

# **Walking Backward Out into the Wild**

by

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## Declaration of Committee

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## **Abstract**

This study explores what arose after I received my cancer diagnosis. Having the courage to find free spaces within which to live became vitality important. A cancer diagnosis enlivens the question of what it means to live well with the Earth and its multi-dimensional beings and provides a necessary push to step out from the confines of a self and toward and into the wild fray of this life. I interpret my lived experiences through hermeneutics because it is a practical philosophy. Hermeneutics has helped me perform and write my lived experience which I hope will draw in readers and listeners to a recognition of their inescapable ecological interdependence. Cultivating an ability to listen and interpret the world and the human and more-than-human kinships became undeniable as I engaged in this study; I am learning to understand their deep importance in living. Listening to words that arose in my performances at conferences became my way of taking a journey toward learning to be open to the fullness of life, how life is lived, how life can be remembered and suffered and let go. Through this study, I am learning the necessary steps, forward and backward, to unforget what I think I need and what the Earth might need of me. I learn how cancer offers a place for the practice of interpretive inquiry—of making sense of being in the world and of understanding the offering that arrives when I nurture a commitment to care for the world and myself.

**Keywords:** Cancer; Hermeneutics; Performance; Education; Stories; Lived Experience

# Inspiration

**In the presence of air every living thing is moved.**

Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), 1998

## Acknowledgements

This work was written in the high mountain air of the unceded and traditional territory of the Sto:lo Nation and the sea air of the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. Without this land and air, this work and I would not exist. This knowledge orients me in the direction of certain obligations and commitments. I have committed to bringing the knowledge of the land's importance and the words of Indigenous writers onto these pages with care because they are my teachers.

This work has emerged through relationships with human and more-than-human beings. I form and reform interpretations as I come to understand these bonds. I neither keep these relationships at a distance, nor are they, my possessions. Acknowledging them can make it seem as though there was a precise beginning to this work or that one thing is somehow more special than something else. To pinpoint a start or to make something appear special seems to reduce the weave and flow of my learning to a singular timeline or place. Acknowledgements of people also give the appearance that everyone is acting independently—we are not. This moment of thanks reflects the organic movements of learning in relationships. Please view this acknowledgement of particular people and places as part of the tangle of relationships for which I am grateful.

This writing has one of its roots in *Pedagogy Left in Peace: Cultivating Free Spaces in Teaching and Learning* by David W. Jardine (2012), which I read beside a sunny window in 2014. The writing spoke to me *and* heard me. David Jardine often quotes the 15th century thinker Tsong-kha-pa, who said that “offerings of practice” (2019, p. 104) are what matter. It is with humility that I hope my writing and performances and all my relationships, as practice, express my commitment to lending a hand, ear, and voice to this Earth in ways that he has shown me.

I also appreciate and acknowledge Lynn Fels for her ability to check in with me at all the right times. Seeing her ride up to my apartment on her bike, or hold a cup of tea, helped me know that both movement and stillness are part of what it means to write. Lynn understood that writing with “breath and heart and life and presence” (personal communication) arising from a cancer diagnosis, and all that is attached to it, required her to tread

gently in her supervisory role, which she did both with grace and without losing sight of her role: to guide me toward the edges where I needed to walk in my writing.

Karen Meyer, in and out of her writing classes, inspired me to take risks with my words on the page while maintaining a sense of responsibility to the reader. I have continued to look for and explore spaces of intimacy in my writing because of her dedication to do the same. Heesoon Bai's sense of wonder helped me slow down and learn the names of flowers. I thank Vicki Kelly who said, in 2017, "you know you are doing good work." Those words kept me walking and writing. Celeste Snowber, with her dedication to embodied practice, energized my step helping bring this work to its current form.

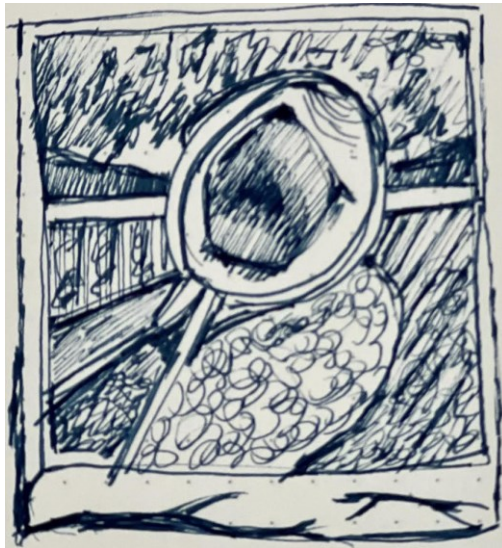
This writing is also possible because of the friendships that have sustained me. Amy gave careful and heartfelt suggestions on my early writing. Our conversations called me to reflect on the words I speak. Pille's wayfinding ability helped me navigate the wild spaces of forests and memories. Negar's friendship and co-construction of the ECE training program allowed me the time to do this work. I also appreciate the support given to me by educators especially those who have become long-time friends: Sherry, Wendy and Renee. They generously shared their experiences with me as we went about our daily work. Most of all I appreciate their lightness, laughs and play which made this work joyful.

Thank you to Ecco for her ability to walk through the hospital with me, recording gear in hand, with such capacity and compassion and to stay with me throughout this whole writing process. To Michael and Heather who worked with me to find the right melody and voice to the poetry of this cancer journey. To Sarah, for her skills in the radiation room and heart-felt care for those of us who crossed that threshold.

I thank my children, Liam and Ceili, for their understanding when my face was directed at the computer or when they had to step around books strewn about the floors. They navigated time zones when I was travelling. Hearing their voices on the phone when I was away at conferences gave me comfort. Their quizzical and caring glances as I toted the plaster bust with me following surgery, calmed me. I appreciated the many cups of ginger tea they made and the space to grow alongside them.

Finally, I thank Renata Jane Aebi with all my heart. I learned compassion from her listening. She was often part of my early performances, reading as the narrator and helping me to create the context for the audience. She thought through ideas with me and held my hand when I felt unstable. Her delight in the many paths my ideas took me gave them room to grow. I am thankful for her ability to witness this work's becoming and for her eyes that see beauty in this world. She has helped me discern what has been most needed on this journey. To her I quote Joni Mitchell's 1971 song, "A Case of You,"

*Part of you pours out of me  
In these lines from time to time.*



Walking Backward Out into the Wild<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> This image was created by Renata Aebi after the dissertation defence. It is her expression of some of the ideas shared and shaped in the performance and subsequent conversation with the committee members and external examiners. Welcome to the mountain or wherever you find yourself.

## **Fáilte. A Warm Welcome to the Reader.**

*Fáilte.* This word honours my grandmother who has walked this work with me in spirit since I was born. She gave me her name. I carry it with care. Lee Maracle (2002) a member of the Stó:lō Nation, died November 11, 2021 writes, “Grandmothers are doorways to different points of view” (p. 69). Kathleen Mary McCabe was born in Ireland August 4, 1898, and I knew she had died the day I saw my dad crying out by the tomato plants in 1980. My days with her were mostly spent at the water’s edge. I still see Granny and her daughters laughing and basking in the sun as I played nearby with a sand pail and diggers. I still feel her small home at the end of the cul-de-sac in Donnycarney, on the North side of Dublin. There she gave birth, cooked, and read the Sunday papers. I often wondered if she ever got a good night’s rest. At the age of 20, I went to Ireland to sit at her grave. The summer day was hot and the soil dry and cracked. I sat for some time letting the laughter, the serious expression she wore when she saw trouble coming, her length of stride, and the stories about her settle inside me.

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Stories pick me up in its kaleidoscopic whorl of twists and turns, their patterns and geometry. Stories carry me away. Stories are in me. Living as a woman, teacher, mother, lover, friend—and the list can go on just as it does in you—is complex, daunting, and mysterious. One thread tugs on another in shifting geometries, perspectives, and choices of action. A solitary walk on a mountain path five years ago, as I will share with you later in this writing, weaves its presence into my work with children and encounters with ECE candidates. Being swept away in the arms of a story isn’t always good, even if it’s my own. I bear witness to these stories, unravel them, and sometimes leap out of some of the tangles they bring. It is not always easy because the stories are part of my skin.

Unraveling is necessary because it frees me from the stories others have bound me to. Unravelling frees me from those I tell about myself. This writing expresses what happens when I put myself into question and how I might live on this earth with a generous heart.



I want research  
that begins in a place of unknowing,  
with a leap  
of faith,  
a courageous willingness to embark on a journey.  
I want research  
that seeks out mysteries  
and acknowledges even the  
muddled,  
mad,  
mesmerizing miasma  
that rises up as a kind of breath and breathing,  
connected  
with the pulsing and compelling rhythms  
of the heart  
(Leggo, 1999, p.180).<sup>b</sup>

Curled by the fire with my laptop or staring out a snow-patterned window, I often found it challenging to imagine you, the reader, reading this work. I couldn't see you or hear you—or touch you, or weep with you. When my work was evolving out of conference performances, I felt the aliveness of interactions. Distanced now, I draw on those memories of your presence: winding forest walks, dinner gatherings, and the times the cast iron wood stove, filled with last year's labour of chopping and stacking, kept us company.

I am learning to make sense of things that show themselves sometimes so fleetingly that I am left gasping and grasping. Here, you will read short, quick, and

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<sup>b</sup> Carl Leggo read his poems with breath and care to the spaces between words. I imagine hearing his voice as I read his writing in the scholarly articles and books I draw from. I try to reflect my embodied understanding of his work, and the work of others, through the spaces I use on the page. As I began to get more comfortable with this play, I wrote to David Jardine to let him know I was “messin’ with his words.” His answer was in a two-page example—“fiddling and fooling”—a playful exploration of a Gary Snyder quote”. Since then, I have gained awareness of the poetry in the scholarly articles I have read and confidence with exploring their words in the method of *found poetry*. I am learning to “speak and write differently...than inheritances have allowed” (Jardine, 1992, p. 8). The reader can find quotes I have played with in the Appendix, where they are written as they were found in the original texts.

sometimes even unfinished sentences. I bear witness to and care for the words as they weave their ways onto the page, releasing and easing long-stuck pains. Thank you for bearing with me. I have tried to compose this piece while being composed by it. Out of seriousness and lightness I hope that some degree of balance is born.

My offering—an 8-year labour of love.

“The word becomes binding, as it were: it binds one human being with another. This occurs whenever we speak to one another and really enter into genuine dialogue with another” (Gadamer, 2002, p. 106). I know that without you this story is silent. So, I welcome and thank you for being here. And if, by chance, we meet one another again in another place and time, I will embrace you and your stories in all your vulnerabilities and joys.

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## Preamble

It is September 30, 2023, the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. I am returning home from a retreat at Loon Lake, Maple Ridge B.C. lead by Patty Krawec, who is an Anishinaabe and Ukrainian writer from Lac Seul First Nation and author of *Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future*. Patty Krawec, opened the three-day retreat with the statement: “*You are here to think about how you can become the kind of relations we want as kin*”. Krawec’s definition of unforgetting is the acts of “*excavating colonial violence and oppression within family, community, and national ‘truths’ and rethinking the past and to learn to be good people to the land*” (September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023, opening remarks). While in conversation with the author and other participants at the retreat I shared that unforgetting, to my way of thinking, is not a once-and-for-all practice. It includes, but it not limited to uncovering histories (my own and those of others). Through my study over the last eight years, I have come to see unforgetting as my commitment to seeing the world as abundant and seeing myself as part of that abundance from which I draw the strength to take up Krawec’s challenge. Unforgetting is about committing to a full examination of my life, believing that our place is with this Earth we were born into. My work is to walk with grace in that unforgetting while giving what arises time and space to show itself. What follows is the back and forth journey that I took to get to this current understanding.

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You might just have enough time to put the kettle on, prepare a cup of tea, and read this preamble before you walk with me into the main body of this work. The pragmatics of writing, editing, and presenting a dissertation, is at best an uncertain journey, requiring setting out a few signposts, diligently explored in the main text, to guide the reader.

*This* version of my dissertation was awakened after a 21-month hibernation. I was a little intimidated as I began to scroll through the pages looking for key places to *expand and clarify*, a requested task, *an impossible task*, I thought. It was almost as though I worried that a sleepy-eyed bear might pop her head out of the cave and growl from deep down in her belly, “Oh, it’s you, the walker. Come back tomorrow.”

Oh! The bear I just mentioned has just turned up! I am immediately reminded of Gadamer's (2004) philosophical focus that it is "not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us above our wanting and doing" (p. xxviii). I did not try to write Bear in on purpose. She found her way in and onto the pages of this introduction. She might be symbolic of a life of sleep-walking, I suspect not, and I carefully hold out my hand. Bear is a dynamic creature, and represents the aliveness, and cheekiness, of hermeneutic work and of healing. She wakes me up! Perhaps she is Hermes in disguise.

I met a bear once, walking in the mountains. A singular glance. She disappeared into the shadows of trees. Nothing happened, or so I thought, but still, she haunts me. And just like my meeting a bear in the mountains, this bear's hot breath, unexpectedly arriving here in my text, catches my attention. Something about her magnitude addresses me and so, understanding begins anew. The work of hermeneutics asks me to compose myself. I consider the draw this bears places upon me. Yes, fear is there but awe too. The bear's beautiful black coat, her glistening nose, and eyes as deep as pools are attractive and deceptive at the same time. I am caught in her spell. Hermes is at play and I am given another opportunity to find wisdom in the hot, open stare of the bear.

The Greek god-nymph Hermes, born of the god Zeus and the nymph Maia, from whom the practice of hermeneutics is derived, served as a messenger between the gods and mortals, between what is foretold and what is learned. He (she? they?) *is* the *in-between*. Hermes' job was to keep the gates between open, so that a portal to new learning may be possible. I award Hermes a leading role as I riffle through pages, consumed by writing and re-writing, this work simultaneously joyful and tricky. Just when I *think* I have an idea that will help me understand my actions or the children or the students I teach, something arises to turn me upside down. Hermes is a trickster. He does not lie but he does not tell the whole truth either. *Will I? Can I?*

Hermeneutic inquiry, which I enact in my research, requires that I go *through* landscapes and seascapes of challenges and dangers. It's the kind of risk that I felt, still feel, with my whole body. Hermeneutics asks me to face the important questions that come from such a meeting. What is going on here? How did I end up in this place? The words that come begin to set down paths for walking. I bring my deeply personal stories with me as I walk. It's easy to feel wrung out by all the possibilities, and to recognize the gap of an as-yet-unfinished journey that is hermeneutic inquiry.

My doctoral journey came on with a booming crash like the stormy seas I have stood before with trepidation in Tofino, B.C. The deafening sound of my life is called into turbulence on news of a cancer diagnosis. Like beach tides and waves that must be read well, if one is to survive, hermeneutics requires careful attention—and a good degree of suspicion—reading and re-reading, performing and re-performing words, experience shared, new and past, performances offered—dynamic textures of waves, to be composed enough as I venture into this hermeneutic world of water, safely, even though I know that safety may be fleeting, my life jacket as yet untested.

It is in the *movement* of walking that I come to know my body and the history my body holds. When I walk, thoughts relax, and clusters of images find their way into words and sentences. Initially, during earlier writing, I tried several times to take a hand-held recorder with me to record, aloud, the thoughts swimming inside me. But, as I brought the machine to my mouth, only halting syllables and sentence fragments found their way into the air. I sounded silly and I gave up quickly. When I returned to my computer, I found that the unspoken words that only an hour before had held such promise had hidden.

What I have come to learn in this, my inquiry, through the performances-in-improvisation I have created and offered, is to let an idea find its footing or moorage in tempest seas. Meaning, arriving in story and performance, or lived experience, is not readily accessible, but the hints are there and *I am here* ready for the engagement. Writing, at least for now, is as stumbling as thoughts that ache to birth meaning. Yet, the topics under consideration—my life, Early Childhood Education, encounters with children, my cancer diagnosis—call me to take risks and to search for the words that attend and care for phenomena that I have left unsaid. Coming to learn how to slow down as I approach an idea doesn't necessarily make what I encounter and offer less dangerous, but it does allow some distinctions to come to the surface. Writing and rewriting as I am called to do reveal nuances, distinctions however hazy at first become visible, and, "*treading gently, oh so gently*", as Madeleine Grumet (Fels, 2020, p. 17) advises, I am finding my courage to free words as they arrive, in free flow, written onto the page, *unforgetting*.

I wrote the main body of this dissertation over two years of reflection, walking, talking, and writing. Saying words out loud and on paper was often unsayable but I took

risks with poems where my lived experiences became more accessible to me. My poems provide opportunity to train myself to look at my traumas. I am thankful to the authors whose words, written as found poems<sup>c</sup>, called me to respond with my poems. I had a lot of fear then and much is written between the lines. Cancer tore the cover off the manhole filled with these traumas. Imagine the whiff of years of childhood experiences of abuse that was released and the feeling of futility that no amount of running or pushing away could lessen. Giving words attention stirs the air, the stench rises and a little voice says, “*Put the manhole cover back on. Keep walking*”. I persist, in part because I see this study as an opportunity to reflect on that which is “darkly hidden [and has] dark influences” (Bai et al., 2020, p. 38) on my being and all my relationships that are included in my being toward a more loving approach to my living and teaching.

I don’t want to make cancer or the ensuing debris that was dug up and spewed out by a cancer diagnosis, the centre of my attention here. There are demanding moments of my living landscape, that call me to attention, and my attention shifts, like light on water. Yet, renewed encounters with preschool children, adult ECE students, passages read in a book, a song lyric or the re-appearance of the bear that walks a pathway behind my home, even cancer itself, come to my attention and when they do, they make a good case for reconsideration of what I thought I knew. They invite me to learn something more or different in this re-turn, re-reading, re-writing, re-presencing.

As I unfold my thesis from files in the computer in readiness to reconsider and re-elaborate, I am faced with what it means to *unforget*. Unforgetting calls me to listen well to the words I was called to write. It is hard work going back over some things I had written earlier in the dissertation, because they tug on my skin, my bones, my blood. Words call up memories of running away from some things and toward others. Sometimes I see words trapped beneath a blackness so heavy with mold and decay that I fear the closeness. Somehow, I have had enough sense to know that a bold courage

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<sup>c</sup> Carl Leggo (2018) in *Loving Language: Poetry, Curriculum, and Ted T. Aoki*, writes about and practices writing found poetry. His (2014) example of found poetry leads by example in the co-edited book *Arresting hope: Women taking action in prison inside out*. A fulsome exploration of his poetic adventures into his ways with words; his own and those of others, can found in *Storying the World. The Contributions of Carl Leggo on Language and Poetry* edited by E. Hasebe-Ludt, A. Skinner and R. Irwin.

was waiting to show itself. This forewarning I am now writing, is an unforeseen opportunity to practice writing backwards with enlivened courage. Courage is needed to explore openings for humility, vulnerability, questions, and anxieties.

As I mentioned earlier, in my welcome to you, my grandmother claimed me the moment of my birth. I am named for her. I am uncertain if she was borne of the *walking people*: the Minceir. Perhaps, she was not. This group of Travellers won Irish government recognition as a distinct ethnic group in 2017. The Travellers have been among the Irish minority for centuries and persecuted for their wandering, nomadic ways. Yet even if my grandmother was not a Traveller by blood, genetics, or ancestry, I knew, as a child, and then later, when as an old woman, she took off her brogues to dip her toes in the water, that she was movement and home, *together*. Even if she lacked the blood of the Traveller in her veins, in her own ways, she may have learned and practiced the walking disposition she embodied from the land she walked and laboured on. My own walking draws me closer to her and as Snowber (2021) writes, “[w]alking, sauntering and moving are all ways to grow the muse and nourish a creative way of being in the world. The muse is connected to flow, and she lets the breath and blood move through our hands, thighs, hips and heart, walking the paths before us” (p. 16). Maybe my grandmother is my muse. My interpretation of my close relationship to my her has helped me to understand that *my obligation to her* needs to be expressed in the ways I walk, the ways I speak and listen and the ways I write—ways perhaps, that may be unfamiliar. Perhaps you might benefit from a road map for all this walking...and yet, I hesitate, the map is not the land on which I walk, nor will a map capture the rhythm, faltering, tentative, hopeful footsteps as I lay down a path in walking. Each re-turn, a new horizon opens.

Yet, a preliminary explanation may be helpful. I engage in hermeneutic circles, in which I turn and re-turn again to a moment, an encounter, an action, to linger, to be present anew, spiralling hopefully into new understanding. This call and response practice of being in dialogue and of seeking to understand my belonging to the world, began with a diagnosis of cancer. *How could I not be thankful?*

The found poems you will find within are quotes that I have re/read many times. You will find my textual responses to the author’s offerings on the left side of the page. I respect the labour and heartache authors shoulder. I experience an author’s words.



Feelings arise, visceral in listening, and I feel a compelling desire to honour each author and their words, by creating space, inviting a new rhythm of engagement, so that my engagement with their words might breathe anew. Thus, I re-turn to reflect on words offered by each author, and to be present, I listen again in dialogue. I seek to create within these pages what Jacques Daignault (2005) calls an acoustmatic text, a hermeneutic text that invites listening. Certain words and phrases within an author's text carry an energy that calls me to attention. I try to reflect my embodied understanding of each chosen quote, and create what I name as a found poem, through how I place words, fragments, sentences, phrases, line breaks on the page. I bring an author's singular text onto my page, generous with space and line breaks, not to reduce nor dishonour each quote now a found poem, but as an offering so that you and I might linger with the *in-between* (Hermes) spaces. And then, I feel compelled to respectfully respond in kind—in a poetic way that I feel leaves room for ever expanding possibilities to arrive. My responses to the calls of the written texts I encounter in my readings now found poems are in turn offered as poetic moments for pause and reflection which you will find on the right hand throughout the manuscript.

Engaging in the textual call of response I offer is an act of reciprocity. In call-and-response, we work together to move the song along and in so doing, something arrives that is inventive and collective. Reciprocal interplay between the found and what arrives in response is my appreciation and love at play. I invite you, my reader, to linger as you read, that you may bring your memories, experiences, and interpretations to the found poems, my poetry, which may perhaps awaken or reveal something to help us, you and I, make sense of our lives (together). Poetic call and response and textual dialogue, is symbolic of the reminder that we are never alone in this hermeneutic task of finding out where we are and what we are to do next. Dialogue is one of the best forms of play I know, *shadows and all*. As Celeste Snowber (2016, p. 3) writes in the opening of her poem *BodyPsalm for Playing*:

Now is the season

to call back your heart

to live with lightness

and cherish the chance

to take back what you deeply know

find the joy in movements  
which sweep your being  
into first utterance...

I place one of Renata Aebi's (2023)<sup>d</sup> line drawings in this space to invite you to attend to the place that you are now sitting and for a moment, this moment, to rest, to linger, to reflect, to breathe. Perhaps encountering Renata's drawing here will encourage and remind you, throughout the text, to pause, to linger, with your life experiences, learnings, curiosities, wonderings, pedagogical or otherwise, and be present in a reflective dialogue that this text invites. Imagine a space that is free from constraints, expectations, and breathe in the fresh sea air, cedar boughs, feel the wind on your face. Here is my hope for your reading: that you will be present in dialogue and in reflection, and feel the gift of a pill bug offered, by a quiet child, in your hand. The white spaces on these pages, whether they be within the lines of this drawing, the images that are offered in the text, in the call and response between the poems or between the lines of the text, are invitations to think about the ways you want to act well in the world—as a scholar, an educator, a human in this more-than-human-world. I hope this moment of reflection I offer here, to dwell with Renata's image, will be a reminder to take time with the text. We are in no hurry.



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<sup>d</sup> Renata Aebi often sits with pencil and paper sketching line drawings of windswept and tree-topped places. Her gift of images call me to attention, to attend to what I fear, awaken my imagination to fill in the texture of the place. I am pulled into the lines and space and therein, reflect on my life and the questions asked of me.

## Call and Response

I first experienced the play of a spoken form of call and response when in 2017 when I attended a 5-day retreat with Ysaye Barnwell, one of the founders of Sweet Honey in the Rock. Dr. Barnwell developed a program called “Building a Vocal Community: Singing in the African American Tradition”. I thought that my embodied experience of call and response was in the past, forgotten. It was not until I looked how I had arranged the found poems/quotes with my poems in my dissertation that I realized the deeper impact of that retreat. Unforgetting invites dialogue, through story, to perform on the page. I have since learned Irish bardic recitals at social events in the early 1600s, were designed to recall a clan’s history. These early oral poems were primarily political, clan-centred, and argumentative. The style in which they were originally spoken has been left behind over time, but it is a wonder to me if these poetic conversational traditions were not already within me all along through my grandmother. As I begin to walk wider circles of remembering experiences of call and response in my life, the collaboration between singers, Buffy Sainte-Marie and Tanya Tagaq in the song You Got to Run<sup>e</sup> lightens my step. I hear the frogs that fill Locarno Beach each Spring with riotous sound. They too are in conversation with each other, the marsh, and in the presence of my listening, my deep breath of appreciation, my response.

While initially arising from an African American history, as well as Indigenous origins (see <https://turtleislandmusic.com/home>), a hermeneutic call and response speaks to the centrality of dialogue, which is how I have come to many of the understandings in this work. I re-turn to the call of moments, encounters, experiences that live in my text written 21 months ago, listening anew. I have had dialogues with published texts as noted above, and I have had endless call-and-response conversations with Lynn Fels and David Jardine. Later, Vicki Kelly checked my writing resulting in an additional opening to the reader that I hope will have a steadying effect as you walk with me. Celeste Snowber’s comments encouraged me bring my whole body to the writing, rewriting and to performance. Their dialogue with me affirms an understanding about the finite nature of human knowing while demonstrating an ongoing commitment toward finding the meaning(s) of our existence. A paradoxical quest. Our ongoing dialogue creates a sense of solidarity toward a devotion to keeping the lives of

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<sup>e</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5zb0WTSLSY>.

students open to what arises. Without giving too much away, (lest we forget that hermeneutics is not a practice of explanation), forget-me-nots, their appearance, and disappearance too, are reflections of call-and-response—ways of being in dialogue with the more-than-human.

Languaging experience is complex, elusive, challenging. I continue my search for words to speak to my experience of a moment, an event, an encounter. I circle again and again in my writing, seeking to understand what is yet to be learned. There are events and feelings in my life that are left unsaid, deliberately silenced. As required by the work, I re-turn to my original writing, borne of lived experience, performance, writing and unwriting, trying to release the unsaid, hinted-at moments, encounters, experiences into words, stories, explorations, yet doing so only increases the haziness of my understanding. Clarity and expansion are not guaranteed. The unsaid, what is silenced, sometimes shimmers, for another time. And yes, that *is* the work, to follow leads that spilled out since cancer's arrival. Not all is yet bearable.

This preamble is an embodied walking backwards, offered here as a way of understanding my *understanding-in-movement*, and to prepare the reader, I hope, to walk with me on this precipitous journey. Along the way, there will be words and ideas that confuse, that still cause me to stumble, to hesitate. That was how engaging with this work has been, and continues to be, throughout my walking backwards, unforgetting. Confusions and entanglements persist, and I have left them where they are, without attempts of clarification, explanation, or definitive answer—that is the very nature of the work itself. A multiplicity and complicity of possibilities dwell in the liminal spaces of hermeneutic inquiry. I am open to what your reading might encourage me to think differently about in the years to come, and how we might, sometimes, perhaps, untangle things together.

The practice, my practice, will go on and on and....

Oh, Reader! how hard it is not to get caught up in a wild flow of words, thoughts, living experience. I long to write something *here and now*; something that we can linger with, puzzle over, attend to with open hand, palm up. With all this coming and going, walking backwards to arrive forward in a temporal clearing, there is bound to be confusion. I expect it. I welcome it. I hope you will too, with compassion in your heart.

The writing that I offer here may appease, disturb, or illuminate your wandering through shadows. I am unsettled. But settled or unsettled, I am given, as we daily are, an opportunity to compose ourselves anew as I/we walk back into our memories and expectations and disappointments to bring them out again with us onto less familiar paths. This is the practice of hermeneutic inquiry, to embrace meaning-making as an interpretive encounter, unfinished, incomplete, ever-beckoning, and I am ready now, all ears and heart for a never-ending conversation that leaves space for a future where I am not alone.

I invite you now to imagine yourself walking with me. Imagine a spring in our steps and a little skip and jump when an idea sounds worth following. Imagine too the little bits we trip over. Let's take time to stand in those tangles in the landscape. They are exactly the right spot to be in together. "We both", as David Jardine once wrote to me, "have knots to untie; different open invitations to offer and in meeting in that spot, (we are) able to remember to let go of something, let it go the way it will, and try not to argue it back over here" (personal communication March 18, 2022).

Here, as we lay down our first steps in walking together, I invite you to take up my offering of call and response. Poetically arranged on the left side of the page is the call of key words in the title of this thesis, all words in each line drawn from the dictionaries noted. And, on the right side, my response —words like blue flowers on a mountainside appear briefly, thresholds to new understanding, new beginnings—all that I understand, and re-turn to again and again, embraced in my title, *Walking Backward Out Into the Wild*.

**Walking** (from Merriam-Webster online dictionary retrieved April 19, 2023)

move at a regular pace,  
lifting and setting down each foot in turn,  
never having both feet off the ground at once.

to advance by steps  
to come or go easily or readily,  
for exercise or pleasure.

walking the plank  
walking on eggshells  
walking (someone) through steps in a procedure  
walking through the early stages of rehearsal

walk the talk  
a walk in the park

**walking my body**  
of research –

wind rain and river  
noticing  
witnessing

breaths held  
lungs tight against  
destinations  
away from here  
anywhere away from here

yet

here

knife slices  
a gaping hole

silent scream's tendrils  
threads  
traces of  
longing  
capture attention

spaces expand

self appears and disappears in cycles

conversations between stones

**Backward** (from Merriam-Webster online dictionary retrieved April 19, 2023)

a reverse or contrary direction or way

toward the past

toward a worse state

done

less advanced in accomplishment

less than expected

behind

past

bending over backward

knowing the process *backward and forward*.

remembering

**walking backward**

**embodying my past –**

noticing my steps

retracing my steps

witnessing my cries

finding my breath

[losing breath]

following traces

anywhere  
everywhere

and here  
face forward

eyes in the back of my head

all ears

alert

to find the words

and speak them

to learn grandmother's whispered

promises

and

knotted zigzag arguments

tripping and falling

adjustments made

dues paid

things worked out

again and again

**Out** (from Merriam-Webster online dictionary retrieved April 19, 2023)

a direction away from the inside

movements away

a direction away from the centre

from among others



away from a particular place  
missing or displaced  
expelled  
into the open  
to identify (someone) publicly  
to reveal

out-of-bounds  
out of the question  
sorted out  
stretched out  
out cold

for crying out loud  
they outed her (queerness)

## **out**

untying the straightjacket  
blurting out the secrets  
prodding  
normativity and oppression

walking running scratching my way out  
of having my body done for me  
performed for me  
laying out the rules  
produced and reproduced

acting out  
a messy loud argumentative aching  
wail  
sometimes only managing a whimper

a didn't-know-what-hit-ya  
kind of wildness

and then  
the dust settles.

For a little while  
I am cradled.

**Into the wild** (from Merriam-Webster online dictionary retrieved April 19, 2023)

not ordinarily tamed  
or domesticated  
growing or produced without human aid  
uncultivated  
unruly  
beyond convention  
off an intended or expected course  
a wild, free, or natural state or existence  
like wild honey  
indicative of strong passion, desire, or emotion  
cosmic web

plants that grow wild  
wild ideas

wild with grief and  
anger

**into the wild**

walking backward and forward  
and trying  
to write what happens

when a cut-  
a shaft of light,  
becomes a  
sacred doorway

into Earth-bound beauty of  
connections and  
tangles  
and searing tears

or a whispered lyric  
full of promise

blending  
claiming and being claimed  
back and forth

unforgetting the stories helps  
haze lifts  
and fear and  
belonging  
exchange glances

a new beginning  
revives a forgotten call to sit up, see, listen  
commit to the obligations and  
rise to meet one another  
in liveliness

As I undo silence.

