the two can co-exist. But we can't just co-exist.

I won't chase you when you storm out.
You are an adult, you know. Don't you know?

Blinded by your angry, alienated, schooled, confused discontent.
We have fucked you over.
Eight weeks of more school will not pull apart the dis-from the course-content.

I celebrate your ass in this seat.
I celebrate your homemade, fuzzy, lean-back, basement-hollow angry rap.
I ask to hear more, and you hand over your headphones.
I listen,
in the middle of a mathematics lesson.
You watch me,
waiting for the familiar scowl and faint smell of something sour.
But I don't do that here.

I glimpse the child
in your watching.

I see the man you will be in thirty years
when you realize that you should have stayed here, now.

It's not enough this time.

Maybe we will meet again, but not this time.
You think I still think you are trouble.

You are here but you don't yet know why.
But I think you still think I am the enemy.

And so, not this time.

The women come to me after class. Pull me aside. Skin and bones. Confide, whisper, cry. *Oh, it was bad. It's still bad.* Maybe we can find you a counsellor. Maybe a program. Just listen. It's not enough. They go back, turn their backs, mostly. But we are women, and we sway onwards, bumping up against our own choices, our dishonoured strengths and stolen joys. I get it. Confidential.

The men sit and wait for me to come to them, or they sidle up while I am erasing the whiteboard after class, in the between-times.

I was in the residential school just down the road, ya know.

Stare at me, dare me to wince, to turn a cheek. To break the spell. I never do. I am held hostage. Rooted, silent, frozen, a silent covered-up gasp. This is not my first time. I know the way through. I breathe deep, centre, and prepare to let him wash over me. Sometimes the tears slide off my chin, and I let them do what they will. The men never stop talking when the tears come. But we find a way through.

And thank goodness we can laugh. This uncle-man leans back in his chair, his unruly, wiry moustache-stubble hanging on his every word.

I am a healer, eh. I have visions. I come from a long line of shamans, and when I hear the ancestors sing to me, I open my mouth and it comes out, ya know. I am just learning how to handle my powers. I am just a young man, now, just learning about the elder I am to be. I share my wisdom-stories.

I have a dream, he says. I want to have my own flagging company. Yup, the first First-Nations flagging company in the province. I just gotta get some start-up funds and some education. That's why I am here. Not easy, being back in school, eh.

After he tells me this, I do my next daily drive past the construction crews and my imagination goes to our uncle-man, the drive-by shaman, leaning on his slow-stop sign. Nodding, blessing, silently-wisely waving them through, the highway pilgrims. Oh my, we laugh.

We read the play, *Where the Blood Mixes* (Loring, 2009) It is about the Kumsheen, this very real place very near here, where the rivers meet and the salmon story us. "The place inside our hearts where the blood mixes" (back cover). *Oh yah, Kevin, I met him a coupla times, he had dinner with us at my aunt's, they are friends, eh.*

For the first time in our class a guy says, reads, the word 'fucked,' and they don't laugh.

"He beat me.... Fucked me." He chokes, pauses, softens on the words.

We had to cajole and tease this young-gentle-silent-brilliant man, jokingly nicknamed "Mr. Loudmouth," into reading the part of the main character. I knew what was coming before he started. Who the hell do I think I am, talking about this, asking them to read this?

But we are more than this. All of us. We know it. And he continues reading, the moment noted, survived.

There is a new-father-man who sits in the back row, a round-faced, squatting bullfrog peering at me over his glasses. He has five grown kids.

I was in the residential school just down the road, ya know.

Boarded, empty,
a silent, hollow moan.
Burn it down, plant a garden, let it rot.
We walk on by,
tense up imperceptibly,
just enough to feel the scars on our backs itching.
Our History is written on our spines

and on the skeleton buildings,
reclaimed, denied, destroyed.

I wasn't there for my boys. They don't listen to me. But look at me now, I am here in this class with them. I was a drinker, eh, didn't see them much growing up. Their mom, she left me, and I don't blame her, ya know. My daughter, she is our tutor, real smart. My one son, he went to high school in the Kamloops high school, got good grades, knows more math than you, I bet, teacher-lady. He has big dreams. My other boy, he is ruining his life, wasting his chance. Won't get nowhere without an education. I don't want them to be my age doing what I am doing. Starting over. So here I am.

I know they have told me of rape. They have told me about beatings given and received. They have told me about the nights they don't remember. And perhaps I wanted to forget. I don't know. But I have forgotten their memories. Only the whispers remain. Sometimes it washes over me in a rush. Circles, returns, never reminisces. There is no nostalgia in this place. Sometimes it drips down on me from out of nowhere, like those clear days, when you hold out your hand, wondering, look up and see only sunshine.

I tease out from the tangled imagined threads their young-elder, scarred, smooth, crinkled man Faces.

I hear their soft, gravelly Voices.

Their mourning, teasing, thriving, gruff Laughter.

Feel the clamp that locks down on my heart and squeezes, squeezes,
pushing blood up into my neck with a whoosh and a tingling ringing between my ears.
Crystallizing in a pure, clear Moment.

Nod.

Breathe. Breathe it in.

Witness. Face.

Allrighty, see you tomorrow—say, we got any math homework, my teacher lady?

EARTHLY KNOWLEDGES

It may be that the meaning and place of children in our lives is the most important consideration to be taken up in education today, not just because the voice of the young has been translated out of any meaningful involvement with the powers that be, but also because the questions of the young (their conception, care and nurturance) devolves precisely on so many of the defining issues of our time, such as the structuration of power, gender relations and the matter of how we might learn to live more responsibly within the earthly web of our planetary home.

(David G. Smith, 1999, p. 28)

(No) Frog-Stories in Your Backyard

In her book, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014), Elizabeth Kolbert shares a frog story:

The town of El Valle de Anton, in Central Panama, used to be home to thousands and thousands of golden frogs, to the point whereby a creek close to town was nicknamed “Thousand Frog Stream.” Then, a crisis arose, but by this time it was too late. Starting near Panama’s border with Costa Rica, the golden frogs began disappearing, until in 2004, the blight had spread to El Valle de Anton, and tiny frog corpses littered the streams around the town. All attempts to preserve the species have come too late, as the discovered cause, the chytrid fungus, has spread worldwide and is “for all intents and purposes, unstoppable” (p. 15).

Although the amphibians are classified as the most endangered class of animals, they are merely the front end in a mass stampede of extinctions (p. 18). Herpetologists Wake and Vredenburg (cited in Kolbert, 2014) noted that, although there are a multitude of reasons why species are disappearing, the root causes trail back to “‘One weedy species’ [that]... has unwittingly achieved the ability to directly affect its own fate and that of most other species on the planet” (p. 8). Now, we can’t be *completely* sure if they are correct in their predictions. But what if we read these stories, these accounts, as if they are *true of something*? What does this mean in the lives of children? What stories are we to tell to our children about what we have done to our planet, and what might be done in the face of one of the rarest events in life’s history, the Sixth Mass Extinction, taking place, even now, if you look carefully, “in your own backyard” (p. 18).

My best friend's mother, Brun, wonders about the frogs that live in the slough out behind her house on the ranch on Lindley Creek Road, in Merritt, B.C.

She complains:

“Oh, those noisy frogs, just a couple of years ago, they used to be so loud that we couldn't sleep at night during the summer! We'd have to put earplugs in. Such a nuisance!”

And then her voice drops:

“Now, we don't hear them at all. I just don't know what is happening to them.”

listen...

The silence of the frogs—

a croaky,

slimy,

belly-up,

absence.

“Deep Earth Democracy”: Introduction to *An Organic Pedagogy*

“As your heart breaks open there will be room for the world to heal”

(Joanna Macy, 2007, p. 152).