## **Note**

All photos are by the author unless otherwise noted.

# Chapter 1.

## Openings



The task of our human life  
in general  
is to find free spaces  
and learn to move therein.

(Gadamer, 1986, p.59)

Making a plaster cast of my breasts was my first experience of following my body's lead, the body I was on the edge of becoming acquainted with. I didn't know the cast would lead me to understand the courage I had that helped me walk out of my fear and silences and into the openings.

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I step into the tub, cool whiteness against my feet. Dizziness follows me and I steady myself and stand tall to face the ornate, gunmetal-grey frame of the large mirror. I slowly trace its curly surface, take in the fullness of the rectangular surface. The mellow, 10 p.m. summer light enters through a window above my head. Small shadows collect in the corners of the room. I look up again and this time see myself. I know my reflection, yet I am a stranger. I am awkward. Naked. I am struck into stillness. The face in the mirror is afraid. In a few hours I will be on an operating room table and a surgeon will remove the tumour from the centre of my right breast. A nervous laugh escapes my lips. How is it, after 54 years, I can't remember ever looking at myself in this way? What does this skin remember? What will be lost in the cutting away?

I coat my shoulders, chest, breasts, and belly with petroleum jelly which will make the removal of the plaster cast easier. I dislike the oily smell. I pull the thick, greasy mass across my skin and feel the tiny hairs stand at attention. My skin recoils and I grimace. I grab a towel and wipe the residue from my hands. I take a breath and exhale, impatient. I layer the wet, pre-cut plaster strips over my body. The material is awkward to use, and I feel uncomfortable in my skin. As I move across my collar bone from my left shoulder the plaster cools, and if I use too much water, the cloth slips and balls up beneath my fingers. Every movement of my arm shifts the plaster already in place. I begin to move quickly because the material is sliding downward. I cannot manage this task standing up. I gingerly get out of the tub and think about abandoning this project entirely but lying down makes the task easier. The plaster becomes hot as it

hardens. The weight and the heat are stifling; the cast becomes menacing. I want none of these sensations, these feelings of tightness and pressure tugging on childhood memories. In a bit of a frenzy, I persevere and continue to slap on strip after strip until I have about three layers across my chest and belly. I am surprised to feel it's hardness so soon and relief doesn't come fast enough as I peel it from my body, raising the edges at the waist, then my rib cage, and finally my collar bone. With two hands I push the cast away and upward. I look for a moment at its underside. I am dizzy. Seeing the two cavities formed by my breasts is overwhelming. I am emptied.

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Since my cancer diagnosis, I watch, listen for, and tend to, free spaces. Free spaces. Free spaces don't often shimmer. Nor are they neutral. Free spaces are not voids into which I fall, as I did the night I made the cast. At the hearing of my diagnosis, my ribs caught hold of my breath. I became small and closed. No free space seemed to exist in that moment. With my sense of belonging to this Earth torn, I began to sink. I had failed to attend to my life, and I was on the precipice of despair. "It is like the air we take for granted, something we do not notice unless it is cut off or fouled by some odour. It is given by simply being taken as a given, without so much as giving it a thought" (Caputo, 2018, p. 35). In moments like these, having the courage to find free spaces in which to live becomes vitality important but seems impossible.

This work explores what arises after my cancer diagnosis. I present my experiences of flowers, trees, pathways, and children, cancer therapy, and more. I have tried to bring the vividness of these events to the reader through vignettes. I hope readers might see or hear something of their own lived experiences in these stories. I offer them as potential openings for readers to develop—as I am developing—what Hillman (1981) describes as *heartfelt knowledge*: where knowledge is not the subjective feelings of the individual but *imaginal insight* into shared human experiences.

I try not to perceive the world as an object. I am motivated to understand it through my personal commitments and concerns. Every act of seeing and re-seeing, of coming to understand an event as meaning something, is embedded in personal history about my life as mother, lover, teacher. Communal norms and traditions are attached to these experiences and contribute to my understanding. Understanding plays out in my

words, thoughts, and relationships; I investigate them to know how they shape my actions.

I explore the unravelling and reweaving of my life through philosophical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics originates in the ancient Greek word *hermeneuein*: to say, utter, explain, or translate. Later the field integrated the Latin equivalent *interpretari*, and thus hermeneutics has come to mean interpretation, or the task of understanding forms of communication and life experiences (Zimmermann, 2015, p. 3). Hermeneutics helps me explore my deeply held beliefs embedded in language, tradition, and history.

I am trying to learn how my understanding of *what is and what might be* happens through this study. In doing so, I might be better able to make decisions around events that arise in my life. I do this while holding Mary Oliver's (2020) poem *Wild Geese* close to my heart because if there is anything to be learned from a cancer diagnosis, it is that the world goes on. While I might tumble under a diagnosis and under other life events, I am learning that I

do not have to be good.  
do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

[I] only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair and I will tell you mine (p. 347).

When I write or talk about what happened to me on a mountain trail brimming with forget-me-nots, or share my experience of lying alone on the cold metal of a radiation table, or of making a plaster bust, I do so knowing that such experiences are not unique to me. I share stories of my life “to remind folks that we are all struggling to raise our consciousness and figure out the best action to take” (hooks, 2003, p. 107). Hermeneutics is not relativism. Because I can see my world in many ways does not mean that this world of things, events, or relationships are neutral or objective—nor do I *make up* the world. Personal involvement is essential to how I *understand* things, but I do not *construct* the world. In the hermeneutic sense, the world *discloses* itself to me based on *my* angle of sight.



Similarly, from a hermeneutic perspective, language is not a *tool* to use to explain what things, events, or relationships mean. Rather, words are the medium through which my thoughts and experiences find shape. I am intimately aware that words are often connected to so many other lives and thus carry variations of understandings. Words are “as physical as paint and stone, as much a matter of voice and ear as music, as bodily as dancing” (Le Guin, 2004, p. 179).

I have made every effort to choose words carefully and I continue to refine these sentences while knowing that “[h]uman words and actions have no special meaning; they acquire meaning only in a context of specific relations” (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 7). I offer these words humbly knowing that none of this painstaking attention to wording my stories is of use without readers enlivening the text with their own senses, feelings, and yearnings. I write knowing that this English language I use, however slippery it might be, is an opportunity to continue conversations where the variety and complexity brought about through dialogue may help us understand one another and our lives better. My understanding is enriched by the complexity readers bring to the work.

Hermeneutics calls me to return to memories, experiences, stories, and texts, and understand these not simply as objective, neutral and disinterested facts but instead as moments to be reinterpreted. This process of engaging in dialogue—in text and in conversation—and moving between new details and contexts and past interpretations, helps me learn ways that honour the changes in me as I learn to care for myself, the Earth and its inhabitants.

In any hermeneutic inquiry, there are multiple ways and perspectives that need to come into a strong interpretation. Within each performance and in the pages of this text, I am reminded that I do this work to explore and learn from complexities and free myself from oversimplifications. Each step in my research journey shows complexity’s beauty that goes on however I act. I have written the following David Jardine (2012) passage from the “Descartes Lecture” in a poetic way, as a found poem, that I think he will approve as he has encouraged me to think with the spaces in a text. I assume his words and those of my other teachers are not meant to instruct me but to welcome me into the landscapes in which they write. I place their words on the page in a way that I hope honours the openings their writing creates.

Hermeneutics culminates,  
slowly  
into the insight that this world  
will be fine  
without me,  
and the great sense of relief  
that can slowly come from this insight,  
the great sense of setting down the panicky task of mastering things  
and feeling somehow essential to their continuance.  
*That* is what it means to truly *understand* something  
in the hermeneutic sense (p. 4)<sup>1</sup>

I am open to renewal. Renewal depends on taking time to understand my own twitches and knee-jerk actions, sleep-deprived states, my wrong-headedness that arises from a sense that boundaries, binaries, and constraints really do exist. I create poems as stopping places to wander, renew, and to “find the places where critical analysis cannot go, and to push my own boundaries of engagement and understanding (O’Connor, 2001, p. 84). This practice is a movement toward a kind of poetry that “...does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man [sic] onto the earth, making him [sic] belong to it, and thus brings him [sic] into dwelling" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 218).

My poems offer time to while (Jardine, 2008, 2016) as places of freedom and creativity. I rest in these moments and spaces between the lines, but not lackadaisically. I experience rest as paying full attention to a thing so that I can give it, and my experience, care. Mary Oliver’s poetry (2017, 1990) has helped me give myself over to this attention. Her words show me how she senses the world, and through her conversational style she brings me back to my body and its interrelationships with things around me. Resting in my body and the Earth frees me from the noise of competing thoughts and attention. The found poems, with their collections of words are the words

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<sup>1</sup> I remind the reader that many quotes, recorded here are offered as *found poems*, located on the left side of my text. When I read and reread an author’s work, I increasingly read it with breath and roominess. If given more space on the page the words would be spread out to mirror the breath. I realize that their words carry much more than what appears on the page. My original poems are offered near the right margin.

that held my attention. I hope they will allow the reader to slow down, to pause and reflect on their life, questions, curiosities, and write in response so that we may continue to be in conversation about what it means to be here, together, on this Earth and how we can learn to live it poetically.

Similarly, my poems, placed on the right-hand side on the page, offer a place to slow down the pace of writing (and reading), offering moments to breathe where breath is like “a breeze, a movement of free air” (etymonline.com) that allows the work to continue freed from self-imposed constraints and frets. As I speak the words aloud, language and place hold and ground me. Words spill over and beyond the page. They offer tiny glimpses of places, plants, and animals, and my relationship to them. Most importantly, I write poems in recognition for the ongoing conversations I have had, at least figuratively, with the authors I cite. This style keeps me aware that I do not just take their words and gather them for my own purposes, but I heed them. I take time in my listening, I attend to *how* I listen (Armos, 2020) and respond, poetically, in writing, in breath.

The poems I write are not meant to be romantic. My pain of today and yesterday is real and there is no use running or being pulled and torn by screams. There is a way to understand pain and exhaustion and I do this through the creation of word clusters, spaces and connecting words that end one thought while feeding another. I have placed the little poems along the right margin and italicised them to help the reader know their unique role in the writing. This formatting offers a physical place for me (and the reader) to rest in the flow of writing, and I have re-turned to them as I completed this work to help stabilize me, to help me reflect on my earlier understandings, and to slow me down. They hold time with tenderness and grace. In *Storying the World: The Contributions of Carl Leggo on Language and Poetry*, the editors Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Anita Skinner, and Rita Irwin (2019) have discussed and selected works that demonstrate what Carl used to repeat in classes or just when I dropped into his office to ask advice, - *breath, just keep breathing*. The large white spaces to the left of the poem are reminders to breathe before slowly writing and taking in the words and spaces of the poems. The poems help

me dwell with ideas that I am wandering with<sup>2</sup>. The poems and their placement on the page help me resist being drawn into my own story too fully. I breathe. I often come back to read the little poems with a little distance from the large feelings that helped them find their way to the page. Questions sometimes tumble out. The poems help me learn what full presence in the world might look and feel like if I could live into each poem's knowing or intention. These moments of poetry help me open to negotiation while in transition between then and now, now and later, cancer and healing.

bell hooks (1990) writes, "Language is a place of struggle. ...For me this space of radical openness is a margin - a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance" (p. 145). I am in good company. I have been able to risk walking out into unfamiliar and often desolate places with the authors and mentors whose words I have shared here. This is why the call-and-response throughout the dissertation is so important. Imagine that sometimes I am being called from across a field. Think of how I must find the breath energy to make my own voice heard in response. This action requires my ability to take the risk that I might not be heard but the commitment to try again. The more I take risks to walk into these moments, the more I understand that I am learning—that I am teachable. The more I know my teachableness, the more I understand that I am already and always in a place of possibility and that the effort is in choosing what risk to take among many. My poems, my gatherings of words, lend to my understanding that life's endurances are always in the company of other beings, human and more-than-human. They are a way of expressing beings in relation (Haraway, 2016).

Endurance is important because the poems are an effort to point to the withdrawal of things—an embodied experience. I experience withdrawal as the pull of ideas and experiences that call me, ask me to heed them—that call my attention to them

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive discussion and examples of the practice of poetic inquiry please see *Poetic Inquiry. Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (2009) by editors Monica Prendergast, Carl Leggo and Pauline Sameshima. In terms of the importance of white space, see Fels (2009), and her reflection on her deliberate use of white space among other poetic ways and her quote from the work of Mark Taylor and Esa Saarinen (1994) who write "White space becomes the site of transaction in which the event of understanding occurs". For a recent exploration of poetic inquiry please see *Language, Land and Belonging: Poetic Inquires* (2023) by Natalie Honein and Margaret McKeon who brought together work that arose out of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Symposium of Poetic Inquiry on the topic of Indigenous Languages.

in their leaving. Understanding withdrawal is different from knowing that things draw away. Withdrawal is a relational action that leaves my skin and limbs tingling. Withdrawal is about what happens in between present and past. Withdrawal is abundance.

*Wild spaces-  
opening, withdrawing.  
Even cancer  
spills.<sup>3</sup>*

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My finitude flashes before my eyes on that day of my diagnosis: a life visible, then invisible. At that moment, my life is struck clean. "Having steeled ourselves by confronting the prospect of death, the scales of everydayness drop from our eyes, the authentic being of Dasein is disclosed and Dasein resolves upon its own most proper way to be" (Caputo, 2018, p. 51).

Almost immediately, I was consumed by an urgency to get off the path I had been travelling. I wanted to learn to live and love well with others and to learn about my becoming in the world, with the fullness of knowing my human limits nested within this time and place. Thankfully, cancer treatments and academic school assignments slowed the rush. The period of diagnosis was a call for compassion for a heart that had been silenced long ago and had forgotten itself:

***Undoing silence***

*Closeted  
28 buttons  
black threaded*

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<sup>3</sup> I remind the reader that my poems are my intention to create a loosening of ideas. They are an expression of the feelings that arose in me as I was writing the dissertation. They bring the landscapes in which I live and the memories that are attached to those landscapes. I hope they create spaces for readers to allow their own memories and connections to bubble up and in so doing inspire interpretations of this work and of their own lives.

25 years  
bagged, secreted  
safer zippered  
this way.  
the weight  
of it  
hanging a  
narrow column  
off of  
narrow shoulders  
two-eyed buttons  
waiting blind  
waiting light,  
the warmth  
of skin

year after year

*hiccups, laughter, banter, mum?, feet slapping floors, bat cracks, thunderous  
rubbery balls, skip-skip-skipping stones side-armed across cool lakes, spatula scrapes  
on cookie trays, fever moans, Yellow Duck's bathwater splash, piano's G minor, car keys  
and midnight latch clicks, the candle heat of children's birthdays,*

year after year

*What is in the air today that calls me to remember after all these years?*

*Not until now  
28 black buttons*

*undone*  
*by your tender touch*  
*do I understand the call*  
*to know time*  
*not as a series of nows*  
*but as*  
  
*space*  
  
*into which I may release.*

Cancer—as catalyst and as transition—pulls me into question. Responding requires new ways of seeing, listening, and feeling. Responding requires emotional, spiritual, and physical energy. I draw on my endurance as a child, learning to release myself from thoughts — “the fear never really goes away. It can only get dulled somehow, or swallowed (Vermette, 2016, p. 50)—to help me create new and generative ways of being and becoming in the world. I ask, now with the visceral knowledge of my life’s finitude, how I might live well with others and how I might love this land, full of its particular and tangled knots? How will I express that knowing with what living remains? If I come to know my heart, what then? With these questions the silence is cracked open, and the journey begins (again) with le Guin’s (2004) words echoing,

Her work, I really think her work  
isn’t fighting, isn’t winning,  
isn’t being the Earth, isn’t being the Moon.

Her work, I really think her work  
is finding what her real work is  
and doing it,

her work, her own work,  
her being human,  
her being in the world (p. 292)

Starting a journey when the end seems near made me connect *the river in the raindrop* as the saying goes. In this way, I come close to understanding Buber's (1937) sense of the *encounter* whereby the entire universe exists through this drop of rain.

Through this drop of rain.



### **impermanence**

I walked six kilometres of city streets after each radiation treatment, winding my way along various routes. Cracks on the sidewalks, car horns, traffic lights and their patterns, all seemed new to me. My curiosity was heightened. Daily radiation treatments can be tiring and, as I rounded the corner of a street, I noticed the flower, shown in the image above, at the edge of the path. It drew me to it, and I took its photo. I stood looking at it and in one quiet movement I seemed to be pulled into the droplet that hung on the end of the leaf. I had the strangest sensation being inside the drop of water and almost hugged by it. Unafraid. Time gains and loses meaning in experiences such as



this. I felt as though all eternity was in that moment while feeling outside of time. I can't recall if I felt my feet standing firmly on the pavement but as I started to swoon, I found a place to sit. I dwell on this moment especially when I seem to be losing appreciation for the everydayness of life.

Cancer and study helped me back away from the alienating and all-encompassing experience of the I-It construction (Buber, 1937) whereby all things are my object. Relationships with people, stars, trees, worms, and air feel acute and intimate, beyond good and bad. Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) write "relations are not necessarily good; human relationality is not an ethical value." (p. 7). When I pay attention to the moments of these relationships, I gather a sense of who I am amid the network of connections in the landscape in which I live. Through attention I realize that the "disclosure of the 'who' through speech, and the setting of another new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt." (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 163).

I am coming to expand my understanding of what it means to have an experience *of* something *and* encounter it. I am coming to know who I am. I need more time to untangle many of the jumbled clusters that relationships represent but there is a kind of peacefulness that comes from knowing that not everything needs an answer or a detangling. Daniel Heath Justice (2018), an American-born Canadian academic and citizen of the Cherokee Nation helps me learn that "...*respectful* [italics mine] relationships are embedded in empathy and humility..." (89). That takes patience and listening to nurture.

My study opens me to new ways of considering and being within relationship. For example, I highlight the following writers through my work: Jardine (2016), Noddings (1984), Buber (1937), Dewey (1897), and Gadamer (2004); and notably, Indigenous fiction authors Lee Maracle (Stó:lō nation) (2002, 2018), Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Band, Chippewa) (2008, 2012), Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) (1998), Craig Womback (Muskogee Creek and Cherokee) (2001), and Katherena Vermette (Red River Métis [Michif] (2016); and non-fiction authors Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) (2018) and Robin Wall Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) (2013). They are my teachers, and they encourage me to understand the importance of attending to the relationships in my life. Indigenous literatures and scholarship have had a pivotal place in my thinking

over the last few years. Their words invite me to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all things, human and more-than-human; I respectfully appreciate the network of ideas, experiences, and offerings that provide a path for me to take up the task of enlivening old, unsaid, and difficult memories. Learning about relationships from a wide range of authors, foremost, First Nations authors, whose stories, and experiences that have been so generously offered to me, have touched me deeply. Indigenous Literatures has shaped me as I enter their texts. There is no preparation for the kind of learning that Indigenous literature offers; stories teach us in ways that call us to attention, to memory, to forgotten places, and places and experiences that I am not yet willing or able to speak to. I am learning to act well in the world, and I take my direction from those who have sacrificed and had the courage to face overwhelming challenges. I have learned that resiliency grows in the company of others who share care for the Earth, which in turn, listening deeply, helps me form understanding about myself in the world and about the world that is in me.

For instance, I am a teacher because of the students I teach, and I learn to teach rhythmically and openly as I come to know the world and those I teach. Living is a dance of relationships that hold and sustain me—but it is not always the kind of dance I wish for or appreciate. Cancer evokes in me a desire to know these relationships in greater detail. Study—through conversation, walking, reading, listening, and muddling through the mash of ideas swirling around in me—has provided an opportunity to know the land and my body as holders of knowledge; an intimacy with my body and the land helps me navigate my way through significant life changes, one of which is cancer.

Gadamer (2007) suggests that understanding requires the acceptance of knowledge from a source outside the self; I read this *shaft of light* as inviting me to accept knowledge from art, trees, radiation machines, and pill bugs. I learn to understand and listen for the knowledge-in-movement of children. A readiness to hear a child's knowledge opens the world to me, while I too, open to the world. A free space of potential is created when I give myself over to children's eyes, and ways of being, present.

Let me bring you to the forest with Zoe:<sup>4</sup>

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The children love to play in the forest 100 metres from the childcare program along a fence that reverberates with years of sticks having played its metal, diamond-patterned weave. The fallen cedar is a pirate ship one afternoon and a hospital the next. The leaves and sticks are the stuff of ice cream shops and swords. The children play back and forth across the trail where horses and dogs are announced with a clear “dog on the trail” voice from ECEs and children alike. Some children leap quickly to the side while others marvel at the animals as they brush along the low huckleberry bushes and mounds of sword ferns. The summer has been mild, and it hasn’t rained for a few days and the old fallen trees capture our attention. Their drying bark, laying low to the ground and shaded by the big leaf maples, invite the children to prod and watch what shows up. Zoe had been playing a game of “baby” before walking over to a decomposing cedar tree where two other children were trying to draw the attention of pill bugs. Zoe caught my eye we stood watching the interplay of gaze and pillbugs. When the other children left, Zoe started to poke a small stick into the surface of the wood. I asked, “what do you think the pill bugs might be telling each other?” Zoe was silent. I waited wondering if she was thinking out a response or if she had not heard. Then she started gently poking at wood around the larvae. We watched them move between the tiny levels of wood, wiggling their way to darker spaces; their tiny heads raised and turning as though to tell us off. Then I asked another question, “Do you think the larvae are tasting the wind?” Still Zoe provided no comment. Close by was a pill bug, scurrying to safety. Before curling into its tiny-ball-self, she picked it up between thumb and forefinger. Zoe looked and looked and then placed it in my hand, catching my eye again. Then without a word, she ran off to other games. A tumble and jumble of thoughts swirled as I held the little creature in my palm.

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<sup>4</sup> Not her real name. The selection of the name came because I have always liked it for its playfulness on my tongue. I look at the roots or meanings of words. The Greek name Zoe means *life*, and for my purposes, it offers a generous place to learn. Rosi Braidotti notes *zoe* is “the power of life ‘as potentia’” (p. 177). Braidotti’s exploration of this word left me with a strong image of *zoe* as generative and resistant and has given me a complex understanding of what *life* means. This is certainly a disposition to hold when working through the curriculum guides that stand steadfastly in binaries and dictates. I have learned from this exploration of *zoe* to be wide-eyed and all ears to the things that show themselves.

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I tell this story of Zoe and I and the pill bug to emphasize the idea of relationship and how learning to understand pedagogical relationships is important in my teaching life. I want this story and smaller ones that I tell to form a kind of weave of trails on the landscape of my life as a teacher, friend, and student. I will return to this story of Zoe to explore the idea of walking backward and how this story marks a significant point in my awareness to my lived experience—to the children, and ground on which I walk. I want the uncertainty, the silence, the questions, and the quiet inquiry to be carried along with me as I explore the ideas.

The only way of deciding what education should be, ...  
is discovery of what actually takes place  
when education  
really occurs (Dewey, 1964, p.3).

I am learning from my time with Zoe. Zoe's short but important eye contact was a gift to me that I only recognized properly long after I had left the forest. Buber's (1958) *I-Thou* relationship is one where the potential for mutual understanding is noticed and nurtured: where the we-ness of the relationship is held. This moment is an empathic place for us. My inability to honour this gaze was lost because of my prejudices related to my narrow understanding of the role of teacher.

My questions seem to have been motivated by a desire to help Zoe think about the nature of homes and our responsibility to ensure the insect's security. Zoe's silence might attest to the need for me to refrain from teaching children about morality in such a sideways manner and to attend deeply to the way silence is a yielding—an intentional creation of space for pill bugs and their larvae and for watching and for opening me to beings—and a generative act conducive to deeper listening as I step out of myself and into this place of silence and forest: the wild not-yet-or-may-never-be-known. This found poem from Heidegger's (1962) work hints at the disposition needed to learn to question in a way open to new paths and possibilities:

Every questioning is a seeking.

Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought.

As an attitude

adopted by a being,

the questioner,

questioning has its own character of being (pp. 3–4)<sup>ii</sup>

Another way I might interpret my encounter with Zoe is to see her as embodying the quiet absorption that comes with study. In Zoe's case, her focus might have been the study of larvae and pill bugs, or it might have been of tree trunks and teachers. She embodies the art of questioning in her disposition to quietness and silence in the earth's company. When Zoe follows her wonder in relation to the pill bug, she lets the world express itself to her. Instead of being seen as non-communicative with me, it may be that she already sees herself and her inquiry as recognized and supported through the past experiences I have had with her.

Human communication is meaning making and connection. I am learning to understand that the role I play in my interactions with a child is to carefully choose when and how to go beyond the world of boundaries and correct answers. I am learning to wait carefully on the edge of the child's world so that the children and I might walk together. The dance to coordinate our actions begins, fails, succeeds, and stutter-steps along. Accepting my evolving interpretations of Zoe's *being with me* is an integral part of understanding itself. "Understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 308). And yet, something more than that is happening.

By our very attitude to one another we help to shape one another's world.

By our attitude to the other person, we help to determine the scope and hue of [her] world;

we make it large  
or small,  
bright or drab,  
rich or dull,  
threatening or secure.

We help to shape [her] world not by theories and views but by  
our  
very attitude  
toward [her].

Herein lies the inarticulated and one might say anonymous demand  
that we

take care  
of the life which trust has placed in our hands (Logstrup, 1971, p. 19)<sup>iii</sup>

Zoe hints at steps a teacher could take amid moments of ambiguity and indecision. When I revisit Zoe's attention to the pill bug, I learn to bring my heart to the moment. The subject of our attention—the pill bug, and perhaps its relationship to the log, the larvae, and beyond— “is not merely an arbitrary object of discussion, independent of the process of mutual understanding, but rather is the path and goal of mutual understanding itself” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 180). An experience like my encounter with Zoe invites me to attend to how I am called out of myself and into the world of other beings. My experience with her provides an opportunity to find times when instead of issuing questions, I might thoughtfully express openness and receptivity to what is arising. Zoe had knowledge: she understood the pill bug had something to say. The forest, its cedar logs, the squeals of children chasing each other, all helped me become aware of the importance of the space between teacher and child. The ways I honour this

space are becoming increasingly important for me to learn. I interpret this event as a moment where Zoe stepped back and away as a yielding: an invitation to encounter the pill bug and all its connections—quietly.

As I deepen my interpretation of my time with Zoe, I am learning to be grateful for understanding what it means to encounter myself and others in teaching; from such encounters, renewal is possible. Zoe and her capacity to stay quiet despite my questioning is a gift: an opportunity to develop a commitment to make ongoing adjustments, of stepping back, yielding, listening, watching, and feeling my way in life. Walking backward and appreciating the offered free spaces marks the condition and the result of my practice. Doing so may allow me to preserve the pill bug within its forested world and its relationship to Zoe so that these relationships among humans and animals and the forest can be returned to again and again.

*Words can be such piercing things.*

*Silence is something I must listen to and  
when I do, it catches hold of me. It tells me how to know things,*

*like if the river is about to swell or*

*if*

*the Steller's Jay is on the hunt.*

*In silence*

*I become aware of something larger*

*opened by the light*

*dancing*

*between the trees.*

Dewey (1964) reminds me that “education is, therefore, a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 7). In my field of ECE, *future living*, predicted and

planned for by many educators is about kindergarten readiness: usually meaning the ability to sit for periods of time to express letters of the alphabet and counting to 100. We are still navigating within Taylorism's (1911) borders: the most influential management theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, proposed that schools should be modelled on the factory systems of the time. My *intention* is to coordinate my physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual behaviours with the steps the child and I take. This is a form of *resistance* against preplanned procedures where the child is standardly performing each simplified and fragmented task. The "academic field of education is so very reluctant to abandon social engineering" (Pinar, 2006, p. 109). I work to resist my impulses for excessive order, where interruptions are eliminated and dialogue is scripted, guaranteeing us all the possibility of winning the gold stars I so clearly remember in my days of schooling. The dances I engage in with children are an effort and a commitment to inquiry that welcomes conversation with all persons in the broadest sense. Through such dances, the child and I gather an energy that helps us notice ambiguity and yield to it when necessary; allowing it the space it needs to loosen its own knots. Studying myself within relationships with children, decaying cedar trees, pill bug larvae—all nested within the dappled light of the forest—helps me understand myself as one of many co-arising actors on this Earth. I am trying to act in ways that may help get myself out of the present downward-spiraling conditions that a cancer diagnosis can engender.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) students I teach want to know *now*, over a course of a year or two of training,<sup>5</sup> what they must do to help children maximize a future. They want to know what they must learn to prepare children for continued development.<sup>6</sup> Many ECE students want to know the best methods to redirect "challenging behaviours." Thus, many ECE students have goals for the future and are often in a hurry to learn what is necessary to guarantee their success as educators working within systems of child care. ECE students often make predictions for the future based on their personal prejudices and a narrow reading of the definitions and examples outlined in textbooks and online resources such as the *BC Science of Early Child*

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<sup>5</sup> Training is a problematic word. It relates to Taylorism, but the BC ECE Registry and Private Training Institution Branch of BC (Ministry of Advanced Ed) use this word centrally with regard to certification of ECEs in the province.

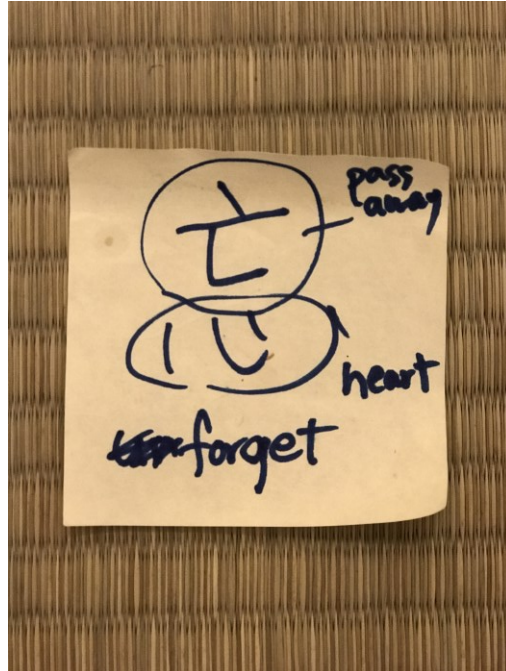
<sup>6</sup> Development, too, is a problematic word as it is attached too closely to an overreliance on developmental psychology, of children running *the* course and of fitting into *the* norms. See the work of Silvia Kind (Capilano University) for articles on this subject.



*Development* (Red River College, 2021), where child development theories continue to constrain children and those who work with them. Children think of the *now-presence* differently. Children don't often worry about how they will navigate Grade One or what instrument they *should* play to get into the best schools. The now-presence for children is about *the living itself*. Living is about lunches and a parent's love, about muddy buddies and the ways of waist-deep puddles. Walking beside them as they navigate lines of flight is likely our best course of action.

With a greater awareness of myself on earth and the ways of children and ECE students, I am learning where I too have had forward-marching goals for children. Zoe demonstrated to me that I had not yet learned to release my agenda. I am learning now to abandon my over-reliance on an ordered system that mirrors curriculum guides; instead, I am learning to be in a child's midst so that I might understand what I am being asked to consider, interpret, and interpret again and again. I am learning to be near in terms of the dialogue I have with each child while backing up and giving space for our dialogue to find its footing. I have ended up with scraped knees and bruises from the leaps I have taken. The wild landscape is my unlearning: my experience of learning what it means to be teachable by children and ECE students alike.

I do not have an expectation for one solid, end-all answer although this feeling creeps into my stories sometimes. I understand many interpretations will arise and that I will be carried into the next interpretation, and then the next. Nourishing a greater understanding of myself and the ways I am being called to act in the world requires attending to ideas and interpretations and then letting go—about unlearning some things and unforgetting others. This became abundantly clear to me when a friend, fluent in Japanese, showed me the Japanese characters for forgetting. Using a small yellow notepad, she wrote the characters:



One part of the character means *passing away* and the other part of the character means *heart*. Forgetting is a little like allowing the heart to pass away. Unforgetting doesn't mean that we must remember all things to preserve our hearts for other relations. Rather, my friend's words and her exploration of the characters helped me attend to forgetting and unforgetting as matters of heart and mind and are thus remarkable and generous as are Leggo's (2001a) words,

The art and the heart of story-making  
are capacious and uncontainable,  
always seeking surprising twists and twisted surprises,  
the story is a neverending story,  
a story only temporarily suspended

With 'once upon a time'

and 'ever after'.

There are many possibilities in any story.

I write and rewrite,

revise and revisit many possibilities (n.p.).<sup>iv</sup>

Through cancer I have become acutely aware of the kinships, interrelations, and interdependencies of this life. Sometimes this coming to awareness is painful learning and with practice I am, on occasion, learning to suffer life's generousities with gratitude. I am reminded of Donna Haraway's (2016) encouragement "to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present" (p, 1). Recovery needs patience and determination. These kinships show themselves among and between my teaching experiences with preschool children, my walks on mountains, by the shore, and in my academic performances. Reflection in and after these experiences leads me increasingly to complex understandings of myself and of my connections to Earth.<sup>7</sup> I am reminded of Lee Maracle's (2007) novel, *Daughters Are Forever*, in which protagonist Marilyn walks and stills herself to listen to Westwind's messages as she explores the impacts of colonialism and patriarchy. Lee Maracle—like many Indigenous authors of fiction such as Linda Hogan (1998), Craig Womback (2001), Louise Erdrich (2008)—call me to

*walk in a graceful manner  
and learn to  
carry the composing cosmos  
in my steps.*

Relationships to others—those here now, particularly small children, and those who have come before, be they family or scholars—awaken me to the steps I take. I feel my relationship to my body and its intimate connection to Earth when I attend to my walking. "The body I am is my most intimate point of entry into the world" (Kohak, 1985, p. 105). In me, I am becoming aware of the complexities of relationships: between the

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<sup>7</sup> Lynn Fels uses the term *interstandings* in her writing. She cites Taylor and Saarinen (1994) where interstanding is meaning making and as what is possible between and co-interdependent, as opposed to understanding, which may be read as objective and individual. This is an approach to relationships that has strong resonance with my work. I have chosen to use the word *understanding* as it is used more often in the fiction and non-fiction that I have engaged with for this study. *Interstandings* remains worthy of spaces in this text.

older and the younger; teacher and the learner; and the private realm of home and in the public, organized body. I am answerable to these relationships.

Education is always communal, bringing with it the fullness of history checked and unchecked, interpreted, and reinterpreted, brimming with opportunities to give this world a chance to heal despite all its dilemmas and ambiguities. I move within my relationships and ideas, freed from some of the imposed patriarchal boundaries I once accepted as real; I move to new ideas that allow me to take steps, as gracefully as I can, out into the wildness and beauty of this living world. I am now able to recognize that kinships, “just as undeniable as difference[s]” (Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 36), need to be heeded.

Listening is no simple or easy task, and it is especially challenging when some voices are silenced. Cooperation between isolated individuals for the good of the company’s stated goals was of utmost importance in Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), the concepts of which have been applied in so many schools as I have mentioned. Without cooperation, I falter. Thus, the recognition and expression of human and more-than-human interrelationships, as knotty as they might be, lays the landscape for our present day and our future together.

I am learning about kinships and cooperation from the *IdleNoMore*<sup>8</sup> movement. This movement calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water” (Idle No More, 2021). Heeding the Idle No More call requires understanding my kinships with others. Christina Lee Countryman (2016) of the IdleNoMore movement comments that

[e]ach stone in the stream helps the water have a different voice,  
a unique song.

We humans are like that too.

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<sup>8</sup> The Idle No More movement started in 2012 and was led by women. The Idle No More movement called for peaceful revolution to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land, water, and sky. I explored this movement to help me understand the importance of action within community. I am learning to act well in the world, and I take my direction from those who have sacrificed and had the courage to face overwhelming challenges. I learned that resiliency grows in the company of others who share care for the Earth. This topic, however, is beyond the scope of the current project but is worthy of my continued study.

Each responding to the current of life in our own way.

The river spirit tells me though, we are all the same stream.

Each individual bears a personal responsibility

for the behavior [sic] of the species (n.p.)<sup>v</sup>

Calls such as these for understanding the interrelationships and co-emergence of beings in the world require me to de-centre myself; I must learn to act from a place of responsibility. In my role as an instructor of ECE students, in my play with children, and in my academic performative work, I have found that my understanding of the knotty and often dazzling interconnections of this Earth entice me to keep the world open by keeping myself open. Each informs the other and nurtures a deeper understanding of ways to act in the world.

Writing has helped me open, and nurture a sensitivity to “a hermeneutical ear, [and] hermeneutical tact” (Caputo, 2018 p. 35). I am becoming aware of myself as a finite flicker of energy on this Earth alongside and woven with rich, complex, surging beings. I am learning how to love the intricacies, the cracks, crevices, and challenges along the way. “It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.” (Le Guin, 1969, p. 109).

This break from my desire for stasis arose out of the cancer that showed itself to me on June 16, 2015. Arendt (1958) asserts that while we “must die [we] are not born to die but in order to begin” (p. 246). Again and again, I need breath for these waking moments where

opportunities

are not plain, clean gifts;

they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds,

luring us

further.

One insight leads to another;  
one invention suggests another variation;  
more and more  
seems to press through the hole,  
and more and more

we find ourselves drawn out into a chaos  
of possibilities (Hillman, 2013, p. 94).<sup>vi</sup>

The small knot of cells lodged in the centre of my right breast brought me full stop to the end of my running. In a turn, I saw that I had been trying to outrun life experiences. My life was bound by the impositions of gender rules, sexuality norms, and the ever-narrowing image of the *good* teacher. My life was filled unquestioningly with lists of ways to keep a *home*, who to marry, and the most enlightened curriculum to offer children. I hadn't known that it was possible to break free of the confines of the "do as you are told; you'll get a gold star" awards I worked toward. A cancer diagnosis enlivens the question of what it means to live and provides the push to step away from the confines of a *self*, toward the fray. This study is helping me learn the necessary steps to remember what the Earth needs.

I have made what I can of societal expectations and impositions. The associated privileges that come with being a white settler colonial<sup>9</sup> have provided me options. Plenty of them. Yet my life was unexamined. A diagnosis of cancer opened the way for this examination. In opening to distressing experiences of shame, anger, sadness, disgust, the lack of compassion toward myself, and the sometimes equally challenging experiences of joy, surprise, and trust, I noticed the myriad of others opening and arising

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term *settler colonial* with respectful observation of Glen Coulthard's (Yellowknife Dene) concerns about the way *settler* has come to be used and how this has become a status that continues to overshadow the very real displacements and broken relationships that take place. Settler is not a word many Indigenous people feel comfortable with. Chelsea Vowel (2016) writes at length about the struggles of naming people and groups. Chapter Two of her book *Indigenous Writes* helps us understand this struggle with words. Further, see *A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* (âpihtawikosisân, 2020) describes the issue well.

with me. I attended often to the pain, joys, sadness, and resilience in the stories I read and heard. As I opened to the world of others and to myself, my listening skills improved, and I gained the courage needed to engage fully with my pre and post cancer experiences and relationships. I had cut myself off from parts of the world to preserve what was left after childhood trauma. With an ability to listen and interpret the world, the kinships became undeniable, and I have come to know their deep importance in living. The past is right here in my present and seeding the future. “The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook, or an acknowledgement; we never leave it and it never leaves us behind.” (Barad. p. xi, 2007). Omishto, the main character in Hogan’s (1998) novel *Power*, says after bearing witness to the ambiguity and deep sadness of life:

All along, Mama, it’s been someone else’s life I’ve been living. Other people’s lives. Now it is my own. From now on it’s going to be mine’. And I see that it’s true when these words come out of my mouth, words I don’t recall ever having thought.

It’s true.

All along I’ve lived in their world with order and cleanliness and the many other instruments of despair.

It has been my life.

And now I want no share in it (p. 211).<sup>vii</sup>

Karen Barad’s (2007) vision, turned into a found poem, provides some insight into the important questions that might help point me in the direction of how to live well. The strength of her message is in the *practice of meeting*.

Justice,  
acknowledgement,  
recognition and loving attention,  
not a state that can be achieved once  
and for all.  
no solutions  
only the ongoing practice of

being open and alive to each meeting.

How shall we understand

our role

and what comes to matter?

How to understand

the practice of meeting

keep the possibility of justice

alive in a world.

How to be alive to each being's suffering,

How to disrupt patterns of thinking—

past as finished and

future as not ours

or only ours? (p. x).<sup>viii</sup>

I listen to learn what path to “lay down in walking”<sup>10</sup> (Varela, 1987, as quoted in Fels, 1999). Louise Erdrich (2008) a Chippewa author and member of the Turtle Island Band notes that “when we are young, the words are scattered all around us. As they are assembled by experience, so are we, sentence by sentence” (p. 268). The language of description is an inheritance that brings its own worlds. I am trying to say that my shared stories mean something to me now even though some of a story might *come to mean* something else later, as presuppositions are tested and released, and new stories enliven understanding. The storied past—my own and others’—put me into question. Doing justice in this moment has something to do with trying to notice when I want to outrun the past and all its interpretations. I am called to stay with the past, called to suffer it, to be freed from it. I step back into the memories in ways that allow the previous understandings to shift in response to new information, the telling of what I think I know are, yet, unfinished.

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<sup>10</sup> Fels (1999) quotes Antonio Machado's poem in her work.



I tell my stories to share my struggles and joys and to connect with those who live in this wildness of not knowing, undoing, and unlearning. When I respect, regard, and nurture all relationships

*human and more-than-human*

through the committed exchange of attention, I celebrate our differences and take strength from what is un/common.

Doing justice to any moment can be, and often is, difficult and different at different times. I have been composing this study for a long time, and I accept its work in composing me. I am steeped, like a good cup of tea, in the words and models of those I admire. The ideas have taken shape and found themselves some footing through the writing and the walking. Increasingly, I have become sensitive to nuances in familiar and new contexts.

I recall, before stepping into the university classroom to begin my doctoral studies, that I wanted to live in a way that did justice to my sense of responsibility to the children I taught. I wanted to find ways to design curricula where I and the children and ECE students might gather around a topic and be gathered by it. Then, with the cancer diagnosis immediately preceding the first term of classes, I became determined to *live poetically*. I later realized I had gathered this phrase from my conversations with Carl Leggo and likely from my reading of his *Pedagogy of the Heart: Ruminations on Living Poetically* (2005). They had attached themselves to my wish to live.

Living poetically requires a practice of *whiling* (Jardine, 2008), so for two years of coursework I poured myself into books and walked by the sea and forest that I was blessed to live beside. During those walks, I became aware of the ways I explored, gathered, released, and regathered to become conscious of the *lifeworld* (Husserl, 1931/2012) that ebbs, flows and surrounds a cancer diagnosis. The sense of *yielding* and its multiple meanings became a strong current to swim in. By the time of the comprehensive exams two years after the start of the doctoral program, my commitment to *living deliberately* wove with prior commitments. That meant to live in a way that cultivated an ability to move beyond coping to a place where I might take life on with all its inheritances and hidden-from-view difficulties. These commitments, arising out of the

contexts and interpretations of the times, are echoed in a deepening desire to  *dwell with a boundless heart*  as David Jardine so eloquently wrote in 1998.

What came before enriches today's commitment. All that I have experienced and interpreted is carried along with me. But I am coming to understand that I don't really possess those experiences. There's freedom in knowing what is important to call upon at  *this moment* .

Learning to listen and to make the right-as-possible choice from what is already there and being offered is a practice that helps me sort my way out of the  *stuckness*  that often happens, or the weightiness I sometimes feel. The fleeting sense of lightness—it doesn't often last long as there is work to be done—that comes from an interpretation that was dug into, that was given its due, is one mark of being fully engaged in this practice of dwelling with a boundless heart.

These expressions of my intentional ways of being-in-the-world—that is, navigating the tension within myself—are different from the goals one sets with the opening of each New Year. “I will not eat any more sugar;” “I will advocate for people who are homeless;” “I will walk more and drive less.” These are all important actions and have merit. They are threaded together with other important actions I consider seriously due to their inherent connections. Everything is integrated, connected, influenced and knowers are always “ *somewhere, and limited* ” (Bordo, 1990, p. 145).

The intention to  *dwell with a boundless heart*  seems quite different from the goals above especially given that I felt I had lost awareness of my heart somewhere between the ages of eight and 13. Dwelling with a boundless heart calls me to pause and listen to my heartbeat. Listening for and then recognizing these beats was a first step in learning to dwell with a boundless heart. Hearing that call made me ready to test my capacity to lean into what is already rooted in me and to find what rhythms I can amid the wildness of life.

Through my slowly increasing understanding of hermeneutics and how it can be practiced, new questions began to form. The practice of hermeneutics as inquiry helps me to develop an ability to see and be grateful for experiences of the past. We always have an experience  *of*  something (Gadamer, 1989 Jardine, 1998) and learning to listen to my heartbeat and its rhythms is a step toward learning how to name those

experiences. What openings are being created through this practice? What steps am I being asked to take?

I have undergone deep upset exploring the landscapes of my body and childhood memories. Staying open to the joys of my life's pre- and post-surgery rhythms, and the movement outside of the familiar, guarded *self* I am in relation to others, is a challenge. Through this study I am learning the meaning of Gadamer's (1977) assertion that self-loss and recovery are key to hermeneutic work:

[...] it is at this point that the concept of the game becomes important, for absorption into the game is an ecstatic self-forgetting that is experienced not as a *loss* of self-possession, but as the free buoyancy of an elevation above oneself (p. 55).

Understanding therefore requires the "loss of self" (Gadamer, 1977, p. 51). Opening to, rather than bracing myself against, the full impact of reading, thinking, loving, walking, and responding in this more-than-human world (Abram, 1997), means recognizing the air rustling in those trees that sway outside my window has always been here—with me, buoying me. I am learning that free spaces allow for outstretched arms. From a bird's eye view, I can learn to feel, like Oliver Sacks (2015), that

my predominant feeling is one of gratitude.

I have loved and been loved.

I have been given much and I have given in return.

I have been a sentient being,

a thinking animal,

on this beautiful planet,

and that *in itself* has been an enormous privilege and adventure. (p. x)<sup>ix</sup>

The openness and willingness to be tested in this way—to let go of a limited sense of self, gather again, re-enliven—does justice to the moment. Each instance shows its powerful abundance. By courageously venturing into, dwelling on, and

interpreting these moments with an open heart, I experience the generative effect of this work whereby the interweavings show up in the foreground of my everyday world.

The open-heartedness  
encouraged by practice,  
is more than simply an idea, or a feeling,  
for it involves  
a particular way  
of tapping into the energetic potential of the heart center of the body,  
and from this point,  
allowing ourselves playful access  
to ever-larger patterns of energy and greater dimension  
of space (Klein, 1997, p. 146)<sup>x</sup>

I am learning to express joy and surprise when the *new* bursts forth, especially when it bursts from the familiar. Meaning making is lively, living. Through openness, I am coming to ask questions of myself such as “why I teach” rather than “what I teach”. When I aim to unhinge my own conceptual approaches from their moorings enough to venture into uncharted spaces, I begin to realize the importance of making my beliefs and values about teaching and learning matter to myself, to the ECE students with whom I engage, with the children who live here with us: born strangers and welcomed into a web of human relations within a world to which we all belong and owe a responsibility to (Arendt, 1958, p. 54). In this way I respond to my question: How might I dwell with heart in this world with others?

## Chapter 2.

### Walking the Research<sup>11</sup>

*I finish speaking and in the question period someone stands up and asks:  
“Should you not have provided a spoiler alert at the beginning of the performance?”<sup>12</sup>*

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A description of methods used in a study is intended to make what is messy and full easier to handle. Methods of inquiry offer guidance to the researcher and reader by making things clear, uncluttered, and set apart. Such expectations have merit depending on the context and form of inquiry. However, positioned as I am, deeply curious to encounter who I am, *here and now* in this moment of unfolding, I cannot separate this study from myself. Le Guin’s (2004) position that “[l]ife exists only as it is going out of existence” (p. 198) requires a *stance* (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 2009) where “[l]ife can only be understood from the inside, in witnessing its performance, or how it unfolds in action” (Moules, 2015, p. 68). While Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2009) situate their arguments around the American *No Child Left Behind* policies, their assertion that the practitioner is “knower and agent for educational and social change” (p. 37) holds true in my practice as well.

When I teach adults studying to work with young children I focus on my lived experiences with young children. This approach diverges from pedagogical methods that are dependent on child psychology where childhood development is key to decision-making. My focus on the *day-to-day ordinary moments* in a child’s life brings my students and me to places where changes in our actions are called for. This stance helps us care about the voices that are concealed (the children’s and our own) and helps

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<sup>11</sup> I had finished the draft of this chapter in early 2021, the same year in which *Walking: Attuning to an earthly curriculum* was published (JCACS. Vol.18, No. 2). In the meantime, I had written and published *Gasp, Struggle, Let Go* (2022) for Art/Research International and *Learning from a Pandemic* (2021) in Journal of School and Society and I did not read the JCACS journal. The authors bring their unique perspectives to understanding Earth’s abundance and how walking might help us learn to act well. David Jardine’s contribution, *What We Know Full Well*, connects to my current exploration of how [my] restlessness can work itself out (p. 44) in walking.

<sup>12</sup> Question asked following one of my performances-in-improvisation, at an AERA conference presentation Feb 2019.

us make our actions transparent. A focus on hermeneutics helps me call my history into question and, in doing so, I stand a chance of seeing where my biases perpetuate oppression. I put myself into question from this precipice.

How I conduct myself in this research is of utmost importance. The request by an audience member for a *spoiler alert* draws my attention to expectations that others have of me as I explore topics of cancer and what that, in turn, calls attention to. Answering this question about a spoiler alert calls for a heart-felt response. To dismiss or downplay the question is to lack an understanding that the audience suffers physically and psychically with me. “Mutual communication between speakers and listeners is a powerful act. The power of each speaker is amplified, augmented, by the entrainment of the listeners. The strength of the community is amplified, augmented by its mutual entrainment in speech” (le Guin, 2004, p. 199). The understanding that “we are in this together” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 9) is the locus of my work. So I approach this question with attention...

Hermeneutics is the heart of my work here and my goal in this writing is to illustrate how the practice of hermeneutic inquiry is woven into my life. A cancer diagnosis, the performances, and conversations I have with others, all give hermeneutics places to play. Hermeneutics involves reflecting on the how of the *interconnected* events of my life. Carrying out a methodology that might lend a cloak of *facts* to life’s experiences is not appropriate as my inquiry reveals itself to me because interpretations and experiences are continually on the move. There is no *once and for all*. What is needed is an approach that honours what is being called for and this takes a commitment to hearing and watching, stillness and movement. As Fels (1998) writes, “The research methodology which we choose shapes our understanding, our landscapes(s), our questions, our way of being....(p. 2). In this study, learning to understand how to live with heart, within and beyond the context of a cancer diagnosis, lends best to a hermeneutic stance, to how I *choose* to be present in inquiry. I pay attention to Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) who describes the sweetgrass braid as a story of how body, spirit, and mind<sup>13</sup> are connected and mutually dependent. Her words

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<sup>13</sup> At the present time I do not know a better way to talk about or name the “heart” of myself which includes what has come to be seen as separate and often, in English, is placed in some kind of ranking (i.e. mind/body/spirit) or opposing parts (mind over body) as is often the case when some of us cancer patients push through the bodily pain to get to all manner of work.

remind me to give thanks to the whole of my life's storied landscape and to notice, celebrate and nurture the gifts that come from it.

The moment of shock in hearing a cancer diagnosis created a suspension, I held my breath and yet this moment, this breath, is not fixed. This moment is fecund and multivocal, not empty and silent. In that holding of breath, I get a hint of the prejudices and the presuppositions that have been lurking in my actions all along and how they close me in and make me think I am alone. As I exhale, odd sensations of vast and unruly possibilities and interconnections arise. I can let such sensations wither, or I can pick up the whispers and follow them out into the wild unknowns. With the outbreath, my body's rhythms take care of things as they have done again and again. Mary Oliver's (2009) question from her poem *The Summer Day* opens a space of possible recovery and renewal:

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

With your one wild and precious life? (n.p.)

Like breathing, interpretation is happening. I am *always* interpreting something and yet often I don't pay attention until something awakens me. Cancer awakens. Cancer invites me to pay attention.

Early understandings of the German *der hermeneutischer Zirkel*—the *hermeneutic circle*—played a methodological role in the practice of reading a text for valid interpretation. The practice of reading involved an interplay between the parts and the whole. A reader was required to learn to recognize the sense of words and phrases while at the same time holding the work in relation to the contexts, styles, and the presumed intentions in which the text arose. The goal of early hermeneutic scholars was to move toward a clear, uncluttered, and non-contradictory interpretation of text. This practice was especially engaged in the study of Scripture or canonical text and those who now conduct research in this way assume that a dialogical back and forth, piece and whole, attention to detail, is the work of a proper and full interpretation.

Heidegger (1962) expanded this practice of the hermeneutical circle from the interpretation of Scripture and canonical texts to an exploration of the facticity of life. "To catch life in the act of being lived and language in the act of being spoken, was Heidegger's project from early on" (Campbell, 2012, p. 2). Living is messy. We are often

blocked from knowing ourselves by a preoccupation with worldly (and often important) concerns. Hermeneutics challenges us to nurture our ability to hold our distaste for ambiguity at bay to recover an understanding of our historical existence, and thereby gain insight into our lives. The “hermeneutic circle is a metaphorical way of conceptualizing understanding and the process of interpretation in which we participate, and to which we belong, are situated in, and living through” (Moules, 2015, p. 122). By bringing the traditions (past meanings) to the present so that they may speak from their own positions, I begin to understand “how our Being has already been interpreted” (Heidegger, 2001, p. 112). The work of hermeneutics is to work out my *always and already being interpreted* to bring lived experiences to the forefront or the surface. I enter my inquiry “by keeping [a] hermeneutic ear close to the ground of life, pressed against the breast of lived experience and...by allowing life to speak on its own terms ...” (Caputo, 2018, p. 35).

This study calls me to explore and express, as carefully as possible, the relationships that matter. Carrying out, and being carried by, hermeneutic research is in part a way to rescue myself from my fear of messiness and the unreflective, taken-for-granted life that pressed against my breast. “Understanding begins... when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics” (Gadamer 1989, p. 298), and the way to recovery.

Working out my life through hermeneutics requires more than learning to read a text following specific step-by-step strategies. Nor is the hermeneutic circle simply a matter of going around and around until some special and expected *it* is found. The hermeneutic circle helps me recognize and understand the assumptions and presuppositions that I have and that impact the ways I act with children and their student teachers. Therefore, there are subjects that are brought before hermeneutics and hermeneutics is the subject that I am seeking to understand. In this way, hermeneutics has this study’s *back*.

Hermeneutics helps me move beyond describing what I have experienced and then interpreting the events. Things *present* in my presence and my task is to be present, to try to look and listen for the presuppositions with courage. Courage amplifies with practice. I have come to know that what is worthwhile is rarely easy. The sense of gratitude having gone through some difficult steps to understanding usually only comes



after the sense of humiliation, after tripping over some rock and roots along the metaphorical path. “Why didn’t I see that?” is a common self-chastisement. I am learning to remember that the deeper being of my life is often concealed. “We are not *simply* there, period, not *simply* present, like a rock or a plant which has certain properties. Our Being is more evasive, more self-evasive...” (Caputo, 2018, p. 36). I am learning to interpret Caputo’s statement through the writings of Indigenous writers such as Daniel Heath Justice (2018), Lee Maracle, (2002, 2014), and Linda Hogan, (1998). Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, helps me understand that using the words *simply there* in terms of rocks and plants, underestimates the complexity and abundance of the Earth. There is a whisper of factual objectivity that the quote carries, and I am learning to take my lead from the world of plants and especially the forget-me-nots, about which that I will write later. In my walks in the forest, trees teach me to stand tall and in relationship to them. When I am on the beach, I learn to sit with rocks whose energy is strong and graceful. When I engage with children and adult ECE students I try to bring this grace-full understanding into my work. Indigenous writers<sup>14</sup> have told me that every *thing* is infused and enlivened with spirit and this knowledge helps me to deepen my understanding of what it means to *be here*. The task is to show how hermeneutics highlights the interwovenness and multiplicity of life, the *Dasein*—the *being-in-the-world*.

Hermeneutic explorations may become accessible to individual readers if and when they are written in such a way that readers might see something of their own lives in the work. The individual events that I bring to this writing, and to my conference performances, are woven with my life’s rich web of relations. I offer this writing and each small performance as a place for us to gather around. My hope is that I share enough details to help you find something of yourself in the words and that in so doing, we further an understanding of what it means to be human together.

The concept of relations (Noddings, 1984, Freire, 1997, Buber, 1937, Dewey, 1897, Gadamer, 1989, IdleNoMore, 2012) offers a path for conversation about the *what* of the particulars in stories. Relationships woven within the stories and that arise out of the sharing of stories are significant, and a movement toward an understanding of my

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<sup>14</sup> See Daniel Heath Justice (2018), *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, for a wide exploration of Indigenous writing on this topic.

heart in its post-diagnosis emergence. I move beyond centering myself doing this teaching and writing, while developing an *awareness* of my responsibility as a teacher and a writer. I am committed to learn about *how* I bring myself to my work with children and ECE students because “relations with those who function in our lives as teachers determine the form *and* function of our knowing, the knowing that shapes our responses to the people and circumstances of our lives” (Stengel, 2004, p. 150).

I share my stories and my interpretations of them knowing that something made visible, brought out into the open, always conceals other things. There is no attempt to fashion some sort of event or story to investigate. My attempt to bring forward the ambiguities of living with children and student teachers, and other significant moments of being in the world, is about bringing myself into the open.

This work is challenging to hold because hermeneutics is slippery work. After all, remember, hermeneutics takes its name from the Greek god Hermes. Hermes was an especially imaginative god-nymph with a boldness and appetite for causing havoc and then slipping out of sight. He was a trickster, a winged messenger, who thrived on deception (Caputo, 2018). He is known as an interpreter and the teller of half-truths. His work causes us to pay attention to what is addressing us and often contradicting us. “Without both faces of Hermes, hermeneutics has not only no name, it has no heart, no life.” (Caputo, 2018, p. 17). His work is giving us a chance to take risks and to see things from new angles. His work reminds me to learn to be open to my own misunderstandings, untruths, and inattention. As Ryan McMahon, and Anishinaabe comedian, writer, and storyteller asserts, “we must continue to unsettle ourselves.” (McMahon, 2014, p. 142).

I return now to the opening question an audience member posed at the American Educational Research Association’s (AERA) annual meeting in Toronto 2019, following one of my conference presentations, one in a series of improvised performances that I will elaborate upon in Chapter 2. I was asked: “*Should you not have provided a spoiler alert before your presentation?*”

The audience member’s question is where the hermeneutic stance comes into play. Inquiry through hermeneutics helps me find my footing within slippery and often wild, unpredictable terrain and to arrive at a place where the interpretation is enriched by

my struggle. “Interpretation...is nourished by the tensions of optimal disequilibrium” (Caputo, 2018, p. 17).

Spoiler Alerts are warnings that *something* significant to the plot is about to be revealed. Many of us are discomforted by the unknown. The desire to be given a pre-performance warning reflects a need to know the score of the game, the winners, and the losers, before the game has even begun. Even those in an audience who don't want to be privy to the spoiler alert can become attached, in the sense of foreboding, that such a warning can incite. To be protected from *the not-yet-known* that my performance may evoke in its unfolding. To be prepared in advance. Yet, holding things tightly can prevent anything unplanned from happening. Fear of *not knowing* results in cutting *something* off from the complexities and the land that gives them birth.

Learning to welcome challenging events, such as this audience member's question, makes the work of hermeneutic inquiry worthwhile. These incidents rumble with deep vibrations of other, often familiar, voices and my awareness of my responsibility encourages me to be open to their arrival. Hermeneutic inquiry involves effort, care, and a willingness to lose myself in the play. “Hermeneutics demands that we go *through* these afflictions (*Erfahrung*) and seek the aid of those who have gone before (*Vorfahrung*) and in this, seek insight and wisdom. Hermeneutic work is meant to “induce and encourage others in this way” (Jardine, 2012, p. 8). I do not stand outside and apart from the work, nor can I isolate things in ways that make them less chaotic and easier to understand. I know that when I go *through* the work of interpretation that I bring ancient and contemporary others with me. Scholars, ECE students, children, rocky paths, and salty ocean spray all dwell with me—and as I am read back to myself, the questions deepen and the web of connections tingle.

With hermeneutics as my way of walking, I respond to the question the audience member posed.

## **2.1. Alertness within Stories**

I tell stories because I wish to untangle them and be freed from them. I want readers and audience members alike to read me back to myself, although this has taken some years of practice to become open to what may arrive. Words attached to the

experiences of loss, anger, and trauma make me uncomfortable. I have run from the feelings they stir up.

Feelings are often untimely. *Why here? Why now?* Just when I get things settled for an uncluttered presentation or a piece of writing, something happens. Something shows itself and I am once again thrown into the wildness of ideas and memories, and I am called to re-interpret myself and my situations to understand and act in ways that lend to the forming of a better world: an expansive world where differences are celebrated as are the commonalities.

Finding my way in life through this hermeneutic stance is partly what makes me feel so alive. Learning how and when to lean into or take a step back from these moments to give them space to move requires my continued willingness for the sustained practice of listening to, and interpreting, each individual event and remaining respectful of what it might be trying to teach me. “Respect means that I stay in relationship to the event long after it appears to have disappeared. I learn nothing if I try to sever what I have learned from the event that gave rise to the learning in the first place” (Jardine, 2019, p. 60).

I risk writing knowing that the *data* of scholarly enterprise are often easily swallowed when they are cut in bite-sized pieces—severed from their attachments, stripped of anything that might prevent other things from showing up, creating clutter and noise, and thus requiring further cutting (Jardine, 1998; 2012). Even in the previous sentence you can see how words find their kin. References to cutting, cancer, the stage, or medical theatre: all begin to reveal the interconnections that exist in carrying out this research. Humans are embedded, embodied, relational, affected, accountable and located (Braidotti, 2013). Holding myself open to the many contradictions that arise among and between humans and the more-than-human world requires practice and persistence.

Rather than attempting approaches that seek to separate and illuminate concepts and things from their relations, I look for openings and release myself to the moments when I am stirred by what is *already* happening. My research requires attending *and* tending to these happenings. My research is neither about finding an essential meaning in the event called cancer, nor in first telling the story and then

offering an interpretation. Unlike cancer, interpretation moves beyond *this* knot and how cancer is the same or different from *that* knot. I attend to the research knowing that I will never know all the connections.

As in spinning a thread, we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres. And the result of this examination (about what might be called common to all) is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and cross-crossing. (Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 32)

Don't say:

'There *must* be something common...

but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.

To repeat: don't think,

but look! (p. 31)<sup>xi</sup>

I struggle sometimes to uncover the presuppositions that have long been part of my being that prevent me, at times, from being open-armed to this way of research. I know the struggle is part of the work and not just a self-imposed distraction. When I first read the "Descartes Lecture" (Jardine, 2012) at the start of my studies, I felt I was on the precipice of something quite astonishing. Reading, underlining, highlighting, and sharing sentences and whole paragraphs with my friends allowed me to ride the onrush of surprise and outrage all at once. I admonished myself: "Where had I been?" "What was I thinking?" These questions led to finger-pointing: "Why didn't somebody tell me?" I had little idea that there were countless layers of meaning that might be part of life. I am learning to settle down and settle in to get to some answers that dance teasingly beyond my reach.

Hermeneutics...is a path that must be trailed...

the topography I have chosen to travel—

my own deeply personal afflictions in terrible concert with the afflictions of the world

comes on like a summons with my name on it,

my life is at stake. (Jardine, 2012, p. 2).<sup>xii</sup>

I appreciate that even when I think I'm getting a sense of teaching or hermeneutics, I realize I don't. Looking for *it* has been part of my education for so long *it* was accepted as truth and goal. Hearing that *it* does not exist does not altogether fix things for me. I keep forgetting then remembering and then forgetting all over again. I will never fully recover from the perpetual losses (Riser, 2012, p. 10) and I am learning to be ok with that.