When I learn of frogs disappearing, bees falling ill, Residential schools and nuclear meltdowns, I often feel that it is just too much to bear. My heart “breaks open” (Macy, 2007, p. 152) on a daily basis, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems that our world faces. These are profoundly pedagogical problems, for our every interaction leaves a lesson, a mark – on our bodies, on our hearts, on our students, on the earth. There are so many problems to pay attention to: where do I start? Sometimes, it’s just too much to worry about, too much to sort through. Too much to bear.

Before coming to create my home-based business, Footprints Harvest Organic Produce Delivery Service, I was an aggressive social justice activist. I spent years worrying about the state of the world, debating with friends and colleagues about what should be done to improve our schools, our governments, our earth. I argued over which career was the most noble, about plastic vs. cloth diapers, and over which car was the most fuel-efficient.

But what I didn’t realize in my arguing is that I don’t have the power to change others’ minds, especially not through the use of forceful conviction. And even more importantly, I learned that I cannot simply will myself to change, either. Change takes time, patience, and practice. And in taking the kind of time that is required, I might become “a better example” (Berry, 2013) of what is good for the world. I hope.

In her keynote address for Public Interest Alberta (2014), Indian environmental activist and author Vandana Shiva outlined the tenets of a Deep Democracy of the Earth (April 10, 2014), whereby all participants, including the non-human inhabitants and landscapes of the earth, contribute to decision-making. Within this notion, there is no such thing as individual freedom. There are only interconnected freedoms. She stated that

in defending the public good, we must not allow our identities to be pitted against each other. The next generation of rights will be based on the rights of the earth. She noted that environmental justice and social justice are intimately intertwined, for “eco-apartheid leads to apartheid. It divides human beings” (Shiva, April, 10, 2014).

She reminded us that we must protect the small things: *seeds. oxygen. water.*

After many months of reflection, and wondering what kind of social justice action would have an impact on my community, I came to the decision that I would promote local, organic and ethically sourced food. I felt that if I could start with our most basic human rights, to eat healthy food and drink clean water, that this would open up some conversations around equality, social justice and environmental justice. I didn’t need to save the world anymore. But I felt like this small, local response was going to contribute to a more ethical world. As a teacher, I knew that I needed to listen to my community and to have my business evolve and respond in thoughtful ways.

In advocating for small responses, Vandana Shiva stated that, “in a world where Monsanto [bought] themselves the 2013 World Food Prize (Gimenez, 2013), everyone who cooks with real food is a food hero” (Shiva, April 10, 2014). She noticed that humans need to re-enter the cycle and landscape of life, reminding us that “food is a commons—out of our bodies, back to the soil” (April 10, 2014). What I began to notice in respecting this earthly cycle was that this business was becoming more than just a service rendered. It was becoming a community. A community of health, love, and thoughtful engagement. I was finding, that in these small, local, communal spaces, that there was “room for the world to heal” (Macy, 2007, p. 152).

An Organic Pedagogy

Footprints Harvest Organic Produce Delivery Service...

A small response
to the world
It grew out of tending
attending to the world around me
and digging deep
and following my
heart-ache
little whispers
ideas bubbling
stories told
little snakes in the grass
slithering up to remind you
that you are alive

I had never really dreamed of being an entrepreneur, but when I moved in 2008 from Calgary back to my hometown of Merritt with my husband and 3-month-old daughter, I wanted a break from my satisfying yet all-consuming teaching world of 50-60 hour work weeks and endless extracurricular life.

My best friend Robyn and I created Footprints Harvest on a road trip to visit my sister in Nelson, B.C.

I love going to Nelson and immersing myself in the laid-back, uber-conscious culture of cool that just oozes out of those summer-misty Kootenay mountains, rising up against the crisp skyline, standing guard against the rushing world. I think our destination inspired us to “think like hippies” on that trip, and wow, those Nelson folks don’t know it but they didn’t disappoint us! I sometimes describe myself as a neo-hippie, and I think my eco-chic friends, urban farmers, avant-garde ranchers, environmentalists and oil-field engineers all have some of the “hippie” attitude in them. It’s time to take back the spirit of that word. The “hippie” love that all of us have needs to be honoured in the work that we do and the conversations that we share so generously with each other.

I saw many friends engaging in home-based businesses, and they all did what they did because they believed in their product. Robyn, a self-described nerd, was running a home-based business at the time.

“I just loooove books, so that’s why I do Usborne Books!”

I also wanted to do something that I could believe in wholeheartedly. My problem was that I was having trouble imagining what I might offer to sell when at the heart of every product-based business is the problematic issue of unnecessary consumption. I didn’t want to be part of that race. I wanted to “make a living, not a killing” (Wendell Berry, 2013). I needed to offer something that I would want everyone to consume in large quantities and never get tired of.

In the first year, we got started on a shoestring. Five customers had agreed to pre-pay for the season, which allowed us to purchase bins to pack the food in. That was about it. We packed the bins on fold-out tables in Robyn’s front yard, under the 100-year-old willow trees. When it rained, we hauled everything in to her tiny little kitchen, piling bins and cases of produce clear to the ceiling. Most delivery days were a panic of getting everything packed and off into my little Volkswagen for the afternoon route, and worrying about whether the root cellar could stay cool enough for the extra root veggies to last until the following week. It usually did—apparently root cellars know what they are doing. We kept track of our orders on an Excel spreadsheet gifted to us from a well-established produce delivery service called Urban Harvest, and we spent much of our time that summer typing in little notes about who wanted extra bananas, and who didn’t like squash.

Businesses take 3-5 years before they start to turn a profit. This is a commonly cited statistic, so I knew that I would need to find a business that I could benefit from even if I wasn’t making money. A friend who was also just starting an eco-friendly composting business, said to me,

“Well, we don’t make any money yet, but we have all the compost we could ever need!”

For me, this automatically ruled out, say, a t-shirt business. I could imagine myself, thousands of hours and three years down the road saying,

“Well, I don’t make any money yet, but I have all the t-shirts I could ever need!”

Hmmm, what was something that I could continue to appreciate, year after year, that would make my time feel worthwhile, even if I wasn’t getting “paid?”

In the early days, I would hear questions from people who didn’t really believe that organic was any different or better than conventional food, or that the pesticides really didn’t have that much impact on their body’s systems. This kind of thinking is hard to refute, because you can appeal to “scientific” research that might support one position or another, and you will find that the research, unsurprisingly, is so conflicting. There are

too many agendas to be served in building up one position or another. And when you have two items that look very similar, taste similar, and are not “differentially branded” with advertising slogans, it is hard to distinguish between them. They are left wondering if “organic” is just a cash grab, left hoping that they can continue to live in a world where food is cheap, and trying desperately to ignore the consequences of industrial food production.

Our customers would argue that in fact, there is a very significant difference in taste and appearance between conventional and organic food. The first thing our customers will say is that the organic fruit and veggies are not uniform. This is because every single piece of fruit is precious and raised with much attention and care, so organic farmers do not sort and cull according to the same standards of perfect appearance. They cannot afford to waste anything. This expectation by well-indoctrinated consumers for “perfect,” uniform produce is a result of the mechanization of food production. When you can produce a million boxes of cereal that look exactly the same, with the same weight and nutritional content, it becomes “natural” to expect that your produce lives up to the same “standardization” as students sitting lined up in identical rows in classroom as they pore over their latest examination results. Well, what standardization leads to is a disconnect from what real food, and real nature, looks, feels, smells, and tastes like. The implications of this are far-reaching. Think about our obsession with perfect, uniform lawns, or our expectation that every piece of clothing we buy is perfectly stitched, without variations or flaws, children crammed into “remedial” or “streamed” classes, culled from the herd due to some perceived flaw in their persona. Think about the homemade, natural clothing that must bear a disclaimer regarding “natural flaws” in the material and variations in the work-wo-manship. Imagine, of all the things that should have to be justified, that in our world the “humanity” in a piece of work or food, in a work of art or writing, a deviation from the lesson plan, must be made *explicit*?