Only repeated practice will help,

full of citatiousness,

study,

and

a deepening knowledge of the ancestral lineages

that we have often unwittingly inherited,

that need to get committed to

memory

or written out and savored and read to friends and neighbors.

Hermeneutics, thus, involves a dedication

to the careful, suspicious reading and re-reading,

interpreting and re-interpreting

the texts and textures of our individual and common lives and worlds.

And then,

in the middle of all that,

hermeneutics demands that I take on the task of composing myself  
while composing something about this world,  
while writing  
a 'hermeneutic study (Jardine, 2012, p.2).

Alertness is required in the hermeneutic stance. Stories require alertness. I am gratefully for, and have learned, through reading Indigenous fiction (Hogan, 1998, Maracle, 2002, 2014, Erdrich, 2008, 2012) and nonfiction (Justice, 2018) and listening to stories told by Indigenous friends (G. Cardinal, personal communications, 2022) of the importance of sharing a story in a good manner. *These stories are gifts*. They and their authors are my teachers. I try to learn from the ways that authors and friends have taught me and as a reciprocal gesture, I commit to being alert and sharing stories responsibly, with care, with compassion, with alertness.

Carefully bringing the reader's attention to my references to illness and to trauma is a responsibility. My disclaimers—in abstracts, previews, or in words before performances at conferences—are ways of respecting the relationship between the audience and me, my words, and my/our silences, and trying not to unnecessarily burden them with my stories even when the particularities are not shared. This is a stance I take, and as noted earlier, I am aware that listeners suffer with me. Abiding by a commitment to care is due. In performance, “[s]peech connects us so immediately and vitally because it is a physical, bodily process, to begin with” (Le Guin, 2004 p. 194). I write and speak with a sense of compassion for what *has happened* because I realize that what happens to one happens to all, to varying degrees, within the interconnections on this Earth.

At conferences, during my performances, and following, I pay attention to facial expressions, stillness, fidgeting, and other overt responses. I ask myself, “What am I having read back to me in this situation?” “How will my writing, performances, and interpretations shift and deepen because of being in relationship with others?” I have no such opportunities to read you here. I therefore use my experiences with others in performance to help me write responsibly. “These relationships create accountability and responsibility for sustained supportive [hermeneutic] action” (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014, p. 223). *I recognize, with respect, I may cause pain.*

## Attention Requires Air

The rhythm and dynamics of my breath is a source of information about what I might be experiencing, in any given moment. Learning a hermeneutic practice is, at times, like being tossed about in the ocean off Tofino; when I am playing in the water, I sometimes struggle to know my way to the sandy shore. Rarely do I regret the deep dive into the ocean when a little salt water up my nose offers a moment of clear-headedness, but only *after* I undergo the experience. Like my disorientation where I am somehow caught between swimming and standing on my head, I still get lost in words and phrases and poems and photos and a child's concentrated gaze trying to puzzle out where this or that piece of Lego should go. The "true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (Gadamer 2004, p. 295). Hermeneutics offers an opportunity for recovery from my afflictions for quick and simple answers.

"Restoring life to its original difficulty" (Caputo, 1987, p. 2) is never solitary work, even though I experienced long hours of writing and thinking and walking alone. The words of poets, artists, novelists, academics, friends, and children are written on scraps of paper stuffed into books, noted in journals, and stored on computers. I have never met most of these co-interpreters. At times—often just as I am writing about an event of particular importance—the words of dear friends and mentors come to me. The cadence of their voices offers the pace of my steps. Even the sounds of the dishwasher, the rain that falls from my steep roof, and the faraway rush of the Sumallo River play a role in my interpretations. *Inheritances*.

I do not sit alone. Typing, trying to feel settled, is made livable by the authors who have shared their stories and wisdom with me. Jardine's (2019) *Asleep in My Sunshine Chair* shows me that the only way this work can go on is *with* others: an attentiveness to break numbing, silencing, spells and to go out into the wild "with [a] readiness to be 'all ears'" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 189). In laying these stories out before the literature, the literature too is called to respond. "Each clarifies and expands the other and frees it from its limitations whilst, at the same time, helps it measure itself against the gatherings of its relations and kin" (Jardine, 2019, p. 23).

I hope that this give/take and call/response between individual relationships, encounters, moments, flicker through the writing. I hope they offer you, my reader, the



possibility to recognize yourself in my stories, attend to their resonances, and notice the interrelationships and free spaces that may open to you. Interpretive work is not charged with cleaning these stories up—blunting their sting, making them palatable, non-contradictory, smooth, and easy. Interpretive work must “restor[e] life to its original difficulty” (Caputo, 1987, p. 2) and, as Daniel Heath Justice writes, “stories can be good medicine too” (2018, p. 5).

*Air.*

## **Inheritances**

I attend to the voices that are the landscape for my interpretations. I cannot possibly know them all while I acknowledge their quietness and their presence. I read widely and included critiques of Gadamer’s work, especially those found in Lorraine Code’s (2003) *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-George Gadamer*. I turned my attention to the works of Indigenous artists. In their painful telling, mythmaking, and ancestral honouring, I found resonance and recognition of what was absent in Gadamer’s and Heidegger’s worldviews—which, in my worldview, my cancer diagnosis ruptured.

Through Lee Maracle’s (2014) novel *Celia’s Song*, I was drawn into a deeper understanding of the intergenerational trauma that the First Peoples have suffered and the devastation that has come from the Residential School<sup>15</sup> system. The novel, told through Mink, a shapeshifter, shows painful truths and the hopes of Ceilia James’s family living in a village in Nuu’chalnuth territory in Southwestern British Columbia. Celia, in witnessing an attack on a young child, feels compelled to help and through her commitment, she finds her voice and focus and learns her place within the family circle.

*Heart Berries*, by Terese Marie Mailhot (2018) helps me understand how pain can be a teacher. In her memoir she explores her feelings of shame, abandonment, and pride while living on Seabird Island Indian Reservation in the Pacific Northwest. Her focus on motherhood, as a child and mother, invited me to think about my own mothering. Mailhot began her memoir when she was given a journal in the hospital learning to understand the impact of a dual diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder

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<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.7generations.org/we-need-to-stop-calling-them-schools/> for a discussion on why we should no longer call these programs “schools”

and bipolar II disorder. Through writing, she began to work her way out of trauma. I deeply connected with her stories, because she reminded me that memories aren't exact. Her message that memories are entangled with pain and imagination and that we remember what we can bring ourselves to receive is particularly important for me to hear. Her words prepare me to be ready for what memories are yet to come when I literally walk back into the places where abuse often took place.

Cherie Dimaline's (2017) dystopian novel depicts a world formed out of the climate crisis. Her novel alerts me to what can happen if we lose our capacity to dream. In her book, most of the people have forgotten how to dream, except for the Indigenous Peoples. When the Canadian government realizes this, they decide to build schools fashioned on the residential school system where they have developed a technique to pull the marrow out of the First Nations People they capture. This book helped me explore how family is a cause of joy and a cause for pain.

These three novels of the many Indigenous novels have helped me understand that pain, words, resilience, and resurgence are part of the intricate web of things. Indigenous stories, perspectives, and ways of being present in the world matter to me. Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies—especially those that envision a commonly-shared human nature that includes non-humans—recognize the multivocal and woven interconnections among us on this earth. They help me see myself as a species-in-relationship and not just part of a culture bound off from other cultures. When I understand that each entity—each plant, animal, air, or stone, is different *and* relational—I am offered the opportunity to see myself differently. Through this understanding I am encouraged to refrain from setting up new hierarchies and oppressions; I look for ways to make good choices that support an Earth that lives well.

The Indigenous novels, plays and poetry that I read, including the novels noted above as well as *Split Tooth* by Canadian musician Tanya Tagaq (2018), *77 Fragments of a Familiar Run* by Thomas King (2020) and *Honouring the Strength of Indian Women: Plays, Stories, Poetry* by Vera Manuel (2019) speak the understandings and embodiment of hope despite enormous pain and injustice that the writers and characters

in the novels have experienced.<sup>16</sup> Indigenous perspectives help me interpret myself out of imposed stories and scripts and language that constrained my precancer self. I am grateful for these teachings. Tracey Lindberg (Cree), through her novel *Birdie* (2015), taught me about finding free spaces. There is tremendous violence in her book, and I moved through her telling slowly. Lindberg gives the following reason for her choices: “In order to write this book, I had to write it for those of us who can believe it. Have experienced it. Have seen it.” (p. 264).

*I feel heard in her words:*

*A shuffle and  
pause -*

*the door clicks closed*

*tight against tears*

*refusing to fall.*

*nothing to report -*

*only register*

*but it goes on*

*in front of everyday witnesses:*

*blotchy carpets, dusty books, creaking stairs, maple leaves, wind, and sky*

*Asleep-wake*

*to it all.*

---

<sup>16</sup> The plural term *literatures* rather than the singular word literature is in keeping with Daniel Heath Justice’s (2018) practice of using the term to reflect the work of “Indigenous writers, scholars, storytellers, and knowledge keepers [who have] worked to articulate lived truths and imaginative possibilities through spoken, written, and inscribed forms and project them into a meaningful future” (p. xviii).

I read Indigenous literatures because “it’s not enough to talk love, you have to live love. Loving means acting. Acting loving means making hard decisions about safety...” (Lindberg, 2015, p. 263). If Indigenous literatures were a specialized course it could be lifelong. Indigenous literatures grant me the gift of seeing love and myself in words, contexts, and feelings that the characters have the courage to share. This found poem is inspired by several children’s books by Indigenous authors and illustrators<sup>17</sup> that I continue to read with the ECE students and children.

Come,  
curl up under my arm, lean into the words and my lap,  
*let us dance and let us sing,*  
*your birth,*  
*and*  
*of everything new.*

In *butterfly steps* of light and sky  
we remember we are all related, curled here together with our breath; *wood-*  
*smoke*  
winding  
*from tree to tree.*

Our fingers hovering over the shapes and colours of *flyers and swimmers,*  
*walkers and crawlers, burrowers, and standing ones.*

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<sup>17</sup> The cento poem was created by bringing together my experiences of reading these books with children and ECE candidates. **The italicized phrases** were found in these books and blend with my own connections/connecting words: Richard van Camp’s (Tłıchǫ Dene) *Little You* (2013), illustrated by Julie Flett; Monique Gray Smith (Cree, Lakota and Scottish), *When we are Kind* (2020), illustrated by Nicole Neidhardt [Diné]; Nicola Campbell (Nłeʔkepmx, Syilx, and Métis), *Shi-shi-etko* (2005), illustrated by Kim LaFave; David Bouchard (Métis), *Seven Sacred Teachings* (2016), illustrated by Kristy Cameron (Métis); Danielle Daniel (Algonquin Anishinaabe, French and Scottish), *Sometimes I Feel like a Fox* (2015); and Maria Williams (Tlingit), *How Raven Stole the Sun* (2001), illustrated by Felix Vigil (Jicarilla Apache and Jemez Pueblo).

You say:

*Sometimes I feel like a turtle, slow and quiet*

and we snuggle up tighter and hide our faces from one another before we peak,

smiles, wide open.

*Circle-on, circle on, circle...*

Understanding takes shape

along my journey.

Opening to Indigenous knowledge (noted above in the novels I read) while opening to a cancer diagnosis provides pathways to understanding the web of relations in which I am embedded. I carry their stories, theories, lyrics, and images, even though these are not always expressed in my words. Indigenous worldviews and ways of interpreting events are woven with the voices of authors I have walked with. These voices teach me how to act with a capacity for celebration and how to be tenacious. I need the ability to celebrate and the perseverance to suffer my troubles in facing my cancer diagnosis. The commitment to dwell with a boundless heart is made worthwhile through this struggle.

My understanding of why Indigenous literatures matters sounds in the gaps between recognition, reconciliation, and renewal. I commit to learning the histories of this land, to using thoughtful language and to read with heart. I commit to choosing actions that help me navigate with respect within this unceded territory.

I cannot know the Indigenous experience no matter the amount of reading I do or stories I hear. I am learning to listen to *how* I listen (Armos, 2019). My childhood whispers similar, resonant tones. Bones and blood know pain. This connection between the lives of characters in novels and the stories authors share of their own experiences awakens me to vulnerability, my own and others', and to ways I might learn to express and receive compassion.

I hope to learn how to leave *something* good behind when I am gone. My commitment to reading and sharing Indigenous perspectives that I learn about in novels,

plays and poetry holds a role in the interpretations I make in these pages, and in my life. My reading of David Loy's (2010) work, *The World is Made of Stories*, and Thich Nhat Hanh's (1988) *The Heart of Understanding*, bring me toward understanding life, and especially my past, with fuller, more courageous interpretations that hold my earlier understandings open. Learning to feel the inter-relatedness of the universe that Thich Nhat Hanh understands, when he says, "[y]ou cannot point out one thing that is not here [in the paper]-time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper.... As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it (1988, p.3-5) is more than a little dizzying. These words, and the words of Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) whose calling us to recognize and tend to the gifts of the land, asks me to see myself as part of the magnitude of life and living where every particle's charge impacts other particles. Indigenous literatures require that I expand my capacity to wonder while practicing the work of interpretation with humility.

Books, trees, oceans, and rocks were important to me from the time of my childhood. They gave me refuge figuratively and literally. I have since stood beneath the tree that I used to imagine sitting in when my body was being hurt and thanked her with deep gratitude. I have since called out my thanks to the wind and waters at the beach that I used to run to when being alone as a child was too much to bear. I research authors whose books I now read to learn of their personal histories whereas in my childhood it was not the authors who matters but the open landscapes they created. In learning to interpret my experiences with an open heart and allowing myself to move through pain and let it go, I am becoming able to read and interpret life with love, Thomas King (2020) writes:

Imagine I have written you

a love poem

Imagine how it might

sound in a warm wind,

feel in a long caress,

look waking up together

in the morning.

Imagine I have written you

a love poem.

See.

That wasn't so hard.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The lay-out of these words is not a found poem. It but holds the structure that King uses.

## Chapter 3.

### Wording My living Out Loud: Hermeneutics at Play

Performance has opened spaces of possibility in my research. Ursula Le Guin (2004) draws our attention to the value of oral performance, saying:

[it] uses time and space in a particular way of its own. Oral performance creates its own, temporary, physical, actual spacetime, a sphere containing a speaking voice and listening ears, a sphere of entrained vibration, a community of body and mind (p. 200).

How do I understand this *community of body and mind* that Le Guin speaks of? I begin with a found poem I created from *Winter's Walk: All the Light I Hold in this Moment* (Fels, 2020). This is the only poem of its kind in this manuscript where I have explored the poetic structure called a cento which is composed wholly of quotations from the works of other authors. I obscure the divisions between Fels' words and my own. I do this deliberately in recognition of her deep commitment to performative inquiry and to the support I felt to try performative inquiry at academic conferences. Her inspiration dances my courage into being:

Sweating<sup>19</sup>

Under the gaze of the audience

Imagining how my words will be returned to me

I search for a structure to

d/ance my ideas to life -

my life into d/ance.

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<sup>19</sup> Lynn Fels encouraged me to let her words and my words dance on the page therefore I have not bolded her words. *Winter's Walk: All the Light I Hold in this Moment* can be found in the bibliography rather than the appendix because of its length. <https://www.learninglandscapes.ca/index.php/learnland/article/view/1000/1039>



Reshaping

memories into new understanding

inviting,

embracing (the radiation beam; the curving lines)

(lying at) the edge of chaos

a space of

co-emergence

encounter.

Implications, complicities, biases, prejudgements, hopes,

stories becoming

embodied form(s) of action.

What if?

This matters.

I hesitate.

(What is) remembered?

Risked?

(y/our gift) is

Attention.

Performance embodies the work's own possibilities. The poem highlights the dynamic nature of performance: of balance and counterbalance and the hope of synchronicity at grace points—of awakening through reflection encountered along the way. Performance expresses my understanding that rhythm, tempo, and open spaces in learning in writing and in relationships matter, and that “[a]rt exists in the everyday, in ways of being, and processes and relationships between people” (McIntyre, 2001, p. 225). Art inspires an interlacing between Fels’ commentary and my own life events, “revealed with the express purpose of connecting, in an [sic] holistic way with the hearts, souls, and minds of readers” [audiences; you] (Cole, 2001, p. 216). Poetry and performance help me remember that I am being composed by this research and in these ways of being I give justice to my experiences. The work presents itself differently across different times and conditions so there is no one performance or re-reading that holds more meaning than others. Each is a new turn.

My experience of performance at the beginning of my studies ignited the possibility of a performative way of knowing. A catalyst for a performative inquiry

may be a question, an event, a theme, an issue, a feeling, a line of poetry, a splash of colour on canvas, a still image from a video camera, a half-remembered melody, a fragment of lived experience, an encounter,

a pedagogical quest—

—not-yet on the

cusp of arrival (in correspondence, Fels, 2021; 1998)

Fels’ (2012)<sup>20</sup> *tug on the sleeve*, calls the researcher or teacher to attention: to attend to the event, encounter, or experience that startles and surprises. These moments are often opportunities for resistance, troubling, or release. Fels writes that, through reflection, these moments speak to experience and pedagogical learning that can lead to what she terms *interstanding* (Taylor & Saarenin, 1991; 1998; 1999). Performative inquiry “...may bring us into new learning not through method or methodology, but through mindful presence to what matters - singular moments that call us to attention” (Fels, 2015, p. 512). Tugs on the sleeve are moments of possibility. My

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<sup>20</sup> See Fels’ *Tug on the Sleeve* (2012) and *Coming into Presence* (2010).

interpretations become a way of welcoming who or what arrives so that we may, if we choose, go on together. Tugs ought to be attended to with an openness to existing ambiguities and knowledge that no one answer will ever be enough.

My performances are a way to honour living rhythms and rhymes that arise from Earth's heartbeat and my own-in-relation. My performances are a practice of dancing with ideas, my writing, in concert with the body language, comments and silences of audience members. My performances need the audience; the members breathe life into the work by offering a place to pause, look, and listen. The tugs on my sleeve from audience members awaken me to new possibilities. They enliven the possibility for my understanding by reminding me that I am not alone. Each audience member brings unique expectations, personal histories, and levels of openness to the performance's content and form. These differences matter and bring the performance into being—a playful encounter co-acted out. With play and possibilities central to the work, no two performances are ever identical. Ideas, contexts, and new interpretations arise that help the performance expand or shed that which no longer needs attention.

My repeated exploration of cancer's arrival in performance helps me explore, illustrate, and expand on the interconnections among and between situations and relationships that increasingly show themselves to me, which I in turn weave into the performances. For instance, on my way to one of my eight conference presentations between 2017 and 2019, I listened to a radio program about how environmental assessment could be broadly conducted with an Indigenous worldview. The interviewee focused on how the Earth has the capacity to heal Herself. Since my performative work moves beyond the arrival of cancer toward my healing (broadly defined), this concept resonated with me. I asked myself how my body, if left to its own rhythms, might heal itself?<sup>21</sup> If the Earth heals Herself, can I trust my body to do the same? I posed this question to my audience at the beginning of that morning's performance and an opening was created into further questions about whether and how I might allow my performances and hermeneutic research to release me from my weighted history.

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<sup>21</sup> This question may be developed in the future with the insights offered by Celeste Snowber's (2016) *Embodied: Writing, living and being through the body*. Her comment related to *this thesis* perhaps being an "emptying" strikes me particularly important to reflect upon as the work draws near its Slán go fóill.

The interviewee's comment about the Earth's self-renewal became a gift that allowed the performance, and my comprehension of what is impossible to comprehend, to take another turn. New interpretations and new questions keep the performances alive, keep them from collapsing into their own repetitions. The dynamic nature of the performances are saved by the relationships that arise between myself, my audience, and the subject of cancer even when these intrude like an unexpected stranger.

As new performances and written sentences arise, new interpretations intermingle between the writing, performances, readers, and audience members, performed within the social and historically conditioned traditions and practices. The performances hold the openings and silences, closures, and excitement, and in turn are held by the words that give them life. Offering my words out loud is a form of recovery; a form of tenderness often found in whispers.

***Impermanence***<sup>22</sup>

*Somewhere*

*waves crash*

*Along a log strewn beach*

*Foam presses, and sputters out*

*impermanence.*

*What appears to be lost, gone, destroyed*

*Is not so*

*The cellular tremble lingers still in my veins*

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<sup>22</sup> With thanks to Andrea Dancer for her comments on this poem.  
The artsong which can be found here: <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/37771>

*Again and again*

*Again and again*

*The sound of the beam, radiation's light*

*Against the summer sky blueness of the machine*

*Directing its desire in search of tattoo markers*

*Marks on my skin*

*Skin that breathes in the beams*

*Takes them like a lover*

*Open and Expansive*

*Open and Expansive*

*While cherry blossoms fall from ceiling tiles*

*on a blanket*

*no longer warm.*

Repetition allows me to pause. Repetition holds things together. In the poem above, repetition mirrors the repeated exposure to radiation. Writing this poem during several weeks of radiation therapy helped me to be present to the experience despite the tumble and turmoil of memories of breath caught between my slender ribs and memories of air-tight childhood rooms. Pause and stillness are required during radiation therapy. Unbeknownst to the technician, her words, “stay still and breathe normally,” spoken lightly and assuredly as she exits the room, set memories in motion. The sealed door, red danger light, and warning chimes opened ways for feelings and memories to collide as the machines moved into place and the beams began their work. Releasing myself from cancer is an opportunity to release myself from these memories. Again, and again, I practice letting them go.

My poem “Impermanence” has been beautifully arranged by Michael Park and sung by mezzo-soprano Heather Molloy. Their collaborative efforts were recorded by Echo Aleck inside a Vancouver church where the words, the breath of the song, and sounds of the piano wove their ways through wooden benches. I imagined free spaces forming as the sounds moved up and over the aged rafters of the high-ceilinged building. The new meaning in this space—the beats, melodies, and rhythms of life—became part of the song. Pulses and pauses stood out. Something common to us all was showing itself. You. Me. An irreplaceable moment that I attended to. Brief. Fragile. Transitory. The song was *among* us in the building, and not just *of* me. Our collective listening and speaking felt generative. The “living tongue that [sings] the word, the living ear that hears it, bind and bond us in the communion we long for in the silence of our inner solitude” (Le Guin, 2004, p. 205). The whispers and the silences of long ago, the words of the diagnosis, seem less constricting now. The new rhythms I hear might be, instead, connected to the ancient rhythms of work and rocks that Gary Snyder’s (1980) words help me know the kind of commitment that is needed for this work:

There's an enormous amount of physical work to be done.

to feel it all moving underneath.

I'm trying to feel

more than anything else right now.

all the way down to some Tertiary gravels and

its rhythms.

Have you ever tried singing a range of mountains? (p.48)

Listening can be lonely, and it is a challenge to walk slowly, especially when the frothy, high-spirited voices get louder. Being engaged in performance puts me in the place of answering to the story which is finding a way to work itself out. My words and movements, my silences and stillness, my sputtering and floundering, all invite me to

interact with my words: words of friends and scholars, the audience, and a world of ancestors. The odd experience of knowing that, within the walk I took to arrive at this place, the tree-lined cement sidewalks, honking cars, and robins are all connected to me even though I forget this quite often. For Dewey (1934), understanding is more than what arises from an experience. One *is* an experience. Experience opens me to *something*. What is that experience that changes me? What is that something in me that is being brought out? Shown? Revealed?

My commitment to the performance of a hermeneutical stance propels me into places of uneasiness and has kept me from running away. I have limited experience with drama courses outside of a class in my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education. I have little appetite for being on stage and the idea of presenting in front of strangers often left me weak. However, Jardine reminds me,

I don't want to "tell my story" I want to be relieved of it by going to a place (eco -, topos -/topica -) where I can meet others who can read me back to myself from beyond my own familiarities and limits and the delusions, beyond the story I have presumed. (Jardine, 2016, p. xvi)

In performance, I experience and re-experience my weaknesses and strengths, moments of pain or disconnection or joy and resilience. I experience my own interruptions and hesitations and bring them out into the performance through my questions and silences emboldened by the fullness of being in a room with others whose own hesitations and questions and silences make me attentive to what is arising in the moment.

Here I interlace Carl Leggo's (2005) writing (on the left) about human be(com)ing with my own words, (on the right and italics) as I practice wording my living out loud. If read on their own (left side and then right side) I hope they each carry a message but that when together, they combine to form a kind of understanding I experienced when exploring performative work.

human be(com)ings

*stretched out, arrested,*

the play of language

*with beams of radiation*

declare, argue,

convince, and proclaim

truth

*and silence*

question, savour and

ruminate

truth

*and breath*

language as performance

invites collaboration and

conversation

*with machines and trees and  
memories*

and a keen sense of confidence

that we are creating

possibilities (p. 5)<sup>xiii</sup>

together



Remember, in Chapter 2, where I shared the details of a conference performance where an audience member asked, “Should you not have provided a spoiler alert before your presentation?”? The audience member noted that a warning, or spoiler alert, was commonly offered before presentations that might cause upset. Her show of concern for others, housed as a question, provided a gathering space to explore placing ourselves in another’s position. Understanding depends upon refraining from muting the other even though agreement is not a requirement of that understanding. Listening to the other opens the possibility that prejudices will be called into question, interrogated, and thus perhaps changed, broadening my horizon and “enlarging the space of the possible” (Sumara and Davis, 1997. 303).

My performance followed the presentations of the four other panel members at the 2019 AERA conference. We shared the common experience of being published in *Fostering a Relational Pedagogy. Self-Study as Transformative Praxis*. (Lyle, Ed., 2018). The room is typical of many North American conference rooms. The tables for the presenters are set up at the front while rows of tables and chairs are set up for the audience.

Everything is neatly spaced and predictable, secure. I am nervous, nonetheless. I understand the time I have and am prepared to keep to the description in the conference flyer—but I am still unsettled. I am confined by the space and yet I look for a corner of the room where I can be a little off centre—anything feels better than being in the centre—on stage. I set up my materials on the table: a hospital blanket and the plaster bust I made the night before the surgery. I need to be connected to the earth, so I prepare to sit on the floor. I take off my shoes and imagine the coolness of the ground holding me. I breathe, I settle into my skin. “Ready?” my co-presenter asks. I nod, “yes”. She presses play. The 3:14 second soundscape begins:<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The soundscape, *Keep Very Still*, is not a found poem. *Keep Very Still* is in Simon Fraser University library at <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/37773>. I have placed it in the middle of the page to draw attention to it as a performative piece. I made several audio recordings of the radiation process at the beginning of my treatment. Later, I returned with sound artist Echo Aleck who put together the sound recording into a version containing elements that she and I felt drawn toward.

We are going to 93.9 (machine moving sounds)

7.9 right (machine moving sounds)

And we want 93.15 at mid-breast (sounds of machine in background)

Kate the machine is going to move around you

It's not going to touch you at all

We are going to be doing you from one side to start and then we will come in and  
move the machine around and treat you from the others side

Everything looks great

We are all ready to go

As we step out

We just press a button and that lets you know we're leaving the room

And then we'll be ready to start your treatment

Keep very still

Breathe normally

and we will be right back

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Chime

Ding Dong.

Going up

Ding Dong.

Going up

Second floor

Second Floor

Going up

Going up

Second floor

Second floor

***Sound of the First beam of radiation***

You don't want to put it directly in line of the machine. Radiation can damage stuff.

You don't want to put it directly in line of the machine. Radiation can damage stuff

Second floor

Second floor

Going up

***Second sounding of the beam for 18 seconds***

Radiation can damage stuff

Damage stuff

Daaaaaaamaage s t u f f (fades out)

*I pause, keep very still, breath normally.*

I speak into this performance. Words find their way to the surface.

When I finish the performance, the room is silent. I sit, head bowed, physically and emotionally spent from the merging of words and memories. In the silence I realize that the “meaning does not exist in the heads or bodies of the individuals who make up the social practice [performance] but rather is located *in between* [us]” (Biesta, 2005, p. 15). In the silence I wonder what interpretation is being created anew.

The chair of our presentation calls for questions. A variety of comments are expressed and then, from the back of the room I hear: “Should you not have provided a spoiler alert?” I take some seconds to respond. I imagine that since I am still having a physical reaction to the performance, the audience member might be feeling strong reactions too. I am thankful for the ability to accept that my body experiences these feelings and that running away from them is not the best response. I am still. Starting from this place allows me to hear the question beyond words of criticism. I ask the woman to share her thinking before I respond.

She tells me that while she was neither offended nor overtaken by the sounds of the radiation machine, she felt I needed to prevent the possibility of imposing harm upon others by providing a fulsome comment on the nature of the performance before I began. I apologized and told her I would think carefully about her comment and question. Before sharing each performance, I think about how I might offer a disclaimer. The soundscape is made up of material sounds from the hospital and might lend to uncomfortable or painful memories for former patients and for audience members who have had loved ones go through cancer and cancer treatment. I am sensitive to that and to the fact that we are increasingly being shielded from our (possible) feelings.

The chair of the presentation and I felt that given the description in the program, we would proceed without a note of caution. In my eight performances over the years there have been participants who shared that the sounds upset them. Two participants said that they were ready to leave the room but stayed by focusing on the dangling cherry blossoms. I don’t intend to cause harm in my performances but neither do I try to hide the raw edges of a cancer diagnosis and the life that goes on with such words as *you have cancer*. Other audience members have had different impressions; participants have told me that the soundscape helped them imagine a cancer patient receiving treatment. One said that the sounds and words *lingered* and that she would reflect on the tenderness she felt. Other participants did not appear to have a strong feeling about

the soundscape but commented on the spoken performance. Comments such as “your performance pulled me in,” and “I heard the silence” gave me a sense that I was reaching people with my words and movements.

I have clear memories of my engagement with the audience in the performance in Kobe, Japan. Spring was late and the Sakura were not yet in bloom, so the cherry blossom materials I had brought (a large translucent fabric screen of cherry blossoms and the hanging strings of cherry blossoms) may have been what attracted people from New Zealand, Sweden, the UK, and Japan to the presentation. Because I had become accustomed to a long silence after my performance, I decided to try a new way of responding to that fulsome space. I handed out hand painted postcards that participants could write on following the performance and then sent these back to them later to return the gift of their words. I have made this poem from some of the words and sentiments on the cards:

*i tell stories of my life*

*for the children i don't have -*

*for my inner child.*

*Have I reached the time to tell mine?*

*words disappear, fall away, images remain*

*to be reinterpreted*

*again*

*trust the new path -*

*not an escape but a path of inherent beauty in the suffering*

*we are not alone,*  
*we learn together*  
*we remember and forget*  
*we hold each other,*  
  
*the moment drinks me in*  
  
*i let go*

What are my obligations toward the care of others within the environment? What becomes hidden when I limit a possibility for feeling something uncomfortable through orchestrating or saying what *might* happen? What threads of interdependencies are torn when I disconnect by placing experiences in silos of imagined safety? Ultimately, does a tight, tidy, and turned-out performance before a forewarned audience lend well toward putting my fertile *Being* (Heidegger, 1962) into question?

As I've noted, the presence of an audience is pivotal to each performance. Weeks before a curriculum conference in Montreal I met with Carl Leggo to discuss what I might expect at the conference that he too was attending. Knowing who was coming, what they typically found relevant, and other questions were top of my mind; his answers, I thought, could help me form the boundaries of what might arise in the performance. Near the end of our meeting, I shared my fear: "what if no one turns up?" He laughed. He shared some of his experiences over the years at conferences that relaxed me somewhat, but I still wondered what it would be like to hear my voice echo in an empty room.

During the following conference in Pittsburgh in 2017 I had an opportunity to try out his advice: "read it anyway." I gave a polite five-minute wait-time, but no one came to the little room down the hall. Taking a deep breath, I addressed the chairs and white-curtained windows, the walls, and red nylon carpet and then I pressed play on the soundscape. Without a human audience there were no facial expressions to read, no

sense of whether I was moving too fast or too slow, words seemed to detach and float away so quickly. When humans are present, I feel my words in the room. I heard only the flatness of my own voice. I missed the presence of other humans. The lack of an audience beyond the chairs and curtains in the room made me *feel* how the presence of humans matters toward expanding my understanding of being here in the world. Being with an audience gives me an opportunity to become aware of what is, in Heideggerian terms, concealed. My voice had nowhere to dance. It was closed off from the openings made by an audience witnessing my sounds and movements.

A performance without an audience brought me to ask questions about how I show up for other presenters and how I show up for myself. What do I think of wooden chairs and carpet fibres that make up a conference room? Hermeneutics as inquiry is knowing that “(e)veryday events can often be moments of invitation to *think* about their rich complexities in this earthly life” (Jardine, 2000, p. 108).

This moment of complexity is not a problem to be solved, but a place of liveliness. My performances are deliberate ways to physically enter my own thinking; audience members interacting with me—their ideas and experiences—help stories play out. Attended performances tell me what needs doing, and with gratitude I carefully hold awareness for what has arrived.

Conducting this research is an aesthetic, beautiful, place of refuge. “The word for perception or sensation in Greek, was *aisthesis*, which means at root, a breathing in or taking in of the world, the gasp, ‘aha’, the ‘uh’ of the breath in wonder, shock, amazement, and aesthetic response” (Hillman, 2006b, p. 36). Beauty can be made of my breath and that of others. Yours. Ours together. I feel the opening and I am ready to walk.

My performance experiences reveal that “what I surround myself with will make a difference to what becomes of me” (Jardine, 2016, p. 124). Revisiting the arrival of cancer through performance is never easy yet offers a gateway to complex interpretations of what it means to live in the world full of heart.

Performance work is like walking by the Sumallo River each day. The season or time of day, each tree that has fallen, each rock that has moved along by the current, or



the Harlequin ducks diving with such great tenacity headfirst into the onslaught of the stream impacts how the river flows and invites interpretation.

My ongoing interpretation of what cancer's arrival might make of me is full of voices of companions—including the Sumallo River, whose stories are brimming with old whispering percolations of the Cascade Mountains set in motion millions of years ago by ice and floods. *Everything speaks and I am present*. My practice is the practice of listening, and then carefully composing myself amid the symphony composing *itself*; it often makes the difference between a good interpretation—one that highlights a possible path for walking—and a poor one—one that closes off or interferes with the possibility of movement. A dead end. A maze without exit.

Opportunities for composure arise in small moments, words, gestures, and silence. Some opportunities are left to wither. Others are picked up, held, and attended to. When I give these moments the regard they deserve, I attend to the tug of the sleeve as performance calls me to awakesness while I give hermeneutics its due.

Falling over words that arise without warning continues to surprise me, though I have some familiarity with unexpected arrivals. I sometimes see them out of the corner of my eye, smell them lurking, or feel their hot breath on my neck when they are about ready to leap out of my mouth in performance or onto the page in my writing. My writing, performing, and listening help me attend to the “continual and incessant materializing of possibilities” (Butler, 1988, p. 521) where I am formed and reformed, let go and gathered, in the company of others. In these moments I know I have begun to walk in “...a place of unknowing, with a leap of faith, a courageous willingness to embark on a journey” (Leggo, 1999, p.180).

### 3.1. Keeping the words in play



#### Keep Very Still

I woke up early that Sunday morning to arrive at the Convention Centre in Vancouver with plenty of time for my 8 a.m. session. My fellow presenters and I set up our materials in the large room, crowded with four long, heavy rows of tables. Given the layout, I set up a table in the front corner of the room, on which I will later sit so that people in the back rows might see and hear my performance. At 7:50 a.m. people begin entering and my fellow presenters and I start on time. I am the last speaker to follow the five other presentations. I walk to the table and place the plaster bust—woven and layers—from the night before surgery carefully at one end of the table. I lay a grey loosely-woven scarf down to give the idea of a sandy beach. When I settle on the table, head bent, the soundscape fills the room. I listen while the soundscape plays. When the recording ends, I curiously follow the loose trail of a script that I created the night before.

I speak to the plaster bust, broken, and cracked, that sits beside me and enter the performance:

*“Keep Very Still.”<sup>24</sup>*

*“Breathe Normally.”*

*Three years ago, the sound of the radiation machine took hold of me.*

*The sound still vibrates but*

*vaguely*

*noticeable*

*amid the hubbub of school children and the clickety clack of computer keys.*

*I hold my hand out to you in the darkness and you*

*take hold*

*The change, now,*

*is that I can be reached*

*in the way a specialist, who listens to her patients, opens herself to their stories  
of pain and loss and joy to join them to do her work.*

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<sup>24</sup> This is a light outline of the text of my American Educational Research Association (AERA) performance. It is not the text of the full performance as words come unplanned and arise unrecorded

*To know the world is to love the world*

*To know myself is to love the world.*

*To know the world is to love myself.*

*This is a way out of myself and into a greater awareness of the world that*

*holds me*

*and is in me as much as I am in it.*

*You are of me.*

*We are*

*connected and*

*yet, you are over there.*

*Getting to know myself through you has been hard when ugliness has been*

*heaped upon us.*

*I did that*

*I still do that.*

*The back-and-forth motion of the radiation machine makes me woozy.*

*Arising and perishing*

*over and over*

*Within a life*

*Where everything is in motion - at play*

*Cancer makes me aware of that.*

*Dizzying at times.*

*I set a place for the arrival of new understanding*

*Near you.*

*A forming and reforming of myself.*

*“To know the world is to love the world”*

*The condition for understanding is love*

*Keep*

*Very*

*Still*

*Breathe.*

The above textual landscape of a performance given at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) 2019 conference in Toronto was preceded by a three-minute soundscape I call “*Keep Very Still*” noted earlier (see footnote 19 for the

link) . The soundscape includes the sound of my footsteps while walking to the treatment area, the technician’s words that I heard before each treatment, the elevator’s optimistic voice saying “going up,” and the sound of the machine while the beam of radiation was emitted.

My friend and I sat at her kitchen counter listening. We sat still, slowing our breath as we listened and gazed off into the distance. The collective quiet and the sound of the machine seemed increasingly audible. The sound of the radiation machine lingers still in my bones and hearing the sounds again with a friend helped me make a map of the anticipated performance I would use the next day. I wonder, do I need to open the performance with a remark about the sensitive nature of the content; do I need a spoiler alert?

But as any hiker knows, the map is but a symbol of the landscape.

By preparing a simple outline for the performance, I create space for language and feelings to arrive as visitors. The way I use the word *visitors* is how my grandmother taught me: they are neighbours coming in the back door, who know the tea kettle is already on the stove and who know my grandmother. With delight and surprise and an open-armed hospitality,<sup>25</sup> she will welcome them in. In each performance I find myself influenced by such instances with friends, the news I listen to in the car, and other moments I have collected along the way, sometimes simply for the pleasure of what is offered and sometimes because a comment or image sticks to me like a tiny thistle, waiting in a seed-state to find fertile ground. I prepare for the performance by giving myself over to what arises. I meet myself again in these performances—become a visitor to myself. I move beyond being centred in a stormy overwhelm of joy, compassion, and anxiety that arises during a performance. Giving myself over to my performance is learning to give up a resistance to what the diagnosis and plaster must have to teach me

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<sup>25</sup> I am making a deliberate move not to overshadow my grandmother’s memory with scholars who have presented works on hospitality. See Derrida’s work on hospitality toward the unimagined stranger in Borradori, G. (2003). My reading of Heidegger and his explorations of the dwelling place as the site of the journey has helped me feel the word *visitor*. It is like the Sumallo River—it has no need of knowing I am coming but welcomes me each time.

—*beginning again*—in this instance, with the physical breath of anxiety and inquiry, where things are already here for me.<sup>26</sup>

Reading this script now feels odd and uncomfortable. “I become caught in its light” (Jardine, 2016, p. 142). I am reminded of the stuttering, the missing words, the silence, the way I held my eyes when looking at the plaster bust, and the audience’s in/attention. And yet I benefit this from distance of time and holding in place. “All translation is betrayal...But this means that all translation ‘reveals’ or opens something: not simply that it blurs or distorts” (Jardine, 2016, p. 140). Whatever was I trying to say that day and what is all this about a specialist? My engagement with specialists throughout the cancer process might be why the word is showing up but is the word an accident? I doubt it.

The night before the performance, I sat with the text and fretted over the word *specialist*. When I read the word aloud the word tripped and bucked. I fought the urge to erase it. Saying the word *specialist* aloud felt pompous and it carried a sense of strain.

I remembered that understanding something begins when one comes up against something strange, and that “in reality, language usage shows us that ultimately the language refuses to be misused”. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 105). In her 2016 publication *The Abundance. Narrative essays old and new*, Annie Dillard (2016) talked of her occasional feeling of paralysis from the fecundity of words and events.

Words draw us in and turn us away for a reason. These words and gestures in this performance had something to say. Something was trying to work its way out. What could this word *specialist* be trying to teach me about myself?

My friends told me the word did not fit with me or what they felt *I* was trying to say. Yet I persisted. I didn’t close the door. Was this folly? Courage? Inquiry? If “this wound is a world” (Belcourt, 2017, p. ix) and these performances a way in, then I have a responsibility to refrain from silencing the words and ideas that challenge the path I am

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<sup>26</sup> This might be likened to *beginner’s mind* or *Shoshin* which refers to having an open, eager stance with a lack of preconceptions when studying a subject. The term is especially used in the study of Zen Buddhism. I have not made a formal study of Shoshin, so I liken this to the hermeneutic stance where I am opened anew to something that appears to me.

trying to lay down in walking (Varela, 1987, Fels 2010). There is momentary comfort in reading that

[a]ll of this is to say that

there is no such thing as innocence

or perfection in such matters

even when they are experienced innocently, naively,

but deeply felt.

Language,

and our individual and collective

cultural inheritances, expectations and the like,

color, cloud, and sometimes illuminate,

sometimes all in one sentence, one gesture, one word. (Jardine, 2016, p. 141).<sup>xiv</sup>

I stay alert.

Alertness is not an easy task. The words “keep very still,” spoken by the technician during radiation therapy, are meant to provide a gentle request. Her comment to “breathe normally” is meant to relieve me of anxiety, yet the words echo childhood commands. I cannot separate from my history where these words were spoken under threat, although I have tried to do so for many years. Weighty words. Words are sometimes like the boulder that I imagine pushing up the hill: knowing its mass was less than the weight of it in my hands. Yet putting words, even ones stretched taut with history, into the world of performance somehow relieves me of their power and my resistance. My heart pounds less painfully and I am relieved of running. Here, now, in this room, I listen to my body. Doubts, old fears, and memories of being watched overflow and flood my attention to the moment just like the character Marilyn had to in Maracle’s (2002) novel:



She listened to the voice. The sound  
seemed to be coming from a being whose body she could not see - a shadow,  
a silhouette,  
active and faceless,  
standing on the periphery of the memory she was immersed in.

She wanted to retreat from the memory,  
step outside it,  
get some kind of command of it.

Her feet remained planted inside the memory.

Breath seemed to be making the voice happen  
all on its own.

She could feel her mind whisper to her voice,

Why are you making ugly sounds like this?

These aren't the words I want to hear, she told her breath.

Make a different voice.

Say something else.

I didn't ask to hear this. (240).<sup>xv</sup>

In response, and solidarity and a knowing that this pain will end, I write,

*Still,*

*fir branches*

*undergo the weight of*

*snow*

*before*

*letting go*

“Knowing draws not only on our senses and our reason, but on our intuitions, our beliefs, our actions, our relationships, and on our bodies ourselves (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiv). “Breath knew the clutter of memory was dangerous” (Maracle, 2002, p. 236). The phrases *Keep Still. Breathe normally* hold opportunity to calm the ruckus. *Keep. Very. Still. Breathe. Normally.* Whispered words act as a catalyst for movement. Words and the exhaustion affirm my living. Breath and exhaustion work together. Do I trick myself? Is this calling to attention an opportunity to face the inheritances of my life...to let them reveal themselves? Both of the above? All of the above? None of the above? Maybe. Probably. Perhaps.

*An unknown frequency*

*vibrates,*

*cast into the wind.*

*Land and air speak.*

*Where is the threat?*

*No wonder the word specialist is so ready*

*to come tripping out over my lips*

*with such confidence.*

*Vulnerability of presenting in front of an academic audience*

*and memories of childhood distress that spill*

*into these moments need calming.*

*Specialists come ready to help.*

*They set the stage for considered thought*

*and when safeguarded in this way I can see*

*that the exposure is to the audience and to myself as well.*

*The word*

*sees an opening, and jumps.*

“Language, and our individual and collective cultural inheritances, expectations and the like, colo[u]r, cloud, and sometimes illuminate, sometimes all in one sentence, one gesture, one word” (Jardine, 2016, p. 141).

Words (and their spaces) can rescue me.

As I enter the pulse of the performance, memories and images tumble and tease. The lines of the map—the tentative script I had created the evening before—begins to show cracks, openings, and routes I had not imagined. Moments of pause hold air and words and phrases are repeated. This is the storyteller’s way. In these moments I hear my own voice and the words I am speaking. In the moments of performance, I can listen to who or what else is trying to speak.

The word *specialist* slipped in through a crack. The word was already there long before I started to speak. Cancer, above many other ailments, invites a host of specialists, each with their individual and somewhat independent approach to treatment of *my* body. A specialist is “someone who has a lot of experience, knowledge, or skill in a particular subject” (Cambridge Online Dictionary, n.d.). Specialists have given years to the study of their work and, thankfully, they know a great deal to help alleviate pain. However, the *system* of medical specialists often operates to make specialists compete and race against one another—individual silos standing together.

Could my holding tightly to this word specialist help me to thread the various relationships together in ways that recognize the interdependencies between us—specialists, patients, technicians, hospital cooks, taxi drivers, radiation machines, hospital gowns, and waiting rooms? Maybe the word is not so problematic; maybe the term specialist offers an ear and a watchful eye, and, in that care, the word is with me and of me in a shared journey.

Hermeneutics is founded on nurturing my attention to the qualities of the interconnections and interdependencies of the lives we live (Jardine, 2016). Hermeneutics doesn’t begin or form itself around a place of clarity, distinction, and security. Giving the term *specialist* a little love and understanding is what is called for if I am to bring the word back into its loveliness (Kinnell, 1980). The condition for understanding the relationship between us,<sup>27</sup> if we are to survive, is love. Not dominance. Not specialized scientific knowledge. The condition for understanding is an outstretched hand and the willingness to take hold of the possibility that I might not gather what I was hoping for. Awareness, regard, and attendance is the work to be done (Gadamer, 1989, Hillman 2006a, 2016, Jardine).

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<sup>27</sup> Words as living things makes the dance between *us* vibrant.

*black, wet, nose tastes*

*Earth,*

*knows the touch of the*

*white-tailed deer*<sup>28</sup>

Patience to attend to the world of words gives me strength to bear witness to the vulnerability that shows itself.<sup>29</sup> Through exposure and attention to the word specialist, I imagine how each cut the surgeon made possibly opened her to her own vulnerability. I imagine how the surgeon hopes to find no more cancer cells than she had anticipated. Does she hold and release her breath in these moments, as I did upon hearing the diagnosis? This exploration of the word specialist helps me see the surgeon from a different perspective, and in doing so I see myself differently. I feel an expansive understanding as I move away from knowledge as particular and finite. An expansive understanding draws me back to my performance when I said "*The condition for understanding is love*": a love of words and of performance. A love of myself. A love of what is yet to be seen or cannot be seen.

Restoring awareness to my pulse and breath through attention, study, and performance, I become adept at understanding my experiences of vulnerability, relief, aloneness, and support. Being at greater peace through this way of understanding increases the intimacy found in caring dialogue where "questions will be addressed to what things are and where, and who, and in which precise way they are as they are, rather than why, how come, and what for" (Hillman, 2006b, p. 40).

*Something will always show itself.*

What do encounters with words, friends, and audience members reveal about my capacity to nurture skills necessary to live in the world well with others? Practicing

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<sup>28</sup> When I write a poem like this, I am trying to express, in a sensory way, what it means to be aware of the interrelationships noted earlier in the world of clouds and particles and stories.

<sup>29</sup> See Amy Thomasson's Master of Arts (MA) thesis and her work related to openness in vulnerability.

listening to others and *releasing myself from myself* allows me to attend to the qualities of things. I am, through this work—this writing—expanding my awareness that judgments have long histories and connections to people and places and things that form them. These judgements can be questioned, even abandoned where necessary. Within this wider landscape, knowing arrives as a possibility—an opportunity, an offering—through acts of being and learning together. Relational knowing seeks to cherish ambiguities and speaks to the central hermeneutic idea of the fusion of horizons. A fusion happens when I integrate what is unfamiliar into what is familiar to me. My understanding is reshaped rather than acquired and I am changed.

I continue to learn to have courage to let tears fall when I perform. Tears form the intimate connection between things and people as I offer an invitation to make pain knowable and because “tears can be thoughts...” (Erdrich, 2021 p. 60). *Here I am, revealing a heart, in heart. I offer you my hand.* I need heart to develop wisdom for the Earth and the children I teach (Clifford and Friesen, 1994, p. 18). My performances, my writing in reflection, and my contemplation of what arises are a practice of stillness and activity. I do not predict what will arrive. I promise my audience no outcomes. This demonstrates the experience of being played by the world (Gadamer, 1989).

*Resting now*

*in this place of words.*

*Still*

*understanding is*

*possible.*

Understanding the meanings of words and sentences recognizes that language is embedded in historical contexts. Language provokes interrogation.

Edmund Husserl (2014) in his discernment of pure phenomenology, wrote that lived experience could be essentialized. He described it as if language were some innocent, after-the-fact-of-experience *means* or *pathway* to get at what just *is*.

Contemporary hermeneutics, starting with Martin Heidegger (1962), discussed that such a view comes too late—we are already full of images, ideas, lingering words, symbols, and signs; our *experience of the world* is not just static and waiting to be described, but must be invoked by the very image-laden means that an experience already has. Max Van Manen (2014) describes the primal meaning(s) of experiences through an exploration of the epoché and reduction in phenomenology<sup>30</sup>. I am learning to take an ecological stance with David Jardine (1989) where the strength of my interpretations is not a matter of getting outside of my earthly body and its implicatedness and then pointing to an experience and describing it or *scientifically* researching it. Rather, hermeneutics is born of writing and talking of lived experience in such a way that readers and listeners are drawn into their own inescapable, ecological interdependence. Each of us feels, imagines, names, explores, writes, paints, sings, drums, and show these interdependencies in a hundred other ways.

The word specialist that appeared in the performance called me to attend to the assumptions, complexities, and ambiguities of my life. What world is disclosed in this word? The act of putting the word into question is one way that I put myself into question. My reading of Gadamer (204, 2017, 2018) reminds me to move beyond what a word means to what would become of me if such a meaning were true. My exploration of the word specialist with friends the night before and in and after the performance showed me that, at first, I was stuck on the word's meaning as someone with specific knowledge. By extension, I saw myself stretching my knowledge of my body with and beyond cancer. I took a while to move beyond the concept of knowledge as confined to a subject or topic to what knowledge as love might inspire or evoke. Knowledge, as love, is an expansive and unbound way of being.

My inquiry into what troubled me and others about the word specialist, although challenging, kept the word in play, and therefore I am kept in play. My prejudices are tested, even now in this writing. My performative inquiry into what troubled me and others about the word specialist, arising as a tug on the sleeve, calling me to attention, although challenging, kept the word in play, and therefore I am kept in play. Understanding the meaning of the word changes with the context and the time and

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<sup>30</sup> The epoché is believed to open the space for the possibility of gleaning phenomenological meaning and the reduction aims for phenomenological meaning to show itself.

knowing this frees me to explore words with openness. *Specialist* was not stored somewhere in me, ready to be used. Such a word was not a lifeless object to be prodded. As Wittgenstein (1969) advises, “[i]n such a difficulty always ask yourself: How did we learn the meaning of this word” (p. 36).

Discerning the meaning of this word invites me to draw on the hermeneutic circle to support my emergent understanding. The hermeneutic circle is not like a dog chasing its tail but is context dependent. The purpose of the hermeneutic circle is more than just finding the meaning of the word as it is tied to the rest of the sentence or as defined in the dictionary. One may define a specialist in terms of medical practice and talk about how long a person trains to become, in this case, an oncologist. But the specialist is more than a set of skills. The ways the specialist carries herself into the surgery and outside of the operating room can set a patient at ease or trouble her. A specialist is more than the way she acts with a patient. Her knowledge and the ways she approaches the patient is a dialogic set of skills and histories at play. The meaning of the word specialist happens in the relationship, and the relationship to this word changes through evolving inquiries into the word’s aliveness.

Insight can be unlimited. I gain a sense of calm when I know that I move from smaller to larger meanings to turn around and around in a dance of understanding. I gain a sense of excitement when I know that all this is happening. The hermeneutic circle takes care of me and the words as they arrive, by inviting me into active play. At first, I brought the word into the performance with an uncritical, yet suspicious, apprehensive, ear. I now engage with the word: walking backwards, forwards, zigzagging, or standing, while calling previous understandings and connections to the interpretation<sup>31</sup>.

Through the word’s utterance in the company of others, I am reminded that the meanings are held between us, however slippery, temporal, or obtuse. My openness to others and words gives hermeneutics a chance to play. Freire’s (1997) position on the importance of dialogue and reinterpretation from multiple angles allows me to loosen my grip on theoretical constructs and universal meanings to where we, together—you and

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<sup>31</sup> Lynn Fels (1996, 1998) helps me understand the roots of performance (per/form/ance). It is through form and the simultaneous destruction of form, that new understandings are performed into being.



I—in this moment, in the reading and play of our text making together, perform understandings that can be attached, but not anchored to, our locations.

## Chapter 4.

### Standing at the Gate

*We shall start from the standpoint of everyday life,*

*from the world as it confronts us*

*(Husserl, 1931/2012, p. 3)*

I was first introduced to the paradoxical anecdote or riddle-like nature of Zen Buddhist koans when reading Karen Meyer's (2006) *Living Inquiry, A Gateless Gate and a Beach*. I realize, in the writing and rewriting of this chapter, that my earlier reading is playing out somewhere like a lost but beloved melody. When I experience moments of tension and hesitation, I feel as though I am standing at a gate<sup>32</sup> where I hear humming: a song with words just out of reach. The gate may be invisible to others but, to me, it can be as visible as any wooden or wrought iron gate might be. Gates pop up everywhere. Some are ancient and rusty and unopenable. Other gates unfurl as though from the earth—twiggy and leaf-covered—graceful gates that need gazing upon rather than opening. Others remind this cautious traveller to take careful steps.

As I stand at *the gate*, I hear myself ask: A barrier? A moment of repose? Might I have the strength needed to grasp and press the handle? How do I decipher this moment of shifting trees, the birds poised for flight, the black bear's eyes, that accompany me? What happens to me when I grasp the awareness that there is no gate at all? My perception of these gates has changed over time. Writing and hermeneutic

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<sup>32</sup> My study continues to encourage me notice the words I use. American poet Muriel Rukeyser famously wrote that "the universe is made of stories, not of atoms." Stories, which I envision metaphorically as gates, teach me what might be possible. What is this story I experience as a gate and what am I called to do (or not do) as I stand before it? What possible openings arrive? What encounters? Ahava Shira's work, *Through the gates of loving inquiry: where the heart opens into relationship* may be used for further reading. Her dissertation can be located here:

<https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0069437>

research helps me become sensitive to my relationship to the world and to my history. The gates invite me to open what is in front of me—or to turn away.

Appreciating the gate as a Buddhist koan, a metaphor, or as a place of potential opening, may be explored with the mythical help of the Greek goddess Aletheia. Aletheia, in hermeneutics, means to unconceal, enliven, and remember. “In its unconcealment, enlivening, and remembering, aletheia brings home what may have been lost, forgotten, deadened, or concealed in our ‘simply getting by.’ The work of hermeneutics is the work of aletheia” (Moules, 2015, p. 1). Walking, backward or forward, with a willingness to be engaged with the gates that arise, is a challenge worth venturing.

Sometimes when I walk the path of *aletheia*—of openness—I feel as though I am emerging from an absence—from my body, from the Earth, from children’s voices, from my heart— into *presencing*. When I walk with openness, I am less frightened or hesitant at the perceived gates that I come to. The dance of possibilities born of the old assumptions and the new interpretations coming together has the potential to expand my being. I experience presencing as a moment and movement beyond ordered logic (*reason* in Platonic terms) toward play within the here/gone presence/absence of things. Aletheia: opening, enlivening, reminding me of the lineages and unforgetting, especially that

*cancer*

*opens up*

*more than*

*flesh*

Openings are layered, multivocal, and imbued with the flux of salt air, rushing waves, pebbles, and echoes of grandmother’s breathy laughter. I bring these inheritances with me to this research that has had many beginnings. The wild, windswept beach where I sat with the plaster bust is but one beginning. The incision, a cut into flesh, memories, and imagination, opens opportunities for courage to tell the

stories *and* to let them go. “The skin tells stories” (Maracle, 2002, p. 16); the cells that cling to the bust’s cavity whisper to me and bid me to understand myself and to inquire into what is revealed and concealed in my life of silences and roars and

I come into the peace of wild things

who do not tax their lives with forethought

of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars

waiting with their light. For a time

I rest in the grace of the word, and I am free (Berry, 2018, p. 25)

The academic performances keep the story in play—a condition of understanding and the basis of learning to act wholeheartedly. Because performance is an embodied practice, I am offered an opportunity to free myself from self-imposed controls that keep me from voicing and moving into understanding. “Our minds [can be] our prisons. There are secrets hidden in our flesh. Our cells are being born and dying with the same force that makes galaxies form and deconstruct” (Tagaq, 2018, p. 110). Performance is a *living* possibility. Performance is an intentional approach to the aliveness I yearn to feel since my cancer diagnosis. The more I do performative work the more I am called to consider the embodiment of my thoughts and feelings. Performance is a pedagogical act that creates an invitation to know myself inside and outside, from within and without (Snowber, 2016). These are not distractions from a sense of *here* because in the performance I am nowhere else but *here*, learning to trust my own heart and limbs. How am I living? These words continue to confront me. Touch me. Word such as Cancer. Trauma. Running. Silence. Breath. Grandmothers open questions.

The winter sunshine has gathered in the room where my friend and I sit to talk about our feelings about being at the end of my five-year cycle post-cancer. I share how I miss the academic performances and how I acknowledge the role they played in my learning. I recall how I first wrote them from my grandmother’s perspective because I felt

too unsettled by the impact of cancer to make myself the protagonist of the story. Since then, the stories have flung childhood memories into the air, unsticking them from their hiding places. In those moments of radiation treatment when the machine swayed and emitted an aching long single tone across my body, memories emerged of the wild sea crashing against Ireland's Cliffs of Moher where my grandmother once stood. I welcomed those waves. Their rhythmic wildness calmed the fretfulness and pushed aside memories and anxieties, tender between inhalations. Imagining standing beside my grandmother in her worn, black-laced shoes supported me during treatment or when memories of the click of a latch or when the odour of stale wine penetrated my stillness brought comfort.

Trying to forget or burying these memories does no good and the effort keeps me from finding free spaces. I learned this over the course of a few months after I had made the plaster cast. My process for making the cast was challenging. Cracks formed quickly and the bust threatened to disintegrate. I added layers of plaster trying to make it perfect. The shoulder kept falling off and I became agitated. Frustration led to my hating the bust for *its* lack of cooperation. Like life, my constructed bust would not oblige my expectations no matter how determined I became. I told my friend about that one afternoon I sat on the beach, dejected, and asked,

“How did I make it to this point in my life?”

She replied, “Do you mean, how am I not yet dead?”

My question, stated aloud in dialogue, ushered a startling question that opened the possibility of understanding. Some questions, especially those offered by others, can be astonishing. They are often refinements of the original question, seemingly arising from its roots—the sounds of which were inaudible to me. In heartfelt dialogue and my friend's question, I am emptied of the story. At that moment, spaciousness appears. The poetry of my life is given wings (Leggo, 2016) and I have before me another opportunity to understand that I can entrust myself to this study and attend to its guidance. There, in the directness of her question, I am read back to myself. Her question is one that highlights impermanence—death, *my death*—that I might be hiding from.

Her question offers a moment of stillness that allows an interpretation of myself to arise. The stillness leaves room for my interest in the poster pinned above the

radiation table on one of the large, yellowing, ceiling tiles. The image shows pink cherry blossoms in full, riotous bloom. I lie on the radiation table and breathe in the beauty of the blossoms. I focus on them and my readiness to run is calmed. The petals tremble as the beam enters my skin.

*Song sparrows*

*trill and gather the sun*

*just now*

*returning*

I am learning to become aware of the gifts that come to me. I am learning the value of holding life, and all its impermanence, lightly. I am learning to be composed. The cherry blossom poster seemed to find me more than I found it. The Sakura, a Japanese symbol of impermanence, showed itself again and again in the performances. I felt caught in the gaze of the branches and their petals as much as they were caught in mine. A gentle tension arose from this image that I carried with me into my writing and performances and that inspired my poem and subsequent art song.

One memorable performance I offered was at a conference in Kobe, Japan. Spring was late that year and flocks of us who had hoped to see the Sakura blooming shared our disappointment. Then, a friend whose family lived in Kyoto told me that my wishes had come true, but that I would have to go on a journey. I boarded a local train toward Nishikyo-Ku, full of excitement.

I slow my steps as I arrive at the Shosei-en Garden Kikokutei<sup>33</sup> gates. My friend brings me straight to the Sakura by the fence near the entrance. This is the first Sakura blooming in Kyoto. From my study of hermeneutics, I know the importance of uninterrupted looking. The low fence helps me be still and in that moment as traces of emotions and memories open and ignite interpretations. Openings can be overwhelming. I exert effort to still myself and to follow what is being shown. The Sakura's gnarly

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<sup>33</sup> 涉成園- 枳殻邸 <http://www.higashihonganji.or.jp/english/sp/tour/shosei-en/>

branches are propped up by lengths of wood, and its weightless petals, against the backdrop of ancient buildings, compose me. In that composure I visit a wealth of previous experiences: cancer diagnoses, childhood trauma, friendships, oceans, forest trails. In the light of this moment, their histories are changed. This tree was like a breath that gives rise to the opportunity to be in life afresh, to walk and to practice wholeheartedness, knowing that I am dying beneath the trembling, air-filled petals. Yet I am not yet dead and so the learning continues.

*Yielding, I*

*give way to the river.*

What am I learning? What am I coming to understand about myself and the ways I interpret my being in the world? I move beyond the identities I am given in cancer treatment. I was a patient in terms of my personal markers such as name, birthdate, and hospital identification numbers repeated often before surgery and later, repeatedly, at each daily radiation appointment. This identity was attached to me like the name band on my wrist.

Soon the wristband was removed, a new identity was imposed: that of survivor. A little while later, *thriver* was used. The words never sat well with me. They seemed to others to simply be familiar givens and self-evident truths. There was something about the assumption of a continuity that seemed unsettling amid an expanding understanding of my own finitude and complexity therein.

Learning to see myself as part of life's inter-relationships rather than a linear, chronological expressions of *patient-survivor-thriver* takes time. *Survivor* seemed to mean something unique to the oncologist. I was living well enough for her to predict I would do well with a five-year cycle of medication, so she had reason to feel good about this word. But I was not yet living a full expression of my life, and with the identity of *survivor* I felt far less like a champion than I think she hoped I would feel. Expectations and identities impose boundaries, and in doing so, spaciousness, movement, and openness diminishes. How do I generate newness when my body is pushed into these forms?

I am challenged to understand that “the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities” (Butler, 1988, p. 521). My reflection on, and dialogue with others about, cancer and its related processes helps me attend to the nature of these possibilities co-inspired by machines, texts, forest floors, and friends. Opportunities for understanding through performative encounters spiral among and between the particulars of cancer, all within a larger discussion of life lived wholeheartedly. I seek to reveal these feelings I carry in the following poem, based on Gadamer’s (1960/2004, p. 189) writing on the hermeneutic circle:

understanding  
cancer  
is/ can be  
movement with  
machines and ideas and histories  
a kind of circle  
not stuck  
but constantly expanding,  
open and expansive  
the concept of the whole is relative,  
to my skin and its memories  
and to this earthly



body

in which I am learning I rest.