These attitudes are changing within our community, and I like to think that our customers are at the forefront of the move towards conservation, more efficient use of food, and acceptance of diversity. In the cooler on bin packing days, we get a special kind of mischievous joy from putting a “funky-looking” two-legged carrot or 5-lb beet in one of our favourite customer’s bins, grinning at the thought of the look on their faces when they open up their bin to see the—gasp! —mutant veggie!

The second thing that they will say is that the organic fruit tastes more flavourful. Those who have not done a taste test comparison will think that this difference is an imagined myth, but I have witnessed people’s amazement and wonder upon tasting a homemade veggie tray made up of organic vegetables.

“Where did you get these cherry tomatoes? They are so tasty!”

One of our good friends who was visiting from the city a few years ago came into our garden, and wanted to try some of the produce from our garden, so he dug a carrot out of the ground, rubbed it on the grass, and started munching. He was like a little child, eyes wide:

“It’s a party in my mouth! It’s like tasting food for the first time!”

Our palates become accustomed to processed food over-flavoured with sugar, fat and salt, and our bodies forget what it is like to eat food for the sake of its natural flavour. We can get used to peanut butter without added sugar, or stir-fries not smothered in sauces, but flavoured with spices. We can get used to anything, even learning without an added “fun factor” stirred in, topics that are spicy in their own right, and a pedagogy that does not try to compete with edutainment. I feel like the work that I do, along with my team, brings life back into people’s experience of eating—to a healthier, more life-affirming, more leisurely and communal experience. What we learn along the way is merely a side dish to engagement in... *life*.

The one story that keeps reminding me that the difference is real is about my grandma Leona, who was always very ill in her later years, afflicted with asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, and many severe allergies, including pet and food allergies. She could never eat an apple because her lips would swell up and get all puffy and tingly, and then her throat would start to close up. But then one day our dear family friend, Brun, brought some McIntosh apples from her tree at home, and my grandma Leona found that she could eat them without a reaction! This was in the days before organic eating was “trendy,” and before nut allergies, gluten-free sensitivities and asthma were so troublesome for so many people.

I used to be defensive and ardent about our mission and the importance of eating organic food. But then I started to really listen to people’s stories.

I heard resentment and sadness,

“When I was growing up, there was no such thing as this ‘organic’ stuff, everything was just organic. We didn’t need labels.”

I heard frustration,

“There is no way I will be able to afford to feed my family at these prices!”

I heard dismissal,

“I really want to buy local—oh, how much? No thanks.”

I heard anger,

“What you are doing is just a bunch of propaganda!”

And then I heard something from a friend.

“Everyone is doing the best that they can with the resources that they have.”

And all the stress, the power of scarcity, just melted away, and I slowly started to learn a more honest way of speaking with and listening to people. Our resources include knowledge, beliefs, skills, money, and the whole range of experience that make us who we are in the world. So I was able to learn to live with the criticism and the rejection, because I knew that the next person I spoke to might be the one who would have a heartening story to tell. Living in a world of abundance feels like that.

“I tried that recipe you posted, and now my kids like zucchini!”

“Last night, I made the first all-local meal I have ever made.”

“Every Tuesday night, we empty out our fridge, chop it all up and dump it in the wok, then look forward to Wednesday’s deliveries.” It is a new tradition in our house: the Tuesday night Footprints Harvest leftover stir-fry!”

These people, all of them, teach me what it means to educate. Educating is not about talking. Educating is about listening and responding. Each person who told me a story was demanding a response from me. And rather than launch into a rehearsed sales pitch, I learned to hear what was behind their story, and try to build on that in some way. Sometimes all I could do in response to the man who thought organics was nothing but propaganda was to say, “Hmmm. Thank you for sharing that. Would you like to try a strawberry?”

The people I listened to also taught me something about what it means to be living in a history. The industrial food production machine is a relatively new phenomenon, having only taken hold in the post-WWII years. There are people alive, like the elders who remember when there was no such thing as organic, who know what it was like to grow their own food, or to buy food at a local market. This history reminds me of the possibilities—our food production system does not always have to look the way it does. In fact, it cannot possibly stay the same, because the current methods are unsustainable. So, I do what I do because organics may not be a perfect solution to the earth’s problems, but the alternative—of doing nothing—is unbearable.

My customers who have gardens always apologize every summer when they cancel their bin for harvest season.

“I’m really sorry, but, you know, I have a garden...”

And they worry that we will be disappointed! No, no, you grow that garden! We love it! You are doing exactly what we believe in! Which reminds me that my business is a little bit different from your typical, bottom-line business. It reminds me that my heart is in the ethics of the work, not the profit, and it allows me to genuinely support my customers who reflect deeply on the problems we face and choose other ways to be sustainable.

Well, here I am, five years later, and I am still waiting for the magic profit-turning year.

And we eat very well in our house.

And I am grateful for that.

I am also grateful for the customers who believe in what we do, and who tell me on a daily basis how what we do has changed their lives. I listen to their stories.

“My son no longer has severe eczema.”

“Since we no longer go to the grocery store, we don’t buy junk food.”

“We actually save money because less food is wasted.”

“We appreciate our food more, because we take the time to make real meals.”

“I have more energy now!”

When I first started this business, I had thought I would be filling a market niche. I had no idea that we would be building a community. People seek me out to talk about their dinner, to ask about gardening tips, to share eco-important news and advice. They send links, they request products, they enliven and enrich my own understandings. This business has changed who I am. It has made me more open to others, helped me to hear the daily struggles that we live with, and to stand with folks in their confusion, their fear, their joy around the choices they make, the things they don’t understand, the wisdom that hits them, and the passions that consume them.

It has helped me to understand what it means to educate with humility.

What I love about being in this business is that it is always evolving, and my questioning nature is always challenged to look to the next issue, do the research for and on behalf of our customers, and make an ethical choice about which product we will bring in. I have delved into questions of local eating, GMOs, Fair Trade, global sustainability, labeling, food politics, gardening practices, and personal health and nutrition. I have a responsibility to keep listening, to keep questioning, to keep reflecting on our choices as consumers, and to share what I learn with our customers. Not to dictate to them what they should buy, and not simply to offer “more choices” for consumers. But to add to the conversation, and to add to and have agency in the tradition that we are all a part of.

Listen... our schools are hungry too...

They long for rich, healthy, ethical nourishment, abundant flavours, textures and varieties.

Their mouths are opening, wide like hungry babes...

Bring on the “party!”

STORYING THE LANDSCAPE

*Families, practices, languages,
roles both inherited and resisted,
times, places, heartbreaks and joys,
geographies known through the
body
and breath and the labor of hands,
and, too, great arcs
of reminiscence,
ancestry,
old ways barely recollected
or inscribed in practices
learned hand over hand,
face to face,

full of forgotten-ness.*

(David Jardine, in press, p. 1)

Finding Myself in the Measure of Things: Introduction to *A Modern Hunting Tradition*

My inspiration for *A Modern Hunting Tradition* came in the form of a quote by David Smith (2014), who wrote that:

Furthermore, some things reveal themselves on their own terms, when they are ready, not simply under the duress of a formal curriculum requirement at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday. This is now well understood in the realm of ecology, for example, and the study of (so-called) wildlife. The best way to see animals in their natural habitat is simply to sit still; then the animals will come out of hiding and show themselves. (p. 82)

I wanted to be reminded of what it feels like to sit still, to notice, to remember, the more-than-human world (Abram, 1997). In conversations with colleagues, friends and students, I have come to notice that growing up “in the bush” is, for a growing number of humans, a story of foreign lands. Places like Rock Island Lake, the fishing camp that my parents operated where I spent my first five summers; Fox Farm Road, the log cabin on the mountainside; Paradise Lake; and Nicola Lake – these are my places, where I feel at home. Joe Sheridan and Dan “He Who Clears the Sky” Longboat (2006) explain that “settler culture” (Western society) has not yet “naturalized” to the land, in that it has yet to create myths that respect the possibilities of this place (p. 366). Finding myself *at home* in the bush, not the forest that “to most settlers remains a dark and evil spirits in need of exorcism or destruction” (Sheridan, 2001, p. 196), but the stomping-hunting-fire-building-silent bush of bushmen and bushwomen, means finding myself in a place that *requires* something of me... for my (earthly) survival.