I seek to disrupt the larger narrative of *cancer patient and survivor* with personal narratives that arose in performances, reflection, and conversation. When I explore my encounters with MRI and radioactive machines in performance or conversation, I am revealed to myself and others. “I myself [am] both observer and observable, and so a possible object of my own humming awareness” (Dillard, 2016, p. xxi). When I test the binaries of healthy/ill, patient/survivor, and past/future, I learn how I am formed and reformed in others’ company. My interpretations of the impositions of binaries have been steadying.

As a teacher of young children and an instructor of ECE educators, I am learning that what I thought was the *right way* to act was limited and limiting. Studying and listening to friends, colleagues, and mentors helps me notice the *materializing of possibilities* in my work and in the ways I teach, learn, and act in the world.

I recognize the observer stance I had taken in my first performance. I had written a full script, from my grandmother’s perspective, around the awareness of life and death that a cancer diagnosis can set in motion.

My friend and I arrange the classroom with care. We hang 40 ten-foot strands of artificial cherry blossoms from the ceiling in the middle of the room. We position chairs back-to-back to represent a waiting room in a medical setting. The plaster bust sits on a table at the front of the room near a hospital blanket and a romance novel like the ones on the carousels in the waiting room of the cancer clinic. We place a large transparent cherry blossom curtain in front of the table.

I sit on a chair in front of the translucent material.

During the 22-minute performance we listen to my three-minute soundscape, modulate our voices, and make eye contact with the audience. During the performance, some participants barely move—they seem tense, their shoulders rise at the sound of the radiation machine. Looking up from my script, I wonder if they were going to bolt out of the room. Other participants seem relaxed and look around at the objects and at my

friend and I as we speak. The performance ends with an art song<sup>34</sup> based on my poem Impermanence (see footnote 18 for the link to the audio track). Silence follows—a long, breath-holding silence.

Then someone breaks the heaviness saying: I am unable to speak to the impact of the work, but I'll write to you later. Her words open the way for others to speak to their fear and feelings of discomfort.

I later realized that I too, held myself stiff against the onslaught of my emotions as I spoke the words and re-lived some of the memories. The fabric cherry blossoms held me in place. Reflection on the comments I received set my understanding of the story in flight, and with each performance the script began to fall away. To learn about what events and experiences are teaching me depends on my ability to set the story free as in this found poem I created from the words of Jane Yolen (1988):

Storying  
is a fluid tradition  
that is as migratory  
as a winter bird,  
feeding  
as it goes from place to place and  
leaving  
something of itself behind.  
over countless miles  
(p. 3).<sup>xvii</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> An *Art Song* is a vocal composition, usually written for one voice, with piano accompaniment in a classical music tradition and based on an independent poem or text. I met with Dr. Rena Sharon of UBC soon after my diagnosis; she was supportive of my exploration into Art Song.

Looking, listening, and creating free spaces happens within. I notice the already-open spaces, even if they are wounds.

With each performance, the script shifted, or parts fell away or were amplified. Some changes to my evolving script were planned, based on my reflection of how I had felt during specific moments of a previous performance.

For instance, there is a line in the script where the radiation technician, through her light, Scottish accent, asked, “would you like a warm blanket?” This question was included to help build audience awareness of the coldness of the radiation room. I didn’t know the gift these words held at the time, until, in one performance, I felt a shiver run along my spine as I spoke the line. In these moments I feel as though I am at a gate, and I know that stillness is needed to understand what might be being offered.

A gift comes to you  
through no action of your own,  
free,  
having moved toward you  
without your beckoning.

It is not a reward;  
you cannot earn it,  
or call it to you, or  
even deserve it.  
And yet it appears.

Your only role is to be open-eyed and present.

Gifts exist in the realm of humility and mystery—

as with random acts of kindness,

we do not know their source (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 23–24).<sup>xviii</sup>

The technician's offering of a warm blanket was an opening into a complex understanding of myself. I was not completely bound by the identifiers of patient or survivor. I was cared for as a human-in-relationship. The technician offered the gift of connection that I had not been attending to because of overwhelming feelings of isolation and alienation in my own skin.

The performances are gifts. With each retelling, understanding of my fears, insecurities, joys, and questions shift. As I put the story into play, I realize I am being formed by the practice that I am forming. When I set the stories free, they move beyond tool or technique. The performances shape me into a gift to myself, and to others, if I stay present to what arises. I show appreciation when I pause and take a moment to appreciate that my body knows what I long for and what I fear. Listening to my felt experience and emotions that arrive within performance, upon reflection, questioning, and writing, helps me recognize the roots of interpretations I am making—the branches of connections, the leaves—are ephemeral gifts. Staying open to discomfort leads to the possibility that I might act with an ever-becoming clarity. Interpretive research, as Jardine (2016) reminds me,

begins

with the evocative, living familiarity that this tale

evokes.

Follow its evocations

its tangled ambiguity

and significance

that are wound up with it.

and

make a claim on me -

this tale opens to  
reveal something to me about my life with others  
in the ever-so commonplace and day-to-day act of becoming a teacher. (p. 2).<sup>xix</sup>

One afternoon in the summer of 2017, during a course with David Abram on the importance of oral traditions, I presented a story on my connection to place. The final class happened to coincide with another surgery that I could not postpone. I informed Dr. Abram that I would be arriving late to class, likely feeling the effects of the sedative. His response was warm, humorous, and inviting. I had a small outline for the performance, but what I had planned did not come forth. When my turn to present arrived, I carried the weighty, tattered, plaster bust to the floor and sat still as though at a gate:

*Courage.*

*(Click.) I open the gate.*

*I speak to the bust:*

*An apology treads the path that tears have compassionately cleared.*

*"I am sorry", I say to the bust.<sup>35</sup>*

I cannot clearly recall the words that arrived that day. The script falls away and the space releases me from my scripted words. New words arise. They are surprising, extraordinary, stunning words of feeling.

In the speaking of new words, I am given an opportunity to forget my scripted self. In that moment of rawness, I voiced sadness, loss, anger, and hope, each threaded in their own ways—more than was visible or audible in the sentences I spoke. I sat on the floor and imaginatively evoked the re/making of the bust and I felt a sense of connection with all that was around me: people, chairs, and the breeze coming through the classroom window. I connected even with my admonishments for objectifying the bust as an *it*—ignoring *its* own lively presence, *its* healing form arriving repeatedly as

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<sup>35</sup> This is part of the performative piece and the words are placed in the centre of the document to differentiate the words from the poems which are near the right hand margin.

openings rather than closures. In that performance I understood the importance of listening to my own experiences. Understanding

is more like learning to leave things be; restoration in the wilderness,

here and

now ...

being still in the presence of things,

letting them speak. (Bugbee, 1975, p. 155).<sup>xx</sup>

The bust offered a different view in this encounter, and as the tattered and flaky form sat silently, I learned that silence is a form of telling. In its material mixture of plaster and cotton, the bust became a way of understanding that my interpretations were shifting and that the free spaces I had been looking for might indeed have been hidden in plain sight.

As I begin to understand the claim the words and events of the performances make upon me, I realize the importance of exploring how I am living my history into my future. My history is determined “from a position within it” (Warnke, 1987, p. 39). I cannot run from history as though it was an object. Rather, I interpret new experiences through a history already growing in me like blood and marrow. The task is, therefore, to discern and possibly accommodate different legitimate new understandings to free myself from constraints that limit my being in the world. Hannah Arendt (1969) reminds me that education “must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into the old world” (p. 193). Old interpretations are not necessarily thrown out—they must be called back, unforgotten, to answer to the new interpretations. The dance between the old and the new is generative and offers a place of possibility in performance and in teaching.

The performances took on an increasingly visceral quality as they grew in number. As I focused less on the props and technique of the performance, I became aware of making acquaintance with my body beyond becoming aware of my flesh and bones and blood. I felt myself maturing in relation to the experience of impermanence as

I embodied my skin. Further, I awakened to the responsibility to invite myself and others into attending to difficulties as well as affirmations as a necessary part of learning to “understand our understandings” (Gadamer).

*Standing in awe of the Pine’s*

*elegant, snow-capped weight*

*I bow,*

*to the wind.*

“How am I not yet dead,” the question my friend and I generated, has begun to be phrased as “how am I living?” Or, as Carl Leggo once asked me, “to what have you given your heart?” (Personal communication, March 2016).

With each performance, with each conversation I have—about children and their forest explorations and ECE students with their unending questions about how to do the *right* things with children—old questions are refined. My performances are shaped by emergent questions and become witness to their reshaping and their continued renewal of understanding. The performances are a weave of interpretations that include layers of traditions and prejudices. They critique tradition and convention. Thus, the other’s otherness may change the interpreter’s horizon or initiate a change in tradition. By learning to experience the performances as “an ongoing integrative process in which what [I] encounter widens [my] horizon but only by overturning an existing perspective” (Gadamer, 2004, p. xiii) I am ready to attend to what is exerting itself and what is receding.

Cancer opened my life, all at once—it put everything into play. Cancer opened a way of learning, to know what must be tested and what I may have forgotten that might help me act with insight. I return now to the beginning for this thesis where I wrote: “cancer threw the cover off the manhole. Imagine the whiff of years of childhood experiences of abuse being released and the feeling of futility that no amount of running or pushing away could lessen. Giving words attention stirs the air, the stench rises and a little voice in my head says to “*put the manhole cover back on. Keep walking*”. Learning

to question the history of words has helped me to put memories into question. For example, I had unquestioningly thought the word *manhole* was about a man who moves through an object or space to repair a sewer system. Hermeneutics and its associated study of words helped me sort out this word “manhole”. The word was first used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to describe a hole in a boiler into which a worker might reach to repair the machine. It had nothing to do with a gender. The root of *man* means *hand*. The word *manhole* was later applied to the access point of a sewer system. This example of learning the history of a word might at first seem inconsequential. However, the close ties between this word and memories that are so painful are somehow loosened and broken open. This word then connects to an exploration of the word *monster* which is derived from the Latin *monstrum* and from the verb *moneo*, meaning “to remind, warn, instruct, or foretell” (claritynow, 2010) When the cover of the word is thrown off, so too is a small amount of attachment to the fear that the memories summon. This is the “hospitality” of *aletheia*. (Moules, 2015, p.4). The web of connections begins to tingle with anticipation.

Understanding myself and my connection to the world is reached through dialogue with others, with my body, and even, to my surprise, with my plaster bust. In my performances and writing, language is “... the air that understanding breathes.” (Moules et al, 2015, p. 39) “Language is the element in which we live, as fish live in water” (Gadamer in Hahn, 1997).

Language is something  
(we) find ourselves in, not something we find in us  
...It is an eco-poetic habitat in which we live,  
contested,  
multivocal,  
obscured and obscuring,  
clarifying,  
articulate,  
foolish.



Language is the soil of the world,  
of our thinking. (Jardine, February 2018, personal communication)<sup>xxi</sup>

Air, water, soil.

Language.

“How am I living” with air, water, and soil? How am I in dialogue with them? How do I witness them? How are they witness to me? I try to express each element in the performances through the languages of my body and of voice. The performances act as an open container for a variety of emotions to show up. But understanding what arises takes time and repeated exploration and openness. “This, then, is a kind of progress—not the progress proper to research but rather a progress that always must be renewed in the effort of our living” (Gadamer 2007, p. 244).

In this study, I am learning the readiness to let go. I am learning to know how memories are related to cancer and how cancer offers a place for the practice of interpretive inquiry; of making sense of being in the world. Cancer, that monster, that was tied to other monsters<sup>36</sup> that took my breath away, came at just the right time. With its full arrival, I learned to release the pressures that bound me to ways of being that limited my being in the world.

The experiences of the performance, friends’ comments, and silence, and the multivocal interpretations helped me realize that my horizon of understanding is not permanently fixed. In each encounter, traditions, prejudices, doubt, playfulness, and imagination are brought forth and the possibility to interpret anew arises. Bernstein (1986) explains, “There can never be...finality in understanding or complete self-transparency of the knower. We always find ourselves in an open dialogical or conversational situation with the very tradition and history that effectively shapes us” (p. 63).

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<sup>36</sup> Monster derives from the Latin *monstrum* and from the verb *moneo*, meaning “to remind, warn, instruct, or foretell” (claritynow, 2010).

My commitment to the work of performance and hermeneutics allows me to become attuned to the possible answers to these questions: “What does one performance close and another open?” What gates appear? What opportunities are there to gather courage? Courage can be fostered by

... “getting over myself” and

by giving myself over to detailing how things are

both a pleasure and slightly nightmarish portent.

how to come to understanding and

intimately experience

what is happening to us.

Pedagogy. (Jardine, 2016, p. 80).<sup>xxii</sup>

*Cancer. Plaster busts. Beaches. Horizons.*

*Gates that I stand before.*

All these books, people, and more-than-human connections are teachers that help me put myself into question so that I might carry myself wholeheartedly into the world. Through the performances, I am learning to stay open to the arrival of the world into my life. I am only beginning to understand what welcoming an arriving world means for my work and for my life. Nancy Moules’ (2015) call to attend to openness is striking as this found poem suggests:

A part of the reason that we live in this world is to

experience the terrible hermeneutic angst of remembering.

There are times we wish to swim the River Lethe and forget,

and there are times we are afraid we already have

and we clamour to reclaim what is lost from memory.

There are things we wish would no longer live

and things we want to keep alive forever.

In hermeneutic understanding,

we know that things must be awakened,

recalled,

remembered,

and suffered.

...There is hospitality to aletheia –

an openness

to what might come to,

and maybe enter,

the door (p. 4)<sup>xxiii</sup>

Moules helps me understand and appreciate the abundance of life. I imagine, through my awareness of aletheia that even pain and suffering can offer something important.

*Bursting*

*from their green cocoons*

*wild roses*

*greet the sun*

## Chapter 5.

### Walking Backward Out into the Wild

Please join me now at the start of my exploration of walking backward in my scholarship, for my life. The context is a five-minute interview I did for Global News (June 9, 2016) almost one year after my cancer diagnosis:

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I wait in the hard seats of the curved studio to be called to the set. I have been primed and primed for the camera with make-up I do not normally wear. Twenty minutes later I am sitting beside the host, who is now off camera. She chats lightly with me about the sunshine and preparing for the Ride to Conquer Cancer, a BC fundraising event. I am told to wait for the signal and then the interview will begin. We are mid-sentence when the camera starts filming and the host introduces me by saying: “This is Kate McCabe everybody”. She goes on to situate me as a cancer survivor and one of thousands of people about to take part in the Ride to Conquer Cancer. I quickly go over the timeline of diagnosis to surgery before being brought back by her request to: “Tell us about that. Don’t skip too much through the details because we want to know your story.” I back up. Slow down. I compose myself.

I know I am being performed and I feel resistance rise in my belly. I am slow in my words, but I give very few of the details I believe she wants to make the story compelling, she wants the details of surgeries and treatment. I tell her there is something beautiful going on for me in this cancer process. The interview shifts from as the host looks up and away: “You said to me, through the course of this year, so much has changed. So much has happened. Not all of it—not all of it—negative.” My response: “There has been some beauty in it...things have opened up...opening up opportunities to know about myself...there are things about listening to myself that I had never thought about...(laughing) riding up a hill you hear your breath, you hear your heart...there’s an immersion that has happened.”

I go on to speak about my art images. I describe the challenges I encountered in making a plaster bust the night before the surgery and how the bust travelled with me for months as I wrote in my journal, stared out to sea, or tramped forest trails. I share how angry I was with the plaster bust and how I tore off one of the shoulders in rage. In time though, the upset turned to appreciation for the beauty of the journey and with it my move to Japanese washi to explore impermanence and transparency.

As part of the interview, the host shared that she read a comment from me where I said that I wanted to erase the stigma around cancer. I gently corrected, saying<sup>37</sup> “There is a silence around cancer...people don’t know what to say...so I am trying to get in touch with my particular experience and learn what is going on that makes it beautiful for me.” Paper seemed somehow to call me to work with it and the more transparent or light the paper the more compelled I felt I wanted to work with it. I recall Thich Nhat Hanh’s (1988) retelling of the story of the interrelatedness of the universe in a piece of paper. Learning to hold the paper with this knowledge helps me learn to hold my life in the same way, with gentleness, and to ask what I might do with what was left of my life. It was as though I could see my life briefly and I realized that with a little water or a few tears, the paper would not be as it is now in my hands. This kind of poignant moment is a reminder of my childhood knowledge, that *this too shall end*. The paper is a reminder of the ebb and flow of life and our ability to walk backward, imaginatively, into a past that is making its retreat. It is a reminder of the courage I had forgotten I had.

The washi connected to my experience with cherry blossoms that I was inspired to pay attention to through my experiences in Treatment Room Number Two, where posters cherry blossoms were pinned to the ceiling. As I lay on the radiation table, I stared up feeling the silence around me at the start of each session. In that silence it was as though the petals whispered, maybe not to me but to one another. I imagined them experiencing sun and clouds and wind and rain. These experiences and materials were part of the interview even if I didn’t share all these understandings in words.

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The concept of walking backward peeked through this interview. Walking backward isn’t about my resistance to being dragged into the identity of a *survivor* but

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<sup>37</sup> This is a paraphrase.

my understanding of walking backward might have some roots there, too. Walking backward starts to show up when I move out of the story of the moments of diagnosis and treatment to a place where I stand back and look at what's happening. I felt compelled to create space for cancer and related experiences: a space where silence and speech<sup>38</sup> might coexist.

*"Hey bear" -*

*"Yeah, you over*

*there"*

*Looking for grubs.*

*I'll leave you*

*be*

*from over*

*here.*

Walking backward out into the wild is an embodied way of knowing. Walking backward is a recognition of a possible answer to the question: "what have [I] been waiting for?" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. viii). Walking backward helps me stay awake. Walking backwards is an embodied act that lends practical support to my teaching—a practice, but not one predicated on honing a series of steps to get it *right*. Instead, walking backward feels like harmonization through a readiness to do what is needed in the moment and being *relieved* of the intentions that often come with predetermined outcomes. Walking backward is about going out into the wild or unknown "with [a]

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<sup>38</sup> I have reflected on the choice of words in the interview. When I used the word *immersion* I wonder if I meant *emersion*. Language is interesting. Emersion is the process or state of emerging from or being out of water after being submerged. I think I was coming up for air from all sorts of pressures, not just cancer. Living wholeheartedly feels like emergence—like when the parts interact in a wider whole.

readiness to be ‘all ears’ (Gadamer, 2007, p. 189). I adopt a listening posture before I decide when and how to walk.

I’ve come to know, through working with preschoolers, that walking is aided by having *eyes in the back of your head*. Walking backward is about enlarging the space, albeit temporary and often fleeting, where I “hold firmly to the standpoint of finiteness” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 86)—to gather what I can of my life, and to feel my everyday humanity even for a short time. The effort to give stories a voice by linking them to the world’s lifelines that have become hidden from view is “something we thought we’d lost to the work of simply getting by” (Wallace, 1987, p. 12), but life doesn’t have to be that way. This is not just the way it *is*.

Harsha Walia (2014) notes that “...walking together toward transformation requires us to challenge a dehumanizing social organization that perpetuates our isolation from each other and normalizes a lack of responsibility to one another and the Earth” (p. 51). Walking backward then is also walking together. Walking backward is a way of releasing the pressures I place on children in curriculum plans and the spaces they learn. My plans become emergent and the shared spaces become open to questions *and* silence.

For Gadamer, there is no innocent act in our attempt to understand our lives in the lifeworld. Interpretation is a matter of *participation* and the important question of how to engage. Learning how to participate hinges on knowing my limitations and my gifts.

If students and subjects accounted for all the complexities of teaching, our standard ways of coping would do - keep up with our fields as best we can and learn enough techniques to stay ahead of the student psyche. But there is another reason for these complexities: we teach who we are. (Palmer 2020, n.p.)

Who I am is never settled; this is an opening and a possible free space.

I have been learning, as Cherie Dimaline (Métis; 2017) writes, that “...running only works if you’re moving toward something, not away. Otherwise, you’ll never get anywhere” (p. 217). Brandi Carlile, from her song “The Eye,” (2014) writes,

“...Can you fight the urge to run for another day

You might make it further if you learn to stay...”

Until the cancer diagnosis, running was my habit. Running daily tasks, between ideas, self-talk—jumping to stay just ahead of a past that I couldn't bury or hide from. Walking asks more of me as Snyder (1990) voices:

There are all sorts of walking -  
from heading out across the desert in a straight line  
to a sinuous weaving through the undergrowth.

Descending rocky ridges and talus slopes is a speciality in itself.  
It is an irregular  
dancing -

The breath and the eyes are always following this uneven rhythm.  
flexing - little jumps- sidesteps - going for the well-seen place  
  
to put a foot on a rock, hit flat, move on -  
zigzagging along and all

deliberate (p. 121).<sup>xxiv</sup>

Walking invites a different relationship with place and movement. It is energetic, different from a regular saunter, and it's not always straight ahead. Walking makes space for other things-in-relation to enter. I have written throughout this text how life events tested my ability to calm my thinking: to tune into fears and wants and be open to whatever was in front of me. Walking backward is not in opposition to this quest.

The gates, the challenges they present, and the risks I have taken to attend to what arises enlarge the scope of my practice with children, ECE students, and my own sometimes-wild thoughts. Walking well as a teacher is not always about walking beside, or behind, or in front—like the linear, flat images on ancient Greek urns. Sometimes



walking backward with children is necessary to enlarge the circle in which the topics we study together live, so they can thrive. Walking backward might be akin to a “slacken[ing] [of] the intentional threads which attach us to the world and bring them to our notice...” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. xiii). In this way, the moment-by-moment practice of *making sense* of the child in each context is slowed, at least momentarily. I am given time to ask how I bring myself to this moment and how walking backward might be a space “to be and become” (Palmer, 1993, p. 70) in the company of others.

When I stand at an emotional, intellectual, or physical gate, I feel the closedness of things. I am moved to find ways I have known that lead to successful approaches to opening the gate and walking through it. My mind puts to work already-known procedures and skills that help me overcome obstacles. Gates<sup>39</sup> can hold the feeling of potential adventures, but the pressure and the question “what to do?” often overwhelms me. Walking backward feels like an event in relation. I draw on past experiences and a slower pace to help me know what this moment calls for. Walking backward is a moment of action based on an openness or receptivity to my being and my uncertainties—to what might come upon me.

I now open a story of my cancer diagnosis, followed by my recuperation and renewal in connection to the land. I release myself into the world having found some free spaces that were always here.

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I have been looking forward to this conference for a while. There were many topics of interest and this morning I look forward to an exploration of Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The story intrigues me. There is something visceral about it that draws my attention. I enter the classroom imagining the smell of the grass and dirt. The grey, rough coolness of the stone presses itself against my hands. I see Sisyphus, moody, in his task even though I understand that I project this upon him. He has, I am told, embraced his fate. The speaker makes some interesting points that make me think

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<sup>39</sup> This study continues to help me notice the words I use. When I see “gates” I feel the link to the word “stories” and how the American poet Muriel Rukeyser famously wrote that “the universe is made of stories, not of atoms.” The word *gates* calls to me attend to how solid and fixed I think things are. While some stories are hammered out in the telling, (even this one), I am reminded that they are ways of making sense of the world. Stories, as gates, teach me what might be possible. What is this story I experience as a gate and what am I called to do as I stand before it?

about my attachment to this story. Why have I continued to associate myself with Sisyphus? The thoughts swirl and are groundless. At the end of the presentation, I turn on my phone to check for messages. I have a call from the doctor about the outcome of my biopsy. I quickly find a small outer sitting area to make the call. “I don’t like to give information like this on the phone”, the doctor says, “but it’s your information and you deserve to have it as soon as possible. You have cancer.” She pauses. I hold my breath. “Come into the office as soon as possible so we can plan.” In that instant I let go of the boulder. The boulder rolls by me. I don’t turn.

Unlike Sisyphus, endlessly toiling, I am relieved of the burden of pushing the boulder up the hill in that short phone conversation. I don’t look as it rolls away. With “you have cancer,” I am released from the burden of the repeated, futile struggle of pushing, again and again. Instead, I let go. Instead, I breathe.

Seeing the frailty of your life through seeing the breath is the meditation on the recollection of death.

Just realizing this fact--

that if the breath goes in but does not go out again,

or goes out but does not come in again,

your life is over--

is enough to change the mind.

It will startle you into being aware (Chah, 2001, p. 44).<sup>xxv</sup>

## 5.1. Recuperating

Recuperating on McKenzie Beach, Tofino, following the surgery, I am acutely aware of my future’ possibilities and limitations. Social pressures, childhood events, and an imposed identity weigh heavily on my heart, inches from where the knot of cancer cells had been. Suppressed feelings and thoughts tingle and scratch at the surface of my skin. I am thankful for the rush of the ocean that drenches their morbid assertions. Amid the tumult of waves and apprehensions, I whisper, “I want a big love.”

This is not an instance of begging. Nor is it a request. My call is a recognition that I am ready.

Love arrives in hesitations. I am given the opportunity to “waver and tremble” (Caputo, 1987, p. 7) in its arms. Cancer was, and remains, an opportunity.

Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts;  
they trail. dark and chaotic  
attachments  
to their unknown backgrounds,  
luring us further.  
One insight leads to another;  
one invention suggests another variation;  
more and more seems to press through the hole,  
and more and more we find ourselves  
drawn out into a chaos  
of possibilities (Hillman, 2013, p. 94).<sup>xxvi</sup>

I started keeping journals the day of the diagnosis. Things seemed to be happening so quickly and I had become aware that I was somehow living outside of myself and had been for a long time. Katherena Vermette (2016) a Metis author of the novel *The Break*, creates a main character who recounts in a voice full of resurgence; “I have never missed my body...My body is only a memory. But sometimes, memories are the most real of all.” (pp. 157–158). Memories and forgotten things have the potential to lay a path of hope leaning against my own history.

My journals contain photos of times and places that followed the diagnosis: lines on the hospital floor, radiation machines, leaves, and cracks on the sidewalk. They contained words uttered by cafeteria servers, technicians, and other specialists.

The journals gave a home to words I was learning to say. Each of these entries struck me as something that, cared for well, might later provide other openings into my feelings and thoughts and experiences yet to be imagined. The collision of past and present and future is loud. I didn't know I would ever attend to these words in this research, yet they have come as another opportunity of the diagnosis. Again, I listen to Hillman's (2013) words, "Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds..." (p. 94).

Through *Life Writing* (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) I am learning that cancer is an emotional and physical wound, which may create an opening for life events to spill out and onto the page. Writing and collecting photos of this time helped that which was roiling to work its way out. Memories of these events are already part of me; having the journals help me be mindful of the experience of cancer and its complicity of connections that sprung to mind and were most often unwanted. Life writing as a form of critical discourse (Leggo, 2018), helps me question my practice, my memories, and the places that are opened in this work whether I like it or not.

The sights, smells, and sounds of the hospital, and the touch of the warm blanket, are threaded with other traces that overwhelm my spirit. The writing and performances counterbalance this lure and pull me back into my skin. "Life writing is about hope and seeking health" (Leggo, 2001, p. 1). That does not mean that the words and photos are clean facts of an experience. Even a photo conceals while it reveals and dismantles memories while offering opportunities for interpretation that help free me from staying stuck in any one moment. Leggo (2001) helps me understand that

life writing is not only

recording and reporting and repeating

the lived story as known,

as written by the subject;

life writing is

recoding and restorying and restoring

the lived story as unknown,

as unwritten by the subject (Leggo, 2001, p. 3)

Writing can speak to the allure to leave something behind, but what I have found is that cancer helped relieve me of this feeling. I do this study to explore the opening that cancer provided and still provides by way of reflecting on it as a gift. I gave myself two years to do the performances. They were my offerings. And my receiving.

These performances are impermanent in comparison to words on a page. The sound of my voice, and all that to which my voice is attached, are given the opportunity to be set free. Setting words free is like imagining the flight patterns of the song sparrow, whose quick bouncy style reminds me of the flow of words that seemed sometimes to swoop and glide. Paying attention to the birds that fill the trees on my morning Spring walks and seeing their lightness of flight has helped me understand that, without air resistance, birds could not fly. I try to remember resistance as a possible opening as I experience the weight of words and memories.

Walking, performing, and writing have woven themselves together. "Once I can get some distance from the doorstep of my own exhaustion, a glimpse is possible" (Jardine, 2017, p. 17). Walking is necessary. I found I had the courage to walk into what was emerging. One foot in front of the other, to go on forwards and backwards.

Going on is not about forcing change. Going on is about my openness to my awareness of the possibility to change, and of the directions some of those changes might take. Walking, as this found poem from Hillman's (2006) work suggests, helps me find free spaces:

Walking calms turmoil.

prisoners circumambulate the yard,

animals exercise back and forth in their cages,

and the anxious pace the floor -- waiting for the baby to be born ...

monks walk around their closed gardens.

Nietzsche said that only thoughts while walking,

*laufenden* thoughts, were of value

- thoughts that run,

not sitting thoughts (p. 253)<sup>xxvii</sup>

Unlike Sisyphus and his acceptance of his task, the unpredictable circumstances that show themselves are a call to know myself better. The force of the boulder against my hands is the force of customs, requirements, and expectations, handed down through laws, and traditions. What might happen if I let go? The boulder was my acquiescence. Its release at the hearing of the diagnosis, and my side-stepping, gave me a chance to see *if* and *how* the boulder might get back up the hill without me falling in line or if it might find its way to the bottom of the sea. The boulder calls into question every norm, law, and tradition that I had accepted unconditionally.

Releasing the boulder upon hearing my cancer diagnosis was not an action of careful thought but a life put into a different kind of motion. Learning, however, to act within this messy, risky life became something that took—continues to take—thoughtful interpretation and heartfelt performance. My life—I—in relation to all that I love, cannot wait. I commit.

“There are times when we have all the information we need and we just have to decide” (Caputo, 2018, p. 211). So, I walk, not always in a straight line or forward. The cool sand gives way under my bare feet. Muscles support and give strength to the movements as I work out the stiffness: the outcome of ceaseless toiling and nightmares that cramp my legs and the *self* that I am opening to. Remembering Hillman’s (2006) description:

Walking can be meditative therapy -

not an idyllic hike by the ocean....

One goes for a walk to get the stuck, depressed state of mind

or its whirling agitations  
into an organic rhythm,  
and this organic rhythm of walking takes on symbolic significance  
as we place one foot in front of the other, left-right, left-right,  
in a balanced pace.

Pace.

Measure.

Taking steps....

As we walk, we are in the world,  
finding ourselves in a particular space and turning that space by walking within it,

into a place,

a dwelling

or territory,

a local habitation

with a name (pp. 252–253).<sup>xxviii</sup>

I'm not walking backwards away from something but out of respect for something. Bears come in all shapes and sizes once you meet the wilding of the world. Some *bear* moments are the ones where I must trust the guides who, through their experiences of bears and cubs, territories, and hunting for food remind me to walk backwards and slowly, gently singing, and apologizing for intrusions.

Walking backward can be about searching for memories, attached to places, people, and ideas of the past. Walking backward can be about slowly navigating the space I find myself in, attending to that space and place by lending *it* room to breathe. In releasing myself to this physical, emotional, and spiritual act of walking, I find free space. I am given room to show up, to find myself. I breathe in and out even though there are no guarantees but, as Marcie Rendon (1984) an Awanewquay and Ojibway author, playwright, poet and community activist and an enrolled member of the White Earth Nation writes,

this woman that i am becoming  
is a combination of the woman that i am  
and was  
this journey backward will help me  
to walk forward... (p. 219)<sup>xxix</sup>

Rendon's poem draws attention to memory's importance in our actions as we work toward attaining goals, whatever we may, in this moment, imagine them to be. I have recalled the words and their focus on witnessing ourselves becoming.