I am mindful that “forgetting the animals leads to the animals forgetting about us” (Sheridan & “He Who Clears the Sky” Longoboat, 2006, p. 377). Similarly, when I think of traditions passed down from elders to youth, I consider how they are constantly renewed in the attention given to them by each new generation. As youth coming into traditions, I hope that we may try to challenge and question everything that has been handed down to us, while our elders may wait patiently for us to sort things out, sometimes pushing back, other times conceding, always listening. If a balance is achieved, we find our tradition constantly renewed in the measure of things. What possibilities arise when we learn to walk softly, to entice the animals out of hiding, to spot cougar tracks in the snow? What does it mean, pedagogically, for our actions to find their proper measure (Gadamer, 2004, p. 251), and thus, their consequences (Jardine, 2008, p. 4) in these wild places and elder traditions that story us? Our human isolation from the earthly landscape is a precarious ignorance. David Abram (1997) says that, “We still *need* that which is other than ourselves and our own creations... we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human” (p. ix).

An earthly tradition.

A Modern Hunting Tradition

My father, Vern, is the hunter. My mother, Lorna is the cook
Traditional. Cozy. Comfortable
Predictable and grounded, stewed in the crock pot
Savoury, only slightly spicy, unless I get my hands on it
I like my stews the new-fashioned way,
Just a little more exotic

I am a strong, capable woman well-marinated in this tradition
People who know me well half expect me to be a hunter—
Even if only because it challenges my gender role

But I am not a hunter. Well, not anymore.

I learned how to shoot a '22 at the age of twelve,

and I once killed a grouse by stoning it to death

Shameful stoning

It was a loud and grisly scene, with me leading a wild pack of elementary-aged children
across the barnyard and into the pine trees, hooting and screaming as we tortured and
murdered that grouse.

The moment that cracked me was when it was lying on the ground, unable to move, yet
still breathing, eyes half-closed. I knew that as the instigator, I had to take responsibility
for what I had done. I killed it with the final stone. We left that grouse in the woods and
we never told my parents.

We never spoke of that day again.

We knew that we had dishonoured the two codes that our hunting family lived by:

1. Do not cause unnecessary suffering.
2. Do not waste one ounce of a life given for your sustenance.

I can walk quietly in the woods. I can identify edible berries and see the signs of danger
and promise in the earth. I can smell a campfire a kilometer away, tell time by the sun,
and mark a path to return by. I know how to remove a tick embedded in my scalp, and I
can build a shelter to keep the night away.

I know how to tie a fly and catch a fish. I can gut a fish and help skin a deer. I know how to pluck a chicken and use every last piece of its flesh and bones for a week of meals.

But I usually leave the killing to others.
Unless I was truly starving, of course, then I would do what I had to do.

I respect it. The killing.

I can observe it. I can participate in the ritual with sadness and gratitude.

But holding a warm animal, a squirming fish, in my hand as the final after-beat of life drains slowly from its body, is too much for me.

Yes, I am known as “the emotional one” in my family. What of it? Would you rather I be cold, dead-living? Let a gal cry!

So I participate in our family’s modern-day hunting ritual. My husband, Jason, is not a hunter, either, but my young daughters are showing interest and I hope that their grandfather will take them one day. Grandpa Vern, achy-old and curling up at the fingers like his father did before him, but strong and bush-humping along, beautiful-functional, still has so many things to teach them and learn from them, us. Jason is the “professional venison transportation agent” (a.k.a a healthy, young and strong body which happens to be willing and to live down the road from his father-in-law) and because he helps pack the kill, our freezer is stocked and re-stocked with moose, deer—and salmon, huckleberries and morel mushrooms—each fall.

Every fall, we wait for the call.

“Ya, I got a moose. He’s a big old guy this time, should be good eating though, not too tough. No, he’s not too far into the bush, only a couple hundred metres over a little ridge.” In Vern-speak, that is about 3 kilometres scrambling over rocky shale, wading through a creek and climbing rope-assisted up a small mountainside.

Vern is no road hunter. To the authentic bushmen of the Nicola Valley, that’s almost like cheating. Unless, of course, you were truly starving, then you would take what you could get where it stood.

So, we plan the picnic. These days, we ask, “Is this a kid-friendly moose-packing trip?” And we pack up the snowsuits, hot chocolate, toilet paper, extra socks, snacks, the until-the-next-snack snacks, sleds, campfire kettle, and a full change of clothes for each child, “just in case.” It is a little more complicated than it used to be when you’d grab a sandwich and an apple and march off into the bush with your matches, knife and packboard. The bush has taught me what it means to be prepared—if you have the room in your truck, bring it because you never know when you might need it. If you don’t have the room, hope for good weather.

The men march out. Vern loves his grandchildren and would sit for hours with them on an anthill talking about ants and clouds and how to braid wild grasses into a wreath to wrap around their curly-top heads, but, “Son, we are wasting daylight. You women can see the trail, it starts right here. We’ll meet you there in a few.” Usually our fit, happy, childlike-wise mom-grandmother Lorna wants to stay at the truck and build a fire. She likes to sit and visit and drink tea, then go for a little exercise-walk. But she knows me better than that—sigh, she knows—I need action, I need to help with the man-woman work, and without uttering a word, she starts to pack up the lunch and the little ones for our snow-trek in the man-tracks out over the hills to the hanging moose.

There are some cougar pawprints right there, but they are not fresh, so we keep the dogs close and walk tall and loud. We wonder if the cougar got any of the meat, but Vern knows to hang it high in the trees out of reach, so we expect that it will be waiting there for us. We haul our babies in the sled to the kill tree, and this time it is only about a half-hour hike. Grandpa Vern wasn’t exaggerating for once. When we arrive, the ritual has just begun. The skinning knife is scritch-scratch, scritch-scratching against the steel, and the tiny wisps of new campfire smoke are trailing up into the fir boughs above. Gloves off, jackets put aside. We scatter to find larger pieces of wood as the little ones crouch over Jason’s fire-building shoulder, helping.

The skinning. The anatomy lesson. The hide falling away. The familiarity of a human-moose body unveiled of its coat. The tendons, joints, muscles, hair. Bled, cold. Tongue, eyes, guts, heart.

Vern takes his hungering place at the fire. “Wanna bite of moose heart?” As he slaps his stick-roasted slice into the middle of his cheese sandwich. Vern does the roasting for the little ones. They watch, eyes flame-shiny, as it browns and sizzles. He pulls it off the roasting stick and gently breaks it in two and hands it over. They sit on their kid-log in quiet reverence as the first mouthful satisfies their well-earned gnawing autumn hiking-hunger.

Sometimes I prefer not to be there, because I’d rather after-hear my home-safe, sweaty husband tell the laughing-horror tale of how he almost slipped and fell off a cliff under the weight of a 100-lb moose head. Yes, a moose’s head alone can weigh 100 pounds. Imagine the rest of it. Five, sometimes six pieces if he is a big old Mr. Moose, sawed apart and sheathed in their white cheesecloth bag to keep them from getting dirty. Sometimes if you get a good hill, you can be a little bit crazy impractical and hop on to the moose-laden packboard, but be careful of hidden stumps and flailing hooves. When the terrain is right, and he can avoid strapping himself into the packboard under a hundred and fifty pounds of moose, Jason will do it the new-fashioned way—winding through the scrawny birch trees, dashing ahead of an out-of-control hindquarter as it plummets down the snowy mountainside. Vern shakes his head, and keeps plodding under his burden. We walk ahead and wait for him at the truck. When Grandpa bursts out of the trees a few minutes later, screaming, “Look out! Moose meat on the loose!”

we laugh as we dive into the snowbanks. You can, in fact, teach an old dog new tricks.
The question is, do you want to?