Walking backward *can* help the future-forward movements but walking backward is an event with its own closures and its own openings. Learning to move is helped by birdsong, conversations with friends, scholars, and the swelling of the Sumallo River.

The troubling space that is worked out is not to be overcome. Walking backward is a caring move. I hold the space open in an unhurried way, allowing a greater sense of presence toward others and things of the world that arise, such as children's questions about worms and "kissing trees" and skyscrapers and "really fast racing cars". And "it is only in looking backward *and* forward - and in the imaging of different possibilities than the ones we've inherited - that a viable future is made possible." (Justice, 2018, p. 140).



## Finding Myself

I created a plaster bust as a marker of the changes that were about to take place following surgery. My decision to make it was probably motivated by fear and a longing for things to stay the same, because the familiar is often easier. As I sit with the bust a little way behind me on the beach, I can almost feel the strips of cool, wet, plaster-infused cotton I layered on my skin and that heated and hardened so quickly. I remember feeling a little panicked as I pulled the white impression away at midnight and tossed the plaster form in a corner of my bedroom. Later I would find myself with it, and all its woven memories, on this beach.

Finding myself involves locating my body here, on the sand with the rush of the ocean, its waves loud, its air a salty tang. I feel my body here with the water, and as I become aware of feeling my weight against the shore and the thrum and buzz of my blood, I begin to witness my body as well. Standing on the edge of the waves, I look out onto the horizon—the dense coastal forest at my back—and begin to get to know my skin and all the vibrations of memory that held within it. I begin to consider who I am with these earthly creatures.

The reclining bust is supported by a log-strewn, sandy beach. I imagine that the skin cells that dot the cavity are being taken up by the wind. The sharp scent of fir and ebb and flow of the waves hold my attention and me as I stand in the foam. Jardine's (1998) words enrich my understanding of belonging:

Once I deeply realize that all these things are not here for me, they begin,  
so to speak, to turn away;  
...Suddenly, I am no longer the displaced,  
questioning stranger,  
the condescending intruder to whom attention must be paid  
and who can make demands without attention to where I actually am,  
without attention to what is *already at work without me*.

Suddenly,

I belong here. I live here. The Earth is my home.

I can finally experience my being as resonant, indebted and interwoven with these things (p. 99).<sup>xxx</sup>

The foamy waves head toward the shore with gusto; they sputter out into millions of tiny bubbles before being pulled back out into the sea's dark body. Forward, back, forwardback. I am opened by and to these earthly rhythms rather than being wrung out or tossed aside. These waves will later give me strength to see myself through radiation treatment: my arms restrained above my head in the device meant to keep me still, allowing radioactive beams to target the tattoo markers punches into my skin several weeks before the start of treatment. The sea's waves and their rhythms give me strength to bear witness to the white-hot flashes of childhood that spark and fizzle out into blackness. Now, the vibrant, crashing rhythms of the earth draw attention to the fullness of me that has been found here where the old is made new with the courage that this moment offers, *here and now*.

The massive strength of the ocean tugged at my feet, belly, throat, and closed eyes. I had not truly attended to my strong relationship to the ocean until cancer. Slightly disoriented, I looked out at nothing and everything all at once. Time seemed submerged here, and yet instead of feeling panicked I felt I had room to breathe. Yet this sense of release—of freedom—was attached to a sense of the constraints and restraints that held me to this spot, invisibly carried. As I backed away from the ocean, looking farther and farther to the horizon, a deep sense of responsibility sounded, and the extending expanse of the horizon created space to imagine possibilities. I am released.

Over the course of the next few months, images began to show up out of this intimate point, prompted by places, sounds, colours, and textures, that made my heart and breath quicken. Each scene flashed before me, calling me to unforget difficult moments, while the world sustains me. The stored images of the past seem to be working their way out of my body while I practice working my way back in—into life, my body, and presence. “The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two [horizons] but in consciously bringing it out”

(Gadamer, 2004, p. 304). I am learning to hear what the other, and my past experiences, have to say. Giving the other and my memories space, *that* is what is needed.

Walking gives wildness and sorrow and pain and suffering its due. Walking gives thoughts a territory where they can *take steps*. Life, like “[I]ove[,] doesn’t just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new.” (Le Guin, 1971, n.p.). Listening to the beings around me—the wind, the trees, the ocean, the machines, the friends—makes life *livable*.

It's like making a path through the forest.

At first it's rough going, with a lot of obstructions,  
returning to it again and again, we clear the way.

After a while the ground becomes firm and smooth from being walked on  
repeatedly.

Then we have a good path for walking in the forest (Chah, 2005b, p. 83)<sup>xxxi</sup>

Cherie Dimaline (2017) a Georgian Bay Metis Nation writer says, “You [can’t] let wounds take your focus out here.” (p. 223) Boulders, fallen trees, and roots present possibilities. Returning again and again to familiar places and ideas and interpretations helps me develop needed focus. Taking part in my learning this way opens me up to the ever-expanding wildness of things. I begin to imagine and hear stories told as others find their way in these communal spaces. I imagine and hear the silence and the breath. I imagine and see new paths as I hold the tension between the old and the new. Here is the true locus of learning, of patience and perseverance and where, if I linger long enough, secrets will be shared.

## **Out Into**

Using two prepositions in the title—walking backward *out into* the wild—brings focus to the tension of the space between coming and going, entering, and leaving, sound and silence, myself and other, and my now and before selves. While these words highlight binaries they hold spaces of possibility. The words *out* and *into* are about looking for home. A quest. I bring the child within me along. Taking her hand is

necessary. Carrying her on my back is sometimes needed. There are threatening times full of monsters holed up in closets and sneaking around hallways. There are times of great thirst and branches that scratch my eyes as I look to the sky for direction. But there is humility in the walking and crawling on my hands and knees and as she clings to me as we sing and say our way through the wild. I know this is my path. It is a wide one. I know I will find my way back across the gaps, appreciating them now and learning from them rather than trying to eliminate them.

The “gap is not something that is alien to the process of communication, but rather something that belongs to it, something that makes communication possible” (Biesta, 2004, p. 18). Further, “...it is the social situation that emerges from the interaction between the teacher and the student that actually ‘does’ the education. ...We might even say that it is the gap that educates” (Biesta, 2004, p. 18). Walking backward is an action that makes space between us as I release my hold on my agenda and my ideas and worries and pains and walk into the wild unfamiliar of another’s ideas or of the topic of our attention. There is something in the topic’s landscape that we might explore together. Creating space allows the topic to freely express itself. Walking backward is not a withdrawal.

Allow me to return to Zoe and I as we gather at a decomposing cedar log full of pill bugs and their larvae. The spaces between me and children take on new interpretations. At first, I watched them from a distance; my presence into their inquiry was hardly felt by me, let alone by the children. I was a bystander, inattentive and unattuned to their play.

To some onlookers, the group of children running around and playing *family*, *monster*, or *builder* as they drag logs from one part of the forest to another, are not just burning off energy, as some adults are fond of saying. I too have been taken up in these sweeping events and neglected to ask what was getting in the way of my experiencing “a sense of something happening, something arriving, something starting to open up, something stirring, becoming enlivened, lovely” (Jardine et al, 2006, p. 40)

When Zoe caught my eye, I began to attend to a sense of the possibility of being together in something. A gift? Yes. Yet, I am dismayed by my intrusion of questions that

did not allow her own to develop or be spoken. They were meant as questions to inspire Zoe's imagination and to see the animals as part of the living wildness of the forest.

Even though I was trying to stay open to meanings in this moment, I can see now that I was unable to risk the vulnerability and the preconceived notions of myself as a teacher. I was unpracticed at emptying myself of the ideas I might have for this child, this pill bug, and this forest. I see now that I was—to some degree—inside my own monologue. I went headlong into something I believed I already knew. Mary Oliver (2017) might show me how to focus my attention. She comes to her work in the spirit of thanks. Her words are a gentle nudge to *pay attention*.

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch  
a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway  
into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak. (p. 131)

In the past I would have been quite unsettled by my lack of attention to Zoe and what she might need from me; my feeling of being less than what she might have needed would have lasted a long time. In the past, I might have played the event repeatedly from multiple perspectives. I would have been overly sensitive to the next event with her. In short, I would have been so full of myself that there was little room for anything or anyone else.

When space is created, when elbow room is given, all that is there appears calmer.

This simple change—of seeing something from a new perspective, carrying so many other experiences of a cancer diagnosis, standing on the edge of the ocean, and walking the forest floor along with me—brings me to a place of openness where teaching who I am becoming is enlivened. “If this is the location of education, if this is where education literally ‘takes place’, then a theory of education should be a theory about the *interaction* between the teacher and the student” (Biesta, 2004, p. 13). The space makes education possible. Walking backward enlarges that territory and makes the event and my missteps less about me and more about *us* and how everything is teaching *and learning*.

This approach opposes my many years of experience developing goal-oriented content units through *Backward Design* (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998) which was the methods required by the elementary school I taught at. There are three important steps: (1) To identify desired results, (2) to determine acceptable evidence, and (3) to plan learning experiences and instruction toward the goal. However, we cannot separate the frame from a teaching philosophy which calls the method and ourselves into question. The idea behind the method is to be totally prepared for teachable moments but being prepared for those moments is about being ready to hear and run with only those comments that appear to move us all to the pre-planned endpoint. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) make no apologies for believing (and insisting) that teachers should know where *they* want to end up. Assessment, effectiveness, purpose, logic, learning as output, performance, progress, and transfer—are all words that are part of this framework. Every task and every level of instruction is perfectly fit for the goal’s attainment. Silos. The possibility of “*what if?*” questions arising and being followed by students and teachers alike are often prematurely halted, and therefore limit the movements of learning.

In many classrooms the framework includes a variety of pathways to get to the goals to be respectful of the diverse needs of students, but sadly teachers feel they do not have the time or the resources to allow students (or themselves) to question because that might take the class “off track.” All this momentum around goal setting and planning keeps us from testing our assumptions. We assume that we can know the child and what they need but we cannot know what is best for them now or in the future. The call that comes from the child or the student is unmistakable. How do we interpret this call and what is our response?

Wiggins and MacTighe use the word *intentionality*, and I might use that word as well in terms of my learning to walk backward with children and topics—yet I feel that we are speaking from different perspectives. I want the word to be a starting point where I might tarry with what seems oppositional to my thinking. I wished I had learned to play with the Backward Design ideas in such a way that expanded my own understanding of teaching and learning and where I could give ideas room to be shift. I want to allow the other’s claim to come into my world of practices so that I and my teaching might be enlarged. I want to quiet the voice inside me that interprets the Backward Design as something that seeks to enliven the gap between student and topic. I am learning to empty myself of myself at times such as these.

My “what if?” question—the openness to the “surprising events that we initiate in our everyday lives” (Meyer & Fels, 2013 p. 305) will be “worth the time” if I continue to trust in my bodily and emotional awareness of walking backward. When I can trust in this way of being I know the hermeneutic journey in my teaching is happening, here and now. When I say that education is about the interplay between educator and learner (Bingham et al, 2004), and that education includes the interplay between learner and topic and teacher and topic, and teacher and learner, then the learning needs to create a pedagogical space of possibility to flourish. Any strict goal-setting method seems to stand in the way of those relationships.

What if my earlier call—I want a big love—was a goal for me, and my students had goals along a similar vein? Love and life are already arriving in hesitations. Love is defined in a myriad of ways, from watching the roll of a pill bug, to the tall stretch of a cedar, to the beauty of the way a child first writes their name. I open to the world in this thinking and the world breathes.

It is already here.

Yielding—to give way and to generate—offers another way of seeing these moments of possibility that have already arrived. Yielding allows me to look for clues and to make connections to what I think I know know that might be fitting for the student in their inquiry. Walking backward and yielding offers a path for improvisational movement. Walking backward and yielding give me time to understand that I do not need to always seek agreement to be learning with my students, and I do not always need to set the

goals. In this time of yielding, I realize that the wellbeing of my students and me, in the biggest sense of the word, is of utmost importance, and this always seems better when there is a bigger space for us to move.

The tension of what to teach and how to teach presents itself. As I explore the various threads of this study, I understand that walking backward and hermeneutics are close relatives because they simultaneously make and care for space that might lead a way to understanding. Walking backward and hermeneutics know there are no guarantees, but take care to look for an opening anyway.

I am reminded of Sisyphus and my metaphorical boulder. When I let go of the boulder, I began to let go of what was fixed and closed, narrow and final. I released into what life is. Walking backward is the release of these imposed burdens, personal and professional. *Walking backward, out, and wild*, are all words that release me from the burdens of reaching some elusive summit. A diagnosis of cancer reminds me that death is coming but there is something surging that seems to have originated from the wound. I am opening into a place of lightness that is born of the wounds.

Having a different interpretation of the fears and the struggles that came with an everyday life burdened by childhood traumas happened at the moment of hearing a cancer diagnosis. The thought of death became a form of relief. In that relief there was openness, as though the space between inbreath and outbreath grew and there, in that space, it was easier to see that my life was far more complex than the struggle expressed as pushing a rock up the hill. In that moment of a death diagnosis, I, albeit momentarily, had an appreciation for the callouses left by the rock's roughness. This moment showed me the powerful capacity of my body to hold and withstand the secrets. There was a sense that my life did not need to be in a certain way; not one way or the other.

Cancer provided a free space that was made possible in the examination and letting go of my life as I had known it. This was a moment in time that was likely the most profound presence I had ever felt. There was an awareness of past, present, and future and with a simple sentence, "you have cancer" and with it all the weightiness of the thoughts, emotions and memories seemed small and shrivelled. As I write this memory, I realize that the bodily experience continues to ground me is a kind of awareness that



must be interpreted again and again in my ordinary life if I am to live it well. The work of this can be done because no one person or thought and its associated emotions can have power over me again.

I opened this writing with the quote that the “task of our human life in general is to find free spaces and learn to move therein” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 59). Free spaces don’t need to be open fields or quiet Japanese tearooms. Free spaces can come in the form of a wild tangle of roots because free spaces are gifts. Free spaces happen when I immerse myself in the study of a word or watching a child pick up a pill bug. Free spaces happen when I listen attentively and with an open heart. Free spaces happen when things become inwardly clear. Clarity is the ability to see things and events with children and with ECE students where *my seeing* means experiencing the beauty in front of me. Inward clarity is a sensual, bodily, emotional, and conscious exploration and connection to the places I find myself in. This sense of clarity can come as simply and as uncomplicated as watching two children setting up a log to make into a teeter totter. Each adjustment of the log left and right accounts for the weight differences of the children playing with it. They seem to know that neither of them wants to get stuck at the top for long. It’s in the watching and presence to the possibilities, the collaboration, the adjustments, and the tensions that allow me to gain greater openness to seeing and hearing with clarity.

Nurturing inward clarity means having the readiness to notice a wonderful rattlesnake that had coiled itself in the hollow of a felled tree as I walked a trail in West Virginia. Knowing that I am delighted by the sight of this gorgeous snake, that I share this Earth, makes me know it and I are jointly exploring free spaces. Being struck by the snake’s slumber is a gift of space. These kinds of free spaces are full of potential. These free spaces sustain me. I respect free spaces because they make the world proportional, and in that way, I can endure the knowledge that experiences, and their attachments are impermanent.

Learning how to notice and attend to the possibility of a free space is important to the ability to know when to back up, when to stay silent, and when to point to something that might deepen the study that the child or ECE student has already taken up. I am not the content of the inquiry. Teaching is about my ability to recognize the shared space between the student, the topic of the inquiry, and me. Walking backward is a gentle and

generous pedagogical act that sees the child as already in the territory of their inquiry, and so the steps I take need to respect this emergence. Walking backward is important improvisational work and often first felt in my body. The good thing is that even here—in this sometimes cramped and taught space of wondering when and how to act, or of trying to write what it is I mean—free spaces exist.

*I keep forgetting.*

*Forget-me-knots.*

Sometimes I forget I am connected to a network of relationships. Forgetting is a personal approach to a life punctuated with trauma and cancer diagnoses. I understand that unforgetting is an important step toward "... the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many levelled unity of our being" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 14). Too often forgetting is like hiding or concealing that which is too painful to report. The difficult experiences can be put away, but they are never really gone.

What I have *forgotten* had a role in making me who I am. My restless, forgotten, and exhausting memories need to be sought out and picked up again, turned over, enlivened, so that I might understand the ways I move and love in the world. "What is inexhaustible is not some transcendental and abstract notion of Life with capital letters, but rather the more patient task of co-constructing one's life, alongside so many others" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 175).

*Echoes of the past*

*comfortably*

*riding March Wind's tails*

Carl Leggo (2001) calls me to live generously in language and living generously helps me take steps into the wild of words, phrases and, mostly, their spaces. Writing and unforgetting, like love, comes "in hesitations" (Caputo, 1987, p. 7) and I have tried to thread these connections to reflect the way unforgetting sometimes happens. I am trying to unforget where I live, where food comes from, and the time of day by the way the sun travels across the sky, the ways I am complicit in closing opportunities to see the world

as it shows itself. The little poems in the right-hand margins are the measures I take to remind myself of important groundings where hope lies.

Please continue to walk with me on my trails with all their jigs and jags. I am trying to take you slowly through important events that, from time to time, are unforgotten and save me from my sometimes harried and distracted life. Memories and emergent insights are not written in terms of their importance. Events and things of life require unforgetting. Soon I will take you to Moose Mountain now, where the forget-me-nots, in all their powder-blue-yellow-centeredness, are biding their time, waiting to unfurl and sprawl across the woodland.

The vanilla-spice scent of the Snow Crocus is attached to a host of other things beyond the forests and gardens in early Spring. They are attached to friendships, forest fires, and footfall. The steadfast strength of the maple tree's branches on 8th Avenue, in seasonal splendor, needs unforgetting. The fire of its fall leaves and its hundreds of *whirlybirds* helped my imagination take flight—it is a place that provided me rest. The radiation technician's brogue—or bróg—when unforgotten, carries its etymological roots meaning *a traditional, sturdy shoe made for walking*. Memories of walking to the beach with my Irish grandmother and my own journey through cancer and childhood events are unforgotten in the technician's voice. Unforgetting her brogue helps me remember the technician's daily practice of greeting the sunrise atop a hill on her Bowen Island community. I walk with her despite never having done this myself. Unforgetting gives attention to those moments, and I am made new.

*Unforgetting:*

*threads of something*

*from before*

*make something else*

*of today*

*openings.*

Tracey Lindberg (2015) a Cree-Métis author and a member of the As'in'i'wa'chi Ni'yaw Nation Rocky Mountain Cree shows her character Bernice, in the novel *Birdie* reflecting on her life. “Her strength is surely being tested, she thinks. Her ache for home, home being something she does not yet understand, and a place she has never been, brushes over her like a skirt hem on the floor” (p. 39).

*The wild pace  
of my body  
longs for*

*a place called  
home.*

*I am  
called home  
to my body.*

My experiences are crowded by my wish to collect scraps of this and that. Documents are worried over to make children’s learning *visible*: their stacked blocks, the worms they hold, the books they love, all stored on my phone or put into scrapbooks; more scraps, torn out of moments in time and forgotten almost as quickly as they are taken. What becomes noteworthy? The camera intrudes, conceals. I have difficulty remembering without my shoeboxes full of memories. This overactivity does not always reflect learning and living. I try to make these traces so that they might nourish me and help me deeply commit to an experience of an event. I am trying to love this world enough to imagine children, students, rivers, cedars, and myself and all my lively interdependencies waking up to the bear’s hot breath of Spring as it lumbers from its sleep space.

It seems silence has something to do with this concern about waking. The saying, *let sleeping (bears) lie* might be a clue. You see, right there in the writing of the

*bear's hot breath*, a clue writes itself. The words come from the experience of silence as a form of protection. But who or what did the silences protect? Who is this bear anyway? I wrestle with the urge to answer the questions in a single, immediate way. My reluctance might be that I know I do not yet have the grammars for this kind of speaking and writing. My small poems are sometimes crying loudly while other times whispering truths just waiting to be spoken with a breath-energy I think I might have. In all of this I risk knowing my response-poems might be misunderstood. Silence created important barriers at the time it was needed, these barriers kept me safe enough so that I could keep going. They protected me from a world that was crashing in on me. They protected me from what I thought, as a child, was death. When the cancer diagnosis showed up it was full of attachments. Cancer made me wake up and see that the barriers, the silences, were no longer needed. Silence did not just offer me refuge. Silence, without me really knowing, laid claim to my body. Coming to terms with that may take what is left of my life but I know, the one way to work through it is walk back into love. That is the action I want to take that will help loosen the layers of silence and free the pain. That action shows up in learning to see and listen to myself and that by example I see and listen to others even better than I thought I was doing before. Feeling the interdependencies, that spoke loudly to me through this research, helps me take courageous steps.

*Had I known I was only hibernating*

*I would have rested into the silence*

*A life of ordinary moments. That is enough.*

*Unforgetting:*

*A bringing to.*

*A new opening that  
the first opening began.*

Understanding doesn't mean having competence over my life. Understanding is being able to allow something to reveal itself. The past threads of this moment put my future at risk while *it* puts the previous understandings at risk. Unforgetting helps me explore new possibilities for understanding. The unity of temporality makes the question of my being in the world possible (Heidegger, 1962).

*When skin wakes*

*it crackles to life*

"The life-world is communal therefore a 'community of memory' must be brought to life" (Riser, 2019, p. 55). Vermette's (2016) character Stella, in *The Break*, is full of memories and restlessness. She allows memories to flow in and says the past is "[n]ot even hers. Just stories that really belong to other people but were somehow passed to her for safekeeping, for her to know forever...All those big and small half-stories that make up a life" (p. 84). Can we let these stories, these images, lay their *claim* (Gadamer, 1989) on us?

*Remember when*

*we gingerly made our way*

*through the thicket*

*of our backyard blackberry bush?*

*answering our ears*

*risking scratched knees and cheeks*

*until the centre opened*

*to the mewling of kittens*

*freshly licked*

*by their mother's tongue*

*we come into*

*being,*

*here.*

*Unforgetting:*

*Is a whispered*

*a-hah!*

Bingham & Sidorkin (2004) ask me to attend to how I occasionally drag my feet and act with reluctance to risk going into the *thicket*:

A fog of forgetfulness is looming over education.

Forgotten in the fog is that education is about

human beings.

And as schools are places where human beings get together,

we have forgotten

that education is primarily about human beings

who are in relation with one another...

It's not a matter of waiting for the fog to dissipate.

Instead, it is an active pursuit while the fog still lingers. (p. 5).<sup>xxxii</sup>

The risk seems too large and risk is hard sometimes to see in its proper proportions. Learning to take a step may be as simple as following the wiggle of some of the smallest creatures:

*The wiggle of pill bug larvae -*

*nose-kiss the summer air.*

*Unforgotten*

*traces.*

Learning to live with risk and fog and memories is a courageous act of calling on the things of the past to be present to this changing self and to see what needs to be challenged and what needs to be let go.

*Unforgetting the ghosts*

*just on the edge of sleep.*

*Releasing*

*tight fists against the shadows.*

Often, unsettled by the past, I do not exert enough energy for reacquaintance. For instance, unforgetting the tumultuous time of human conflict events like the 1954 US Supreme Court judgement *Brown v Board of Education*<sup>40</sup> must not remain forgotten because the relationships, thoughts, feelings, and actions are still relevant today. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission noted that there were unmarked graves, and these graves were talked about by survivors in Canada and the USA and yet there was shock when the graves were uncovered. "Remembering can be painful, even frightening. But it can also swell your heart and open your mind" (Morrison, 2004, n.p.). I unforget these events and the traditions that led to them because even though these

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<sup>40</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education* was a landmark decision of the US Supreme Court whereby the Court ruled that US state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools are unconstitutional, even if the segregated schools are otherwise equal in quality.



events did not happen directly or immediately to me, I am part of them. “The path was not entered, the gate was not opened, the road was not taken only by those who are brave enough to walk it” (Morrison 2004, n.p.). The novels I have read help me learn to honour the children who never returned home from residential programs. The Survivors and their families and communities are in my thoughts when I create time for the ECE students and I to learn about the intergenerational impacts of political and religious systems and to think about how we might begin, in our personal lives and in our teaching, respond to the TRCs 94 Calls to Action (<https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>). In order to understand my obligations to the people that walked such difficult journeys before me I pay attention to Richard Van Camp (2019) a Tlicho Dene from Fort Smith Northwest Territories, who wrote, “the worry from my point of view, was that his was a forgettable life. Because, who knew you? Who did you ever love? Who did you ever - who did you ever give yourself to?...I always wondered about that” (p. 13). Van Camp’s questions bring me to my own. How did my silences falsely make me feel as though my historical events did not happen? How did my silences keep me from understanding that many others around me might be feeling the same hesitations or fears of speaking out? Walking into the troubles is in some ways, a simple act of making myself visible, even to myself.

*Unforgetting:*

*Seeing, listening, feeling*

*not reliving*

*or reliving*

Forgetfulness, in many cases, is the wilful choice to not look at something that perpetuates pain and suffering. Daniel Heath Justice (2018) writes that Indigenous literatures

...don't hide the traumas or the shadows; they don't make everything neat and tidy...They remind us [Indigenous Peoples] that we're the inheritors of heavy, painful legacies, but also of hope and possibility, of a responsibility to make the world better for those yet to come." (p. 210).

Listening to these stories written by Indigenous authors and learning to face the privilege that is the landscape of my developing self, is central to changing my understanding not only of who I am, but of what I must do. These stories help me face my own moments of trauma. I read and retell these stories and my own and we are woven together, feeling our connections. This interpretive research "... begins and remains with the evocative living familiarity that this [or that] tale evokes" (Jardine, 2016, p. 2). To leave these moments of suffering unattended, to leave them concealed, like "tendrils of fog on a road" (Linberg, 2015, p. 49), limits the fullness of insight into our own lives which in turn helps us understand the lives of others. On a personal level, what seems full to the brim, dark and foreboding, may in fact be a free space waiting to happen. Our attention needs to be drawn to our forgetfulness—that we used to think we never needed to remember these things in the first place. In unforgetting there is power that can be claimed and used to move things along and to know "we are in this together." (Braidotti, 2019)

*Unforget choices*

*and words*

*and their flimsy veils*

Learning how to study the words that I use, and the words used to describe and identify me is a struggle but once I explored meanings and histories and started to examine their attachments I began to test the separations, implications, and expectations that these words lay down. "I want you to remember, after the dance comes the love song and sometimes after that comes the babies. I want you to seriously

consider whom you dance with and really consider the consequences of that old love song.” (Maracle, 2002, p. 197). Maracle makes me realize the importance of careful steps and the connections I want to allow to remain.

*The cedar and fir trees  
create a dance of light  
and shade  
just right for hemlock.*

The forest I walk with children daily is full of Coastal Douglas-Firs. They tower to the sky with Western Red-cedar and Western Hemlock. The understory is filled with salal, Oregon grape, sword fern, mosses, and salmonberry. The forest is connected to beach sands, and marine deposits from glaciations. Streams and creeks are being revived and cared for so that salmon and trout may find their ancient routes. Ponds offer havens for the frogs that sound when we stand very still. Walking on (and off) these trails has helped me feel the communication (Wohlleben, 2016) that is going on between trees and the rest of the forest. To become what it is today, this forest has had to depend on a complicated web of relationships. The *tree-time* nature of this forest helps me learn that our interpretations are not simple stand-alone beings in the same way we used to think trees stood alone. Our interpretations are filled with the breath of our ancestors and there is a growing sense of commitment and obligation in me to learning and unforgetting how to listen.

Once an interpretation gets expressed  
it becomes the shared property  
of a community of speakers. ...  
Possibilities are handed down, shared and safeguarded.  
We come to inhabit,  
a definite heritage and tradition (Leichter, 2011, p. 74)<sup>xxxiii</sup>

I thought I had forgotten how to speak my truths but important things like this are not forgotten. They are often deeply buried, and it takes huge effort to uncover events so that what is important might show itself. When I read *The Break* (Vermette, 2016) and

*Power* (Hogan, 1998) for instance, I understand the narrow paths I have walked which have, in turn, made me live a somewhat narrow life. The words the characters of these and other novels speak, come with generosity in their vulnerability. The characters bring an aliveness that does not defy pain but rises beside it. Speaking out is often hesitant but each character is finding something to attune to or walk toward even if walking means going back into challenging places that may bring more suffering. Zegwan thinks quietly to herself, “she’s too shy to speak their language with him. He’ll know she’s forgetting it, losing what she has always known. Her tongue doesn’t turn the words over like it used to. They come out rough and bitten” (Vermette, 2016, p. 211).

*Find out what you love*

*and gaze upon it*

*lightly*

*Unforgetting:*

*it too has a life*

*to live*

Unforgetting is an act of kindness to oneself and to the webs of relations that have always existed. Unforgetting is a way of giving events a second look before deciding if they are a help or a hindrance to life today. It is an act of courage and responsibility to pay attention to the things that have happened. Many things did not happen out of automaticity, like breathing, but have taken shape with intension. Studying personal events is often difficult but very much worth the effort because while they are often grief and anger-provoking, these events are threaded with sometimes the simplest of joys, like sitting literally or figuratively in a maple tree.

Life is more impermanent than a water bubble

Battered by the winds of many perils.

Thus, that you can inhale after exhaling,

Or Awaken from sleep - these things are fantastic (Tsong-ka-pa, 2000)<sup>41</sup>

The story I am about to tell took place a few years ago in July. I was visiting Moose Mountain, so named because it resembles a resting moose on the horizon. It is located about 20 kilometers west of Bragg Creek, Alberta, Canada. There is a set of hiking trails, once an old fire road to the summit. After walking a short way along the path, Renata, David, Amy, and I took a left and made our way along gently worn grasses and between trees.<sup>42</sup>



**Moose Mountain**

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<sup>41</sup> Tsong-ka-pa, 2000, p. 156, as quoted in Jardine, 2016, p. 279.

<sup>42</sup> This image was created by Renata Aebi and has been gifted to me.

Snyder (1990), it seems has had similar experiences of the importance of these kinds of walks:

Sauntering off the trail is the practice of the wild.

That is also

where - paradoxically -

we do our best work.

But we need paths and trails and we will always be maintaining them.

You first must be on the path,

before you can turn and

walk into the wild (p. 165).<sup>xxxiv</sup>.

Soon we are in an opening of grassy rock sloped downward and dotted with small yellow wildflowers. Our little group of four pick up stones or nubs of tree branches that call our attention. Running our fingers along lichen and feeling the warmth of the sun on our faces relaxes us into the afternoon. We find ourselves sitting near the edge of the grassy opening, talking quietly about meadows, our stumbling interpretations, and our deepening friendships. We breathe in the expanse of dips and peaks of mountains and search for Calgary off in the distance. When our hunger gets the better of us, we start back toward the trailhead walking slowly up the slope. My friends are ahead of me, and I am startled awake. There, before me, is a slowly winding path of blue flowers<sup>43</sup>. I am awestruck.

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<sup>43</sup> This image was created by Renata Aebi and gifted to me.



### Blue Flowers

I had missed seeing the flower on the way down, although I don't know how this could have happened. They are an expansive carpet. Is this my imagination playing tricks on me? Magic? Why are my friends not leaping to announce them? I begin to feel I have conjured them, *contra-judicare*—against my judgement. I am slightly relieved when the others note their presence. Can magic be real too as (Meyer, 2006) points out?

Magic has no occasion for explanation;

It can never be grasped

in our thoughts or memories...

experiencing the magic means nothing separates

the / - and the observed (p. 9)<sup>xxxv</sup>

My feelings arise and drop quickly. Delight. Desire. Disappointment at my realization that I had missed them upon entering the hillside. I wanted to stay with the flowers whose names I did not know at the time. But my friends walk on and upon reaching the top of the hill I turn around for one last view of the landscape and...the blue flowers are gone! Not one flower remains. They have withdrawn from me. Anguished, I can't believe my eyes. The desire to follow them—to become lost in them—stills me and my heart trembles. I want to catch up and find out what they are trying to tell me. Too late.