My daughter saw her first dead animal hanging in my father's shed when she was two years old.

She called it "deer parts."

And it bothered her much less than the disembodied deer head trophy that my dad displays in his office.

That says something, now doesn't it?

Mostly, it says to never to put dead animal heads on display in my house
(They scare the kids—c'mon, grandpa!) But the kids, too, will learn

I witness the trophy tradition

desecrated by sport hunters who have never eaten their kill
and maligned by activists who have never killed their food

But for my dad it is not a trophy
It is a single body of worship
Of participation in the world
A world that demands our respect

At one time, if our ancestors refused to respect
they would perish—remember that now
It's all one time
Our prey is watching over us

Every time I make a sandwich for a hike in the bush, or help haul a deer, or cook a moose
roast, I remember that grouse

That grouse suffered, yes I regret

But it did not go to waste
A coyote dragged it off, cleaned it down to bones and remnants
Some birds picked at the remains, and others used its feathers for a nest
The worms fed off the tiny, dark stain
I, too, will be sustained by the grouse
It will remind me of what I am
What am I, in the terrible and fragile?
I will be as noble as the worm

I will not waste that grouse's life

Old-Growth Cultures: Introduction to *The Loon* and ...sacred duties

Joe Sheridan and Dan “He Who Clears the Sky” Longboat (2006) provide a thoughtful perspective on Vandana Shiva’s Deep Democracy of the Earth (see pp. 69-70 of this thesis) when they describe indigenous, “old-growth minds and cultures” that mature, emerge, and encompass the old growth of their traditional territory (p. 366). The settler culture (see p. 79 of this thesis) that privileges “the new” is like a clearcut tree stand, whereby all of the old trees have been razed in one fell swoop, and the new growth arises in simultaneity, bearing new trees of similar age. Not only are these new trees devoid of the protection of their old-growth elders, but they also grow without the benefit of established undergrowth, rotting, nourishing roots, stumps and seasonal layers of leaves. The animal species evacuate the region, and their return is unpredictable and sometimes sporadic, thus impoverishing the animation of the landscape.

This “diminishing biodiversity reduces the continued capacity to know how to think with everything” (Sheridan & “He Who Clears the Sky” Longboat, 2006, p. 370). The principle that every being participates in everything immunizes against anthropocentrism and offers a conscious humility that keeps humans in their place of thankfulness, respect, and appreciation. George “Tink” Tinker (2004) a Native American theologian and scholar, writes that humans think at their best if they know they are the last beings created—the youngest and least wise of all creatures (p. 108). If the question for teachers of “‘what is to be done’ with respect to Others (a particular child, or group), depends on who I [as a teacher] think the Other is, and who I think I am in relation to them” (Smith, 1999, p. 14), how might an ecological consciousness bounded by locales, elders and more-than human teachers re-story issues of social and environmental justice

in the context of education? Remembering the place-based pedagogies of *Stories of Men*, and looking forward to the poems that follow, I wonder... how might the Haudenosaunee notion of old-growth cultures (Sheridan & “He Who Clears the Sky” Longboat, 2006, p. 366) re-imagine the work done in schools, expand our imaginations to include old-growth principles of gratitude, intergenerational conversation, and place-based ecologies? In the poems *The Loon* and *...sacred duties*, I seek to language the discourses of life, death and regeneration, in terms of our human responsibility and gratitude to Creation as the *last beings created*.

The Loon

step in gingerly,
kids in front, mom in back
Push off, canoe ritual,
sit down tenderly,
praying to the mama loon

There she is!

shoe-black face turns, sizes us up
takes one look with her sharp red eye
disappears, diving hunger-deep for her prey

paddles dips in unison,
tiny spheres bubbling down the end of the blade
dripping into the radiating swirls, fading off behind us
as we slice towards the sweet spot
where the rainbow trout lurk, feeding
they don't always splash for their supper
sometimes all you see is a dimple on the surface of the lake

and then gone

Unhook the fly from the cork,
pull the line through the rod tip
ratcheting, rod swaying,
bending in a graceful back-bending arc

cast

line flips through the air

Throw, flick, throw, flick, pull, flick, throw

swish and repeat

leader droplets glistening in the afternoon sun

the perfect cast
lands silently at the centre of the dimpled, muted feeding frenzy

A hit!

Pull, back! Strip the line!

Keep 'er taut, mom, don't lose 'er!
Quiet kids! Sit down!
Easy now, mom! You got it! Yay!
Fresh rainbow for dinner!

She's a heavy one, fighting hard mom, biggest fish you ever caught!
Naw, don't dare to hope, maybe just a fighter
Still, a great catch
Reel 'er in now, where is she?
Pulling the line under the boat!
And up she comes...
The end of the line, the leader...
Get the net!

Ohhhh...

Red, glaring eye emerges, inches from the canoe
Six-foot wing span, flapping back, pulling for her life, her dinner!
Our dinner! Mom!
Stay calm, kids, stay low
She is one angry mama

Loon yanks!

Snaps the line, triumphant
Sinks back into the deep, grumbling at our nerve

let her take it, kids
she earned that one, I tell ya
we don't have much daylight left

tie on another fly

Throw, flick, throw, flick, pull, flick, throw

swish and repeat

...sacred duties

My cousin Becky died several years ago. She died of lung cancer. She had smoked for years and years. She had known, too, for several months what was coming. She had time to plan her own funeral, make her burial arrangements, choose the music, write her own eulogy. She had the first natural burial in B.C., In Royal Oak Burial Grounds, Victoria, B.C. She was going to be buried in a biodegradable coffin that was designed to break down and feed the worms! Feed the earth. Feed a tree, planted above where her body would decompose, quite quickly, we were told.

Becky wanted us to shovel the dirt onto her grave. It was hoped that this would be a ceremonial act, sending her back to the earth. Participating in her burial. Meant for everyone, but a few of the older men took it on as their sacred duty. My dad, Vern in his brown leather jacket, shiny cowboy boots and blue tie, a thin line of sweat forming at his temple, dug his heels into his earthly Uncle duty. Slowly, methodically, rhythmically, turning, twisting, shoveling. A meditation. Tears forming secretly in the creases of his half-smile. Her brother, my other cousin Billy, Wild Bill, Moonshine Bill, a tightly wound spring of repressed grief, unwound himself in the dirt pile. My daughter, 18 months old, played in the dirt and chuckled at her grandpa Vern.

I found myself among them, needing to be a part of this ritual, needing the earth to dirty my plain black “special occasion” shoes, as I took my turn sending her back, so grateful for my wise cousin.

Not a trace of earth touched our hands.

taking care noticing

aching

being cared for
feeling.

She had given us permission

Our Old Ones

the youngest beings.

Brothers, uncles, cousins,

lifelong lovers.

SMALL DIALOGUES

The openness that is required is not a vacuous licentiousness but a risky, deliberate engagement full of the conflict and ambiguity by which new horizons of mutual understanding are achieved. This is the fundamental requisite for giving children a sense of membership in the human community, for one learns to find one's voice only in an environment where speech itself is understood as having a listening aspect, and all that this entails phenomenologically.

(David G. Smith, 1988, p. 27)

My Treasured Relation

I have always wanted to write about my cousin Shelby, but whenever I try, the words just don't seem to do justice to my cousin who never grew up. I want to make him live again in this story. But mostly, I would just really like to not cry today.

Shelby was born to my aunt, with too much life ahead of her, and so he was raised by my silent-stoic, gentle grandfather, Dave, and Leona, the asthmatic, arthritic heart-young grandmother, with more love in her than those sick lungs could handle.

This little boy was never formally diagnosed, as he never got the opportunity to spend much time in school, but looking back now, I know that he did indeed have certain cognitive delays, which I did not, and still cannot, name. Nor do I want to. Socially-constructed deficiencies are not lovable. To me, he was just Shelby, even though on that level beyond the one that we talk about, we all knew that he didn't function in quite the same way we all did.

Shelby was diagnosed with something, though. He was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of five. His childhood years were a blur for all of us.

Waiting and hoping,
trips to Vancouver through the Fraser Canyon—and later, over the Coquihalla,
stays at the Ronald McDonald house,
fundraising projects,
months in isolation units,
missed school,
missed life,

hours and hours stalking and thrashing in the shallow end of the backyard pool:

daring us to venture near him.
A wheelchair-bound, abbreviated trip to Disneyland,
Make-A-Wish dream visits with Hulk Hogan and Trevor Linden,
Birthday pizzas delivered by none other than
Raphael the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle,
and a failed autologous bone marrow transplant.

We were told that Shelby was going to receive a “miracle cure,” a treatment that my 11-year-old brain understood in the following terms: the doctors would take a massive needle that would suck the bone marrow from his spine, purge it of cancer cells with radiation, and return it back to his body with another massive needle, with the expectation that the healthy bone marrow would regenerate and grow, filling his spine with healthy

bone marrow. My sister and I have always wondered if our matching needle phobias were inspired by bearing witness to our cousin's medical treatments.

I learned the language of platelets and prednisone
and blood counts and spinal taps and we-still-have-hope
and in/remission/out and chemo and things-are-not-looking good
and be-nicer-he's-sick and making time count.

No, wait a minute

Time counted us

by appointments
and remissions
and birthdays
and good days
bad days
and

one

more

day.

We counted everything

Except time.

I now understand this "miracle cure" autologous bone marrow transplant the way the doctors and all the adults in the room did, as what it was in those days, as more of a "last ditch experimental treatment." Shelby spent three months in complete isolation while the bone marrow was being purged of cancer cells. In order to visit him, we had to wash our hands to the elbow with stinging, sharp-smelling disinfectant soap, walk through the sliding door into the closet-sized "isolation chamber," wash our hands again for several minutes, don plastic shoe coverings, plastic clothing, and face masks, then enter through a second sliding door, careful, fearful, not to get too close. We could touch his hand, but hugs were out of the question. We just couldn't risk it. He was my alien-cousin, a lovable monster descended from another planet, participating in an experimental study, peering out from behind his oxygen mask. Then I would hear his muffled, cheerful gravelly voice, saying "Hi, Jode!" as if he were just my good old, familiar little earth-cousin. At age ten, he was much more subdued, resigned to the treatments, than he had been in the early years.

Six-year-old tornado.

“I am a DINOSAUR and I am going to SMASH YOU!”

Pierced.

“I am a LION and I am going to EAT YOU!”

Swearing.

“SHIT! I HATE YOU!”

Despising his cruel saviours.

“I am JAKE THE SNAKE and I am going to do a D.D.T. right on your HEAD!”

Restrained.

“I am going to ride my snowmobile all the way back to Merritt
and you will never find me again!”

My sister and I spent many hours with Shelby through the years, his contracted playmates, and I think our company probably was one of the reasons my grandmother was able to maintain some semblance of sanity. He was a challenging kid to begin with, prone to temper tantrums and boiling-over fits of anger. And having to be stuck with needles, of varying diameters, on a daily basis, was, and still is, unfathomable to me. Anyone who had to go through all of that would, understandably, be just a little “on edge.” My mother would send us over to Grandma’s house every day after school until we became too busy with our extracurricular lives; in the later years we would squeeze in weekend sleepovers and pool parties when we could. The two girls would play Duck Hunter and Super Mario Brothers for hours and hours on end, while Shelby wrestled in the background with his stuffed animals and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle figurines, shouting out the play-by-play, occasionally jumping off the couch and squashing us flat-out under his roly-poly body, making us gasp under his weight, begging to be freed, to breathe again.

On the day of my 8th birthday party, all of my friends had come over to celebrate. Of course, Shelby was invited. It was a glorious spring day at the “Fox Farm,” our 5-acre mountainside hobby farm, perfect for badminton on the lawn and hikes up the mountain to the magical forest. My father had installed a rope swing in the woods about 200 metres above the house. All of the kids were taking turns. One of the less experienced “city slickers” lost his grip and launched himself into space, then landed softly, unbelievably, gracefully, like a ski-jumper on the steep landing slope, sliding down the leaf-strewn mountainside straight into an anthill. One girl forgot the only safety rule (to launch yourself *away* from the tree in a circular trajectory), and flew straight out from the tree, then straight back in, smashing into the tree trunk. We watched her float in slow-motion horror, and then cringed in sympathy, shielding our eyes and turning away,

wincing at the inevitable “thud.” We turned back and peeled our hands from our eyes to watch her loosen her grip and slither listlessly off the rope into a weeping heap at the base of the tree. Only two casualties this time. Not bad.

Shelby was down at the house, as it was too difficult for him to hump all the way up the sidehill to the rope swing. I am pretty sure that what we did that day was my idea. One of us ran down to the house to grab a bottle of ketchup. We chose a “victim,” smeared the ketchup on her, and started hollering. “Shelby, help! Tracy fell off the rope swing and she’s bleeding!” I heard him, out of sight near the house, yelling, “What? Oh no! I’m coming, Jode!” And we were all snickering and jeering, until we saw him emerge over the hill, panting and crying, wheezing, tripping over sticks, stumbling up, knees dirty, nose running.

Distraught.

Our laughter froze instantly to silence. He had brought a tea towel. I didn’t know what he thought he was going to do with that. I guess... I suppose... that was the funny part. It was just a joke.

For his 10th birthday, our family bought him a funny little voice-activated yellow plastic sunflower in a funny little plastic green pot that danced a herky-jerky hula, its funny little happy sunglassed face bobbing along to the Mini Pops singing their funny little-kid version of “Karma Chameleon.”

That flower was cool, man. Totally rocked that song.

In order to get it into the room we had to unwrap and open up the package, then wipe down every single surface with the disinfectant, including the batteries. The nurses brought it in for him, as that day he was having a “bad immune system day.” We smiled through the window as he tried it out, grinning from cheek to soft, chubby cheek. We could see him laughing through the glass, and in my head I could hear his hoarse, breathless chortle. My mom picked out that flower for him. I am sure she thought it would cheer him up. It did; she nailed it out of the park. He loved that flower. All the days of his life. Because you should never grow out of silly little things.

Shelby finally did make his escape.

We were called in to visit him in the hometown Merritt hospital.

I knew it was bad,
because any self-respecting version of Hope would have bundled him up in her arms and
magically swooped him all the way back up and over
the winter-blizzard highway
to Vancouver Children’s Hospital.

Bloated, drained, cushioned by crisp white pillows
and our false cheerfulness.

Distracted by niceties and pain.
We, the kids, protected, excluded.
Unaware but still knowing.

Just a short visit.
Tired. Ready. Calm. Barely eleven years old.
Selfless. Raspy.
“Have fun skiing tomorrow, Jode.”
Big, soft, squishy, forever hug.
We knew things were bad when we were allowed to hug him.

Wait, hold it, hold on, for him.
Cry in the backseat on the way home.
Look out the foggy window at the hazy, unending night.

Shelby died on a blowing-snow January night, at the age of 11. I was 12 years old.

I got my first menstrual period the day of the funeral. What a day for firsts. I wasn't particularly afraid or ashamed, as some young girls were back in the days before moms were supposed to be a girl's best friend and talk about, oh, about just absolutely everything! I had read about it in a book somewhere, and had some “samples” stashed in my bathroom cupboard. I was just, oh, just annoyed, awkward and lonely. I just wasn't ready to grow up, not just yet.

Shelby's neighbour
and best friend in the whole entire world,
a mature young woman-ish,
kind, gentle 12-year-old
Robyn,
who didn't have to be his friend,
with two perfect, large fake front teeth
that got knocked out years ago in a biking accident
riding down “Suicide Hill” by our neighbourhood school,
who felt-penned a massive “Hulkamania!” poster for Shelby's best-day-ever
and who probably got her period (light-years) months before me,
and who I imagined would know
exactly how
to handle her newfound womanhood
gracefully,

(She didn't. She told me so years later.)

was beside herself after she returned from viewing his body.

His Vancouver Canucks-jerseyed,
google-eyeballed Disneyland Goofy-capped,

painless body.

“That’s the first time in his life that he has ever been alone.”
She wanted to wait with him in that room until the service began.

Our great-aunt was asked to perform the eulogy, and my narrow little 12-year-old self was disappointed in the choice, expecting that she just way too stuffy and stodgy to do my hilarious, ridiculous, lovely little cousin justice. My mom had written the eulogy—oh, it was just so perfect—and I didn’t want it spoiled by someone who didn’t know him just the way we did. I think back now and realize that my pin-curled aunt was probably the only one in the entire jam-packed room of 300 people who was tightly wound enough to hold it together for the entire speech.

And she re-called him to a “T”.
A “D.D.T.”, that is:

“I know that Shelby is up there in heaven,
riding his snowmobile
and doing D.D.T.’S on all the angels.”

Shelby was the exception. To everything. He was the beautiful little monster who reflected back to us who we really were. We were rude, wild, loud, unfiltered, imaginative, hungry, hurting, scared-cruel dreamers.

That is what love does.
It makes us want to do justice.
Without justice we are merely co-existing.
Waiting for the reward.

Labelling.

Judging—and moving on.
I will never move on.
I want to make him live again.
My treasured teacher.
My relation.
Alien-cousin.
Brother.

Heart-swelling baby dinosaur.

Lion.

Hulk.

Small Dialogues and Memory-Mediations

As I sat, trying to compose myself, trying to *do right* by *My Treasured Relation* (Latremouille, 2014) and its people, I was convulsed in tears. Swamped in memories.

here we go again...

It was impossible. I knew this.

When this piece was published in the *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*, David Jardine (2014) wrote a generous, heartfelt introduction. I reviewed it for inspiration, and I heard him say, “I’m blessed with the meeting of these two earth-cousins that make me remember that I, too, and however near or distant, am a third earth cousin in this fatal round” (Jardine, 2014, p. 3).

I looked back at the small dialogues that informed this story and grew out of this writing. I texted my mom late at night, my little momma Lorna, the day after I finished writing the piece, because I wanted to know what song that funny yellow flower sang. My original choice, “*Walking on Sunshine*” (Rew, 1983), sort of fit, but its slight dissonance wouldn’t let me sleep. My mom couldn’t quite remember the song either. So I googled “dancing flower,” and learned that these fabulous little novelties of the 80’s were actually voice-activated and danced to just about anything. No wonder neither of us could remember “that” song!

After her tenth reading of the story, my mom reminded me of a forgotten detail. “Remember what he said to you the night before he died? He told you to ‘have a good time skiing’ the next day. He was always thinking of other people.” (Lorna Latremouille, personal communication, February 1, 2014), She really needed to remind me of that detail, and I really needed to hear it again.

My mom also wanted me to know that she had written the eulogy, and that her parents had asked her to do it.

pride... love... duty... but mostly love. Duly noted, mom.

Life writing is a multi-layered mediation: it exists in spaces between the “body and text, experience and audience, self and other, past and present, life and fiction, text and image... “ (Feigel & Saunders, 2012, p. 241). Our memories are already “composed and interpreted, and they precede the act of writing” (p. 242). The very act of writing can invoke memories for the writer that were not even conscious prior to the writing. Or, even, that they were lurking but not yet present in a verbal form.

I knew that the almighty D.D.T. was Shelby’s favourite wrestling move, but not being a wrestling fan, I did not realize that it was not the Hulk’s signature move; it was in fact Jake the Snake’s! Out went Hulk. In went Jake the Snake. Shelby knew these things. I suddenly remembered that the poster that Shelby’s friend Robyn had created said “Hulkamania!” on it, not “I love Hulk!” as I had originally written. Robyn (Guidon, personal communication, February 2, 2014) wrote to me and said that she hadn’t remembered that she made it for him. Thank you, she said.

The process of writing gives life to my memories, and shapes them in a particular way that invokes meanings and interpretations that, prior to the act of writing, were merely one of many possible writings. This is akin to the process of interpretation in other forms of qualitative research. When we apply a certain lens to an observed phenomena or interview, we can tease out meanings that would otherwise have been left unexplored. I sat with David Jardine's (2014) introduction for a minute longer, reflecting on what it means to remain true to the "'stubborn particularity' (Wallace, 1987, p. 13, as cited in Jardine, 2014, p. 2) of the case while, at the same time, drawing us into the worlds of its orbit in which we, as readers, already live" (p. 2).

Shelby's birth mother, Aunt Sherri (MacDonald, personal communication, February 10, 2014), re-told the story of sitting with Shelby as he was being scanned in the CAT scan machine, a little boy required to lie perfectly still for countless minutes, terrified tears bolting over his cheeks onto his Canucks jersey. She would sing "C is for cookie, that's good enough for me..." in her best growly-gruff Cookie-Monster voice. She sang it for me again and chuckled under her breath.

...I burst.

IMPLICATIONS

Winner

I always won

Once upon a time

Awards

Races

Medals

Money

Sports

Music

Academia

In...

Anything that mattered

I was always right

Politics

Science

Math

History

Love

Emotions

Parenting

Arguing

With...

Anyone who dared

I was always perfect

Hair

Face

Body

Actions

House

Heart

For...

Anyone who cared

I am much more messy now

I am wrong a lot (but who's counting)

I say stupid shit

I love a little bit too loudly

I cry and let my tears run into my mouth

I challenge history and let it beat me

I act out

I ask dumb questions

I am lovely and squishy

I eat good, good lip-smacking food.

I am safer now

I am malleable

lots of tender spots

touchable

I don't have trophies anymore

...I have people now

people who know me

real people

other losers

(like me)

listen...

“The fact of storytelling hints at a fundamental human unease, hints at human imperfection. Where there is perfection there is no story to tell”

(Ben Okri, 1997, p. 112).

Local Responses to Infinite Worlds: Life's Curriculum Offerings

“What postmodernism does is to recognize the situational limitations of the knower. It recognizes that you have partial, local, temporal knowledge – and that is enough”

(Laurel Richardson, 2001, p. 35).

Dr. David Jardine commonly speaks of the act of writing as “composing oneself in the face of something” (personal communication, November 12, 2013). The word “compose” derives from the Latin *com* “with,” + *poser* “to place” (Online etymology dictionary). As a writer-researcher, I write to learn about myself. I write to learn about the world. I write to engage in conversations—with the texts, my colleagues, my students, the world. When something kept coming up in conversation, as in the notion of genius in the poem *I am no genius*, my writing became a way to articulate my thoughts, to push back against what I felt was an assumption in our language. And I was called to account, questioned by colleagues who disagreed with my interpretation. I write to be brought up short against my own assumptions.

When I finished *My Treasured Relation* and shared it with my family, friends and colleagues, I realized that this story meant something different to everyone, and that the memories, once written down, were no longer mine to hold or control. I learned things about my mother, about former strangers, and about cancer, that changed me forever. I write to organize my thoughts and my life—internally and in community with others. I write to pause in reflection. *I write to find my place*. Upon entering the rural classroom in *Stories of Men*, I wondered if I even belonged at all. Over the course of seven weeks,

through countless conversations, in sharing laughter and difficult truths, I found my place. They had shared their stories with me, and they didn't want me to forget my place as their teacher, but neither did they want me to forget my place as their ally and witness.

The inexhaustible nature of the world (Greene, 1995) suggests that our human work as active agents of change and “articulation or sense-making” (p. 107) is ongoing and constantly subject to questioning, re-imagining and re-storying. Life writing is both the process and (albeit temporary and situational) result of this articulation-work, which seeks to transform, but not to control or possess, our ways of knowing. I see the world as “not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1967, pp. xvi-xvii). This speaks to the difficulty of trying to “finalize” a piece of writing. Stories like *An Organic Pedagogy* are constantly evolving, as my experiences and knowledge continue to shape me and as my business continues to exist and respond to my community's needs. Each time I return to a story, I am changed, too, and thus the work is never completely, neatly bound. The writing-work and our responses to the work, too, are never fully grasped in an end-game articulation, never extinguished in a final proclamation of all-encompassing knowledge, for “it is in fact an infinite process” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 298).

Our teachers are the raucous merry-making of a festive occasion, but they are also those little voices in our ears, those warm, rising murmurings in our hearts, that remind us that the celebration is fleeting and that we had better sit up and pay attention.

We love them and we love what becomes of us in our dedication to them. And, paradoxically, the more we understand of them, the better—richer, more

intriguing, more complex, more ambiguous and full and multiple of questions—they become, and the more we realize that gobbling them up into a knowing that we can commodify, possess and exchange is not only undesirable. It is impossible. (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2003, p. 208)

Dr. Dwayne Donald (2014), Cree curriculum studies scholar at the University of Alberta, in his witness address at the Kindling Conversations Symposium on weaving Indigenous perspectives into the Werklund School of Education, reminded us that we need to spend time with each other. He said that educational change comes through the stories that emerge in an intergenerational relationship, and in being patient with ourselves, we may get to know one another again (February 28, 2014). How might these conversations emerge differently, if *getting to know* one another takes precedence over *knowing more* than one another? In this writing towards a pedagogy of kinship, I seek not definitive knowledge, but rather an ever-regenerating openness to experience that is “made possible by experience itself” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350). These small teachers, these conversations, these metaphors: they feed me; they nourish me; they call out to me for a pedagogical response, and they renew my openness to experience.

How might I allude to truths, to question assumptions, to poke around myths, to incite dialogue, to learn uncomfortably? What conversations might arise out of poems like *Hypocrite* and *Winner*, which remind me of my discomfort and my tender spots when I read and share them? How might this writing listen to the work that educators and students do, and speak back to rigid educational institutions and structures? How might I articulate the whispers of my small teachers that live in my classrooms, that rasp down at me from the tops of trees, or that sit, silently, waiting for me on my bookshelf?

In the poem “Advice from the Geese,” (Bly, 1926), the geese urge me to “[h]urry! The world is not going to get better! Do what you want to do now!” They remind me that, perhaps, “No, everything is not going to be *all... right*. It isn’t going to get better. And in the face of uncertainty and despair, in the face of climate change and young people who hope there is something more to life, the geese advocate for one simple act: to study (p. 1). This work for me creates the space to respond to my children, my students, my earth-relations, as subject[s] “of mystery—producing wonder and awe in us” (Huebner, 2008, p. 8). I am reminded that I am called upon to respond to this wonder and awe. Thomas King (2003) reminds me that, “[y]ou can’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (p. 29). I find myself *implicated* in this research, the stories of curriculum, in the lives of the young. And when I approach life’s curriculum offerings with wonder and awe, as *implicated* in my own life, my educational interactions are—and become—carefully measured. I am not counted by a grading system or a system-wide policy implementation, but I am *held to account* by those topics, ancestors, children, more-than-human relations that I work, breathe, mourn, and play with—we, in kinship with each other.

and then...

a whisper...

So, the other day, my three year old, Kiera, says, "Mommy, I have a tummyache."

"Oh? What's wrong, dolly?"

"Mommy, my brain is trying to say bad things."

And I say, nervously, "Oh? Like what?"

She replies, "It wants to say bad words."

I reply, "what kinds of words?"

She says, "My brain wants to call Buster (our dog) stupid."

I ask her, "So, what do you do?"

She says, "Well, my heart is trying to be nice and my brain is trying to be mean."

I am spellbound. I continue. "So, what do you do, Kiera?"

She says, "I try to get them to stop arguing. I try to get them to be nice to each other. My brain argues with my heart and my heart says no!"

I ask her, "Who told you about this?"

She says, "Nobody, I just noticed."

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APPENDIX A

Copyright permission for *A Modern Hunting Tradition*, as per the following e-mail communication:

From Dr. Gail Jardine (April 4, 2014):

Hi, Jodi

Yes, you have permission.

Gail

Gail Jardine, PhD
gjardine@ucalgary.ca
403-220-7538
Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary
Coordinator, Bridge to Teaching Program
Coordinator, EdD: Leading Language & Literacy Education
ATA Social Studies Council
Journal Editor: One World In Dialogue

From: Jodi Latremouille [jodilats@gmail.com]
Sent: Friday, April 04, 2014 2:27 PM
To: Patricia (Gail) Jardine
Subject: Permission for A Modern Hunting Tradition

Hi, Gail, I am writing for permission to re-print the article that will be appearing in your journal later this year, "A Modern Hunting Tradition," in my thesis. Thank you! Cheers,

Jodi Latremouille

APPENDIX B

Copyright permission for *My Treasured Relation*, as per the following e-mail communication:

From Dr. Nancy Moules (April 5, 2014):

For sure; all you have to do is make mention that it was first printed in the Journal.

Latremouille, J. (2014). My treasured relation. *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*, Article 2, <http://hdl.handle.net/10515/sy5d50gd4>

Nancy J Moules, RN, PhD
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Faculty of Nursing
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On Apr 4, 2014, at 2:24 PM, Jodi Latremouille <jodilats@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi, Nancy, I am emailing to ask for permission to re-print My Treasured Relation in my thesis, coming up soon! Thank you!

Jodi Latremouille

APPENDIX C

Copyright permission for *Stories of Men*, as per the following e-mail communication:

From Shuana Niessen (June 17, 2014):

Hi Jodi,
Cite it as (in press)
Shuana

Managing Editor, In Education

On June 17, 2014, at 1:59 PM, Jodi Latremouille <jodilats@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi, there, thank you very much! I will be working on some edits this week and next. I have included this piece, *Stories of Men*, in my thesis (printed my defense draft just before I received your decision) and would like to get permission to include it, please. I will insert the permission and include it in my final draft. Please send along a citation, thank you!
Cheers,

Jodi Latremouille

APPENDIX D

Permission to cite an e-mail in *a note on whispers*, as per the following e-mail communication:

From Rajan Rathnavalu (March 28, 2014):

Hey Jodi,

Yes, I remember.

In 1999, the year I ordained as a monk, I started teaching meditation classes at the U of T. I remember a conversation with a friend who helped sponsor the classes. We were walking by an aerobics class that had music playing loudly in the background. He said something to the effect that, "When we can't hear our own rhythms, we need the external to be louder." These are my words, but they express his general sentiment.

I think I was remembering this space when I heard about the Eyes High pep-rally. Propaganda often seems to come through loudspeakers. A mind that is conscious of the ways of the world doesn't need exaggeration... as it has the proper measure of things.

Use this notion as you would like!
Rajan

From: Jodi Latremouille <jodilats@gmail.com>
To: Rajan Rathnavalu <rajan.rathnavalu@yahoo.ca>
Sent: Friday, March 28, 2014 9:53:18 AM
Subject: A quote from your presentation

Hi, Rajan, you said something in your eyes high presentation that really stuck with me. You said something to the extent of, "when something needs to proclaim itself loudly, there is something fundamentally wrong with it..." Do you remember that? And were you citing someone or speaking from your own experience and observations? I LOVE IT. And I would like to include something to that effect in my thesis introduction. What do you think?

Thanks :-)

Jodi