One might ask, *how can the flowers withdraw?* I *feel* their withdrawal in my heart and lungs. How can I slow the propensity to only say what is (scientifically) *real*? Can the poetry of their withdrawal go beyond words? “The increasing literalism at work...reflects somehow a shaping of the imagination away from an ability to think analogically, metaphorically, poetically” (Smith 1999, p. 111). James Hillman (1975) goes even further: “Literalism is the enemy. Literalism is sickness.” (p. 3). So, I ask again, how can the flowers withdraw? They are displaying life’s poetry. The flowers teach me. They teach about life and death and the vulnerabilities in between.

What is the unanticipated insight here? What is the new arrival? What is demanding that I wake up? What do I already know about this terrain that I might find balance? My living-ness is clarified at this fine-toothed moment and understanding what is silently at work—I am connected to everything, even with things that appear invisible, and even to the things that scare me. With thoughtful care to this moment and these words and these flowers, I know that the shadows help to keep the flowers and their radiance in proper proportion. So do other earthly ways of sky and trees and wind. I am coming to see the flowers and shadows not as two parts of the same landscape but the landscape itself. This *is* network (Haskell, 2017) and I need to learn that trees and other plants, animals, fungi, bacteria, and human actions are deeply connected. When I learn to inhabit that understanding I am in the better place to learn how to see through the haze.

The flowers and their withdrawal are telling me that I am struck by aspirations. The hard-at-work running away from concepts such as binaries—there/gone, life/death, forward/backward—makes the landscape invisible. The place and its relations and my own being are ignored in service of the binaries. I am drawn out of sleep by the flowers, and I am learning that fighting things such as binaries is just part of the old fret and worry.



Like a cancer diagnosis I had to be stopped still to see beauty and openings.  
Gasp. Struggle. Let go.

Things speak;

they show the shape they are in. They announce themselves, bear witness to their presence: "Look, here we are." They regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what we intend with them,

and how we dispose of them (Hillman 2006b, p. 33)<sup>xxxvi</sup>

My concern to find out the flowers' *truth* blinded me from knowing that I am living in a *field of want* for truth about cancer and its methods for removal, about why I had the childhood I had, and about why I made decisions that I did as an adult. I am not yet settled knowing that the Earth and my body hold mysteries. In my first year after seeing the flowers I was unsteady. I was bent on trying to lock something down about them, to prove not only that they were there but that they might have disappeared. I was living with a desire for positive, forward movement, wanting a harvest of knowledge that can be taken, tested, and confirmed. And yet, what difference will this kind of knowledge make to me and to the world? Mary Oliver (2009) asks a good question:

What, in the earth world,  
is there not to be amazed by  
and to be steadied by  
and to cherish?

Oh, my dear heart,  
my own dear heart,  
full of hesitations,  
questions, choice of directions  
look at the grass (pp. 71–72).

*Stars -*

*I make wishes*

*even in the daylight.*

In my response to Mary Oliver, I take time to remember how I used to stand outside my house, in the middle of the night, the roughness of the sidewalk making dents in the soles of my feet. No one could see me or hear my silent call out to the stars, Starlight, Starbright – First star I see tonight -I wish I may, I wish I might - Have the wish I wish tonight. But I never could come up with one wish I knew would sum it all up. Even as my young 8-year-old self, spoke those words which continued until about the age of 12, I remember feeling hopeful as though the stars might one day hear me and help me find the words to my wondering about what my life was all about. The stars were like blades of grass. Each star its own bright being and dependent on all the other stars in the sky to be its sky-ness. Each blade of grass is thriving because of all the others and because of the cycles of day and night and I know from grass and stars that I am not alone and how they are teaching me. The angle of the sun, the shadows, the wind, and the season were just some of Earth's bounty that played with the tiny petals of flowers that day. I have since learned their name: Forget-me-nots.

I went back a year later, but this time in the month of May. The flowers were nowhere to be found. I still do not understand the grace of that moment. My sadness arises as regret. I was not satisfied with the fleeting encounter—the knowing that the encounter was enough. As Anna Lee Walters (1984) a Pawnee/Otoe-Missouria writer writes in her story of the conversations grandmother Lena had with her granddaughter:

“They’s lotsa things in the world side jest what we see.”

The child was immediately curious.

She moved closer to her grandmother.

Lena straightened the blanket saying,

“We not the only ones what lives.

Some others maybe think they’s the only ones what live.

And too, things ain’t always that they look like.

We walk round and round -

moving through life.

Life so big.  
It's mysterious  
and it all around us,  
ever where.

Lots times though, us peoples can't see whats round us.

It gonna be there though,  
sure enough (p. 145).<sup>xxxvii</sup>

*Unforgetting:*

*Forget-me-knots.*

When I unforget something, I treat it properly. Events, people, memories, are not gone and in some other world of forgotten things. They are not imaginary or chimerical, or fanciful or conjured. Nor are things, beings, and events of the past really of two worlds: past and present. The moment of open space might have been missed that day on the mountain, but the flowers and their connections have not been missed altogether. The moment arises again as a message of possibility. The flowers and their relationship with sun and wind and shadow evoke unforgetting, which, in turn, evokes a *letting be*, *letting go*, and lingering. The event and my memories are evidence of my waking up to the generous spilling of the world and to my coming to know that the silences I kept did not mean that things were no longer there. Turning around to look at the flowers is like figuratively walking back over my memories. They aren't always easy to see but knowing they are there puts me at some ease. I feel my body settle.

Memories, unforgotten and brought into this moment of writing, like love, arrive in hesitations. They weave a tangle of threads that, in this case, need no unwinding. Just like knowing the Sumallo River does not *need* me to know its *bloop...bloop* song at the start of winter as ice begins to form on the surface. The river does not need me to know its roar as Spring arrives and bears awake. The fish that swim the currents do not need

me to see them, but I think they *might* appreciate my growing ability to take time to witness the cycles we are entangled within. When I witness the eagle's catch in the river or take time to explore the growing ice that moves the currents in different directions or when I stand beside the buds of the birch trees and look beyond toward the mountain, we call Lion King, because of its shape, I honour the relationships, including those of my friends that day on Moose Mountain and the little blue flowers. Unforgetting experiences like these and enlivening them in the retelling, help me know that I am

*embedded and  
in/formed  
by this field,  
by this river,  
of experiences.*

*I am  
this body  
this soul-spirit  
seen and  
seeing.*

What can be learned from these flowers and my experience of them? One interpretation might be that the flowers offered themselves without expectation. I am learning to offer my teaching in this manner. I experience freedom as the space between

the giving and receiving of gifts. When I witness the flowers, through my unforgetting, in open-heartedness, I am freed from wanting to be valued and acknowledged. I am given over to the importance of wandering not to find myself at some desired end but to be myself, with others, in the walking of the paths where I might explore how to live well. That is my understanding of home. Not a place to walk to but a being that is found in the walking. It's in the rhythms of the steps and the vibrations that travel from foot to head. It is not away from the house that I lived in nor the home of my grandmother in the cul-de-sac in Dublin. Home is a commitment in my body that feels what it means to be alive.

Repeating these lines cited from Hillman (2006b) is an important step in learning to live well: "The word for perception or sensation in Greek, was aesthesis, which means at root, a breathing in or taking in of the world, the gasp, 'aha', the 'uh' of the breath in wonder, shock, amazement, and aesthetic response" (p. 36). My sense of overwhelm—of holding my breath too tightly all these years, especially at a cancer diagnosis—is given a chance to release at the sight of these flowers and their seeming withdrawal. I breathe out. Let go.

*Unforgetting:*

*threads of something*

*today*

*make something else*

*of yesterday*

*Opening*

*Opening*

## Chapter 6.

### Walking Whispers



**Wild Patience**

A wild patience has taken me this far  
as if I had to bring to shore  
a boat with a spasmodic motor.  
The length of daylight this far north, in this  
sixtieth year of my life  
is critical.  
As if I had always known  
I steer the boat in,  
simply.  
The motor dying on the pebbles.

Anger and tenderness: the spider's genius  
to spin and weave in the same action  
from her own body, anywhere –  
even from a broken web  
and these two hands have caught the baby leaping from between trembling legs.

These two hands -  
also salve (Rich, 1981, p. 8)<sup>44</sup>

The words I had written early in this work are salve:

*Making a plaster cast of my breasts was my first experience of following the lead of my body, the body I was on the edge of becoming acquainted with. I didn't know it would lead me into understanding the courage I had to walk out of my fear and into the openings, as challenging as they seemed.*

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<sup>44</sup> Found poem created from *Integrity*, by Adrienne Rich.

My words about walking out my fear and following my body's lead are woven with Gadamer's belief that "[w]e can entrust ourselves to what we are investigating to guide us safely in the quest" (1989, p. 370), *and* his charge to search for, and live in, free spaces. My commitment to face not only the joys but the burdens that come with this study show that I am learning how I might live well with others, how I might love this land, and how I might express what my heart knows. My learning shows itself in the questions I ask and the journeys I take to find some ways of responding to them while often imagining the possibility of miracles:

What if there are miracles beneath the soles  
of your forgotten path...(Snowber, 2021, p. 12)<sup>45</sup>

Things open along the way, and the more I open to them, the more courage, and stamina I develop. Hillman (1998), in asking what the soul wants, notes that taking time to be with words, images and memories through writing and a myriad of other ways of sharing lived experiences is not just about self-involvement and creativity, but a curative act. Stories—my own and others—free me from my slumber and day-to-day fretting.

Walking out into the wild requires, at least to some extent, readiness to imagine the wild and open invitations to come in. Lindberg (2015) notices, "Look for the richness and joy, know that pain exists, take responsibility for that which you create.

Prepare  
for the possibility  
that you don't know  
all the possibilities

grace  
goodness  
come  
just as fast  
as any other  
circumstance (p. 266).

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<sup>45</sup> Celeste Snowber's full poem can be found in the Appendix



This hermeneutic venture has been an eight-year adventure of loosening words, feelings, insights, and personal losses. Words continue to whisper in my ear, and I feel the vibrations of the earth now acutely. Words that are not yet written—may never be—are present too in this writing. Words and phrases written and performed as I lay down my dissertation in writing hold more than they show. Words continue to conceal and reveal. Sometimes my words are loud and to the point; other times, my words only hint at something known or felt. I am not wholly in charge of when words I fear show up and I am only now learning how to welcome them when they do.

Dōgen Zenji, a Japanese Buddhist born in 1200, says, “To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is an illusion. But myriad things coming forth and experiencing themselves is awakening” (quoted in Snyder, 1990, p. 83). The concept of *wild*—found in my title and seeded by a mischievous wind throughout this work—resides in moments of awakening. I am awakening to unstable, unspecified events and experiences. I am returning to an embodied living, one that is unforgotten, where I am learning to be present and meeting the moment rather than expecting myself to be one thing to another, think one way of another. I am awakening to the wild moments when questions arise without censor. Awakening is a moment when I risk going through the trouble of lingering in knots of not-knowing, knowing that the result may not be productive or beautiful, simple unfinished and open to be revisited anew. An acceptance and welcoming of wild moments are not a matter of romanticism (of childhood or any other time). Welcoming wildness is a coming to know that small openings happen and that “*what if?*” is a good approach and one that I am learning to feel settled within because I am learning to walk with a disposition of *togetherness*.

My intention has been to present details without overwhelming you. There is wisdom in the wild places where form and structure create liminal spaces for learning. My words, my little poems, the spaces on the page, are one way I choose to speak to some of what I have seen, witnessed, experienced and felt. I take this writing seriously. Writing is becoming a practice of coming into relationship. I repeat Tracey Lindberg’s (2015) words:

it’s not enough to talk love,  
you have to live love.

As I write and do performance work, I come to know myself and the world better. I am learning to invite the landscape of learning to show its particulars. I am reminded of Hannah Arendt's (1958) work regarding the relationships and consequences surrounding researching lived experience: "The disclosure of the 'who' through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt." (p. 163).

Experiences of joy, pain, confusion, awkwardness, fear, and satisfaction find spaces within my dissertation. The unfinished character of understanding is something I feel is exhausting and exhilarating. And

...shared exhaustion actually unfolds upon a deeper wisdom about what it is exactly that one knows when one is facing momentous changes in unfamiliar territories. One knows that Life lives on regardless of human pretensions and expectations" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 182).

Therein lies the joy of the practice.

*Whirlwinds. Rough trails.*

*Rest.*

I was caught in the grip of a cancer diagnosis. I have been silenced by traumatic childhood experiences. I stopped still beside forget-me-nots, cross-examining my ability to sense the world. These events are significant. They are my surroundings—"with no surroundings there can be no path and with no path one cannot be free" (Snyder, 1990, p. 65). My fear of significant life events and my desire to separate myself from them hindered their release. I was lost in fear and hesitation. Fretful. "If you are frightened, wondering if there is a demon in a strange cave at night, your fear is not dispelled until you light a lamp and carefully investigate whether it is there" (Tsong-kha-pa, 2002, p. 334, quoted in Jardine, 2016, p. 206). I am learning to let whispers work as guides. A whisper is a little like the in-between—not silence, not everyday speech. I am willing and ready to study these whispers. I am practicing giving demons room while making sure I keep my eye on them like Wilson (quoted in hooks, 1994), who writes,

only by coming to terms  
with my own past,  
my own background,  
and seeing that in the context of the world at large,  
have I begun to find my true voice...  
and  
that part of the work to be done is making a place,  
with others, where my and our voices,  
can stand clear  
as part of a larger song (p. 177).<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Love helps, because, “the context isn’t only about stories of wounding and damage; it’s firmly entangled with the beautiful, tenacious stories of connection, invention, and renewal - in other words, love” (Justice, 2018, p. 105).

Pausing helps too, especially when I sense that things are going too fast. The act of standing on the beach after surgery was a way of being in the world that forever changed me. I may not have understood, at that moment, that I was walking with so many ancestors and their traditions, or that I was immersed in an interwoven life stream. My experience went beyond a momentary aesthetic experience of the ocean or of letting go of boulders and then returning to the endless running and ducking from my life. Pausing offers an opportunity for learning and relearning, again and again, that I must face the past trauma as well as my own inconsistencies and failings. I let cancer touch me. It opened me physically and figuratively to what my life had become to that point. In the power of that moment, cancer allowed me to release into my healing.

The words I have shared to this point speak of the unearthing of silences. It is enough to know there were traumatic events without knowing more about them. I provide no procedure that can be followed to heal another’s wounding. I am learning how to *walk with language* held within common grammars, and most importantly for me, through the spaces and pauses within the poetic curves of words and phrases.

Learning to appreciate words—the old, new, and unfamiliar—awakens me to that which is showing itself. Learning *aletheia* offered a new perspective on what *opening to my life* calls me to do so. Playing with the word *unforgetting* helped me shape new understandings of how to walk with the past in a new way.

Playing with words helps me understand that a compassionate stance can redefine the shadows. I belong to the words that come to this work, as shown in my circular exploration of the word *specialist* that arose in a performance, its significance widened when I got to a place where I could let the word and all embodied within it go even as the word released me. I still don't know the full significance of words that arrived.

And that's ok, I think. I don't think we were ever supposed to know everything. No one ever said we were supposed to know why things happen the way they do. They only said we have to take it as it comes, right? (Vermette, 2018, p. 243)

Hermeneutics allows the language I encounter to be brought out into the wild of all sorts of relationships, and out of closed containers. Hermeneutics leads me backwards to forgotten meanings and this work enlivens unseen connections, making them visible to me. Hermeneutics helps me take care with words and stories so that they might bring something *to* this time and its contexts.

I have learned what it means to embrace sensuality: its unfolding path and that which springs up alongside. The pull of the world's sensual qualities: trails; flowers; the ocean's tug and its millions of tiny, impermanent air bubbles; Zoe's gentle touch as a tiny pill bug is handed over; the breathy exhalation by an ECE student after reading a story to a child; and the wild and rocky trails I have taken, are surprising, bewildering, and stunning gifts that cancer gave me through its call to openness. My awareness of this world and *its* time creates an expansive view. I have had a chance to linger with this work. I am learning to draw in and to let go of experiences and of anything *fixed*. I am learning to navigate the rocky pathways through the practice of walking them.

The English language has limited the meaning of the word *experience*. The German word *erlebnis* emphasizes the distinctive qualities of the moment, and not what the moment means. I have tried to express the distinctive qualities of walking backward and unforgetting while at the same time exploring Gadamer's *erfahrung*, which suggests

the unfurling, cumulative character of an experience. *Walking backward* and *unforgetting* involve movement. I am moved by them. I move with them. I carry those movements to the next event. I am concerned with seeing how they play out in my life and how they call me to speak to the past and bring a newness to the future.

This research attests to oppositions and challenges norms and traditions often insisted upon. Because traditions are dynamic and stable, they do have quite a bit of staying power, but that does not mean they are unchangeable. I am learning to resist personal and professional silos. The development of an ability to speak with, and back to, traditions is important for teaching. As I learn to listen differently to the unforgotten and conventional voices, I might respond better to those who say teaching “is what it is.” Learning to listen well unhinges reductive language from my questions and with Gadamer (2004) I

question what lies behind what is said.

It is an answer to a question.

go back *behind* what is said,

ask questions *beyond* what is said.

Understand

by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that,

includes other possible answers.

Meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it (p. 363).<sup>xxxix</sup>

Karen Barad writes that “the past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook, or an acknowledgement; we never leave it, and *it never leaves us behind*.” (italics mine; 2007, p. xi). I dwell with the past’s language, imitating it, learning from it, letting it go and taking it up all over again. When I understand and express traditions in ways that respect them, while not giving them full authority over my life, they find new footing that helps me as I make the path in my walking.

I walk backward from my own pains and self-doubt. I back up from my own daily distractions. I tread back over the ground often too close for comfort. I move back from the pressures of norms that would rather see me conform than be myself. Things are given greater scope, and I am freed a bit from my own weighty presence, which is a place made of “memory and promise” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 176).

In walking backward, I do not abandon places I encounter nor the past. Paul Seesequasis, nîpisiîhkopâwiyiniw (Willow Cree) (2014) writer notes that for

thousands of years, the Cree, and other First Nations, have walked, paddled, or, in the west, ridden vast distances. That act of motion was, in essence, the balance of tradition and necessity in a way of existence that was sustainable and life-affirming (p. 209).

I am learning to walk in all directions while finding my balance along the way. Gadamer (1986) insists:

if we do not

realize that it is essential first of all to

*understand* the other person

if we are ever going to see

something like the solidarity of humanity as a whole

may be possible,

especially in relation to our living together and surviving together –

if we do not,

we will never be able to accomplish the essential tasks of humanity (pp. 7–8).<sup>xi</sup>

We are always already in relation (Haraway, 2016). Learning to recognize and feel comfortable with the unfamiliar is part of the walking. Walking backward is a condition for ethical relations with children and ECE students. Walking backward gives me and others time and space to look at the alternatives that are possible in the relationship. When I make a move, I am asking a child or an ECE student to alter their

orientation and themselves by extension. By stepping back, I provide the possibility that the other will see their own position of agency and may possibly act differently.

Through my study I have found I am able to *be there* for others and for myself, even at scary, uncomfortable, and confusing times. I demonstrate what it means to walk in the fields with some degree of pleasure, seeing beauty and trying not to be overwhelmed by my own awe or bewilderment or tiredness in the venturing. My senses are learning to be attuned through this work. As I walk about the preschool classroom, I notice whispers of events that are profound opportunities for my attention. Attention to the way a child stacks a set of blocks or an adult's gaze upon a child as she creates a form from clay. Attention to the way a child draws a garden: rows of pink-headed multi-petalled flowers that her dad taught her to draw, there, on the page with the yellow circle of the sun, blazing. I am warmed by these moments of attention where the revealing and concealing flows of life are given space. In that space my understanding of my own finality is viewed generously. Life becomes a dynamic event. I know that I will never understand myself entirely, just as I will never know how to see a teaching moment to its conclusion. But as I unforget moments, new insights may arise and I may come to see myself, teaching, and the world in new ways. No series of single interpretations will ever be enough and that is something I am coming to understand, and which makes ending this writing bearable.

The forget-me-nots on Moose Mountain taught me the importance of quiet talk—that dialogue need not be planned and focused to create space for friendship to blossom and for things to show themselves. The conversations did not need conclusions to be meaningful. Looking and listening together allowed for possibilities to take shape, especially the understanding that I am learning to be-together-in-and-of-this-world with friends and colleagues, children and scholars, trees, and wind. Community is what friendship leaves behind.

The flowers taught me to find the names of things and know that one name is not all the names nor are names all there is to a piece of creation. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) records with the word *puhpowee* as “the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight...The makers of this word understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything” (p. 49). Thus, I know the forget-me-nots are blessed with uncountable kin. Forces of energy are knotted with so many unseen

connections. “The fundamental nature of life may be not atomistic but relational...Life is not just networked it *is* network.” (Haskell, 2017, p. viii),

The forget-me-nots are someone else’s scorpion grasses, the Ancient Greek’s mouse’s ear, or the myosotis alpestris as the official flower of Alaska and Sweden. Even these names tell only a little of what is there. The more than 500 species names recorded and related to Moose Mountain’s forget-me-nots are just the beginnings of the stories told in their company. Now, imagine the millions of seeds that spread easily by attaching to clothing and then are deposited elsewhere. Where might the seeds have landed as we walked out onto the trailhead? “[h]uman words and actions have no special meaning; they acquire meaning only in a context of specific relations” (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 7). The fecundity of this moment is beyond joyful. Names and words matter as do the stories that hold them together.

This carrying of seeds reminds me that my actions matter. “Understanding always projects the unity of a shared truth” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 183), therefore my actions will show my understanding that this is just one of the journeys of many possible journeys I have taken, and I am hopeful that we will find some answers in each other’s company. The good company of scholars, friends, trees, rivers and all my lively kin help in this exploration. Possibilities unfurl themselves like fireweed. The perennials quickly spread over ecological destroyed land. Fireweed brings colour to otherwise grim landscapes. The flower is food and medicine. Its downy seeds float and voice, in whispers, that life is full of abundance and renewal amid the suffering.

*Forget-me-nots and fireweed*

*whisper*

*their dancesong.*

Terese Mailhot (2018) of Seabird Island First Nation, writes that “[t]rying to forget damaged me the most” (p. 82). “This is where my lesson was learned; pain is to be expected, courage is to be welcomed” (Tagaq, 2018, p. 122). Life happens during struggles, failures, and successes. “The pain was a process to understanding” (Mailhot, 2018, p. 38) and with that my heart has expanded. I have gained clarity about what I need from myself to walk well with others. I have gathered understanding that I am



among many interdependent actors and part of the inextricably interwoven web of others on the Earth. I have created spaces to listen. Walking backward does not mean turning my back on myself or my students. Hope, risk, renewal, mortality, uncertainty, are all part of the endeavour to be fully engaged and to embody is what it means to live well together. "To live well is to live rooted in the earth, energized by the heart, discerning with the heart" (Leggo, 2001, n.p.). Taking that little step back helps me see that I am *becoming*.

Stepping back is about having another go at what might be. Living well is unanswerable. Life can't be filled, as a cancer diagnosis can attest to. My living is finite. Sometimes it's as simple as that. What this writing has given me is that I am called to think and rethink my actions and called to walk the path without knowing the end. This writing then is a pathway to reconcile with pain. Writing is a way to walk out the fears and silences and to let the questions arise and the answers to come albeit often with a stumbling voice. I am writing out of the pain of traumas and out of the pain of being alone; too alone to come to my self with open arms. I am writing into a life as a lesbian with a right to heal rather than carry burdens to my death which, at a diagnosis or cancer, seemed much sooner than I thought.

Hermeneutics makes space for abundance in that tight space. Hermeneutics takes my lived experience seriously. It is a heart-felt way of doing research. Hermeneutics has given me footing between pressures and events in the everyday world of the ECE setting. Hermeneutics works to highlight the importance of working with ambiguities and distractions. Hermeneutic practice does not seek to isolate my private life from my professional activities and seeing myself in this way helps me walk in a steadier way. What have I been waiting for?

*I want a big love.*

*It is already here.*

*It arrives in hesitations.*

Hermeneutics helps quiet the roars of historical traumas and fears. It encourages looking and listening and time for walking with friends and standing still. Hermeneutics helps me pay attention to the spaces children create in their silence as well as their

laughter. Spaces of trust begin to show themselves. I begin to trust myself. Trusting myself is important to learning to love the world (Arendt, 1958/1998). Understanding is not about sentiment or affect. Understanding is about a commitment to care for the world and myself. This love is about making peace with myself: of pausing and learning to understand what I am doing. Walking gently on the earth, backing up from time to time, and unforgetting all help me gain perspective. These practices help me know there is no once-and-for-all sense of the world. These practices help me reconcile with the past and as I do this, I can walk with joy, develop friendships, and understand my being on the Earth.

It is time to celebrate my capacity to release myself from regret and to understand that listening well to Earth's beings is an important way to walk in the world. I know I am open when I leave my opinions at the side and truly give space to other voices. Interpretation, understanding, and action are intertwined. I know that I belong to each moment—*this* moment—and the interpretations I have are because I am of this place and time, not outside it. The whole of my historical being is brought out and into this moment. I understand that you may understand me better than I understand myself. What you bring goes beyond me in many ways. This means that you lighten my load. The pleasure is the joy from knowing that interpretations are coming along.

To live well is to know I am attached to this Earth for a short time. A heart filled with love energizes the moments. A heart filled with memory and emotion energizes the moments. A heart that unforgets the trees that held me and the flowers that make me stop in my track makes sense. Living well means knowing that I can walk backward sometimes, and in doing so—in doing what is counter to the general flow of things—is the work of finding free spaces and then showing up no matter what wildness presents.

There is another way of interpreting what has gone on here. Maybe “being tired leaves open the possibility of rest and recovery” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 175). I sense that I have *recovered* those parts of myself that were hidden, pressed down upon, and forgotten. Here, now, is a new word, *recovery*, has spotted me. “We now see that to know something is to have a living relationship with it” (Palmer, 1993, p. xv). This word, *recovery*, might just take me to places that I might not have visited or that I might see anew in a familiar landscape. I am a bit giddy with this gust of wind. I am energized by words and their attachments. This study has prepared me to be taken up by words and

ideas. Past landscapes have helped shape me through their whispered guidance. More questions arise. What does this word help me clarify? What connections are made visible?

I need rest to recover from the “perpetual forgetting” (Risser, 2012, p. 9). I am reminded of the word specialist that kept tugging at me. I tripped over words and abandoned some others that were trying to gain my attention. The world of words and their unforgotten linkages have expanded my ability to have compassion for myself and for those who experienced my performances. I have gained compassion for the Earth. Recovery is therefore a way-making journey.

As I return to my opening questions about how I might live well, love the earth, and know my heart, I listen to the earth and my own stories and know that answers are not just ahead of me but come from vibrations long-since issued. I have left myself open as I attend to my lived experiences. I have hesitated over my actions, my feelings, and my senses, and reclaimed them through careful consideration. I let them go along the journey or held onto them lightly so that they may lead me to understanding other lived experiences, my own and shared by others. I have asked questions about life experiences that I brought out in performance and onto the page. In speaking these ways, I have asked what I am trying to induce, remember, suggest, and interrupt, and what good has it been to do these things for myself, for readers, listeners, or even for the flowers that I saw on Moose Mountain. This practice is my answer to my opening questions. Inquiry, and understanding continues. David Jardine (2012) shares his practice,

but here is the good news,  
*(whispered)* and a bit of a hermeneutic secret.  
All that hard, scholarly, detailed, difficult work,  
all that effort of practice, and reading and re-reading,  
of struggling to understand,  
to open up free spaces,  
real possibilities of shaping our lives,  
where understanding might grow and compassion

might last,  
of underlining and hunting for sources,  
of page numbers and names and seeking out bibliographic  
trace-lines,  
and thus slowly composing oneself while composing an interpretive work--  
all this ends up cultivating and deepening  
joyousness.  
Only now, we experience that joy and abandon as it really is,  
in the full knowledge of the flesh and its passing (p. 3).

Cancer required a cut in my flesh to create a readiness to heal. There were no guarantees. I had to learn to collaborate with a wide range of specialists and learn to trust them and my body. As I awakened to the hum of my own resilience born out of a childhood torn by traumatic events, I learned to follow that hum that was a song. It was hard work, and I was often cold and tired, but the path was there

*open and expansive*

*open and expansive*

*while cherry blossoms fall from ceiling tiles*

*on a blanket*

*no longer warm.*

I'll tell you one last story that happened just today to illustrate that I know I am being composed by this research and am open to the real possibilities shaping me.

Four children and I walk out into Pacific Spirit Forest. Wetness from the morning rain welcomes our muddy buddies and our knee-high rain boots. Our backpacks—filled with snacks, Band-Aids, and a few extra odds and ends—are set. We never know what we will need on these walks. We venture about 20 minutes and then turn off from the directions we had taken the day before. Walking a little ahead with one child I turn my

head to hear the call, “Kate, come quick. We found something.” Walking back slowly I find them transfixed by a 20-centimetre worm in all its fleshy, wet glory. About two-thirds of the worm is white and the rest is black. We don’t quite know how to name what it is. “Is it a snake?” they ask, crouching around it. “I think it’s a worm”, I say, just as transfixed. No photos taken, no picking it up. Just looking and being at peace with just looking. Within a few minutes one of the children says, “heh, let’s get to the castle”. So away we run to the decaying cedar (castle). After playing in the forest for some time we retrace our steps along the trail. I point out the worm to the child who is ambling along with me. She doesn’t stop so we keep walking. A few minutes later, we hear, “Heh, Kate, where’s our worm?” The child and I head back to see the worm again.

There, in that moment, is a retrieval. We walk back to the possibility of a deeper relationship of the worm while I walk backward to a retrieval of what it means to be on walks with children. We move slow and meandering, back and forth. The children look intently at the worm, remarking how it had grown. I remark, “worms and water, they seem to go together.” One child answers, “I thought they lived underground”. This child’s response opens a potential inquiry, a place of tension just before a tear. As we run back to the classroom, they shout, “we found a worm, we found a worm.” I think, *I found more than a worm in this experience.*

I see this story as an illustration of the potential of potential and the importance of curbing my own anticipation. I am learning to make space for these moments to expand. I am learning to hear the poetry. There is beauty in the rhythms of worms. I did not force the children to look at it as we walked back along the trail even though I mentioned the worm to the child beside me. In the story above I did not anticipate the way the children might like to go in terms of their study of worms. I had formerly believed that teaching was about anticipating a child’s interest and need; a kind of knowing ahead of the child’s flow of knowing. Curriculum guides often influenced this anticipation. But in this case, while I delighted in their interest in worms, I was ready for other things to arise.

I am learning to be all ears, eyes, and heart with children. I watched and wondered with the children. I felt a sense of letting things be. The children called my re-attention; they called me to *turn* and have another look. I play with the idea that the worm might have called all of us. The space that is created in walking with children—walking, turning, forward and backward, literally, and figuratively—contains potential

openings. When the children and I choose one opening we are given a new path to follow, full of potential. The stillness, too, is filled with potential. The path the children and I take may lead to something completely different than we thought. We walk slowly letting the landscape speak is the way to travel as we follow the path of worms and water together.

## Slán go fóill



I was gifted this photo that I call *Free Spaces* as a gift from Catalina Baeza Hidalgo, a colleague in the ECE training program. She took the photo in March 2021, one year after I had taken the tree-root image at the front of this thesis. Catalina and I had been having conversations about the role of story in our lives and those of children, and how the children seem to be so drawn to the nests we see in the forest. Some of the nests along Spanish banks are large because eagles often return to them year after year: remaking, reforming, going along with the changes that have taken place since they used the nest last.

This photo of the young eagle learning to soar speaks to Arendt's (1958) concept of natality. *Natality*, among other things, means the "capacity to begin" (p. 247), which means to initiate something new. This is not only about me being in a place to move on to other writing and other understanding but to celebrate and bear witness to those children and ECEs who are bringing their perspectives, threaded with the old, to the Earth. The image of the tree poised on the edge of the ocean; the blueness of the sky; the new, brown, airborne wings of the eagle; Catalina and her camera; and me and my appreciation for all these words; are all interrelated. That is the gift of understanding.

Slán is the Irish word for *safe*. I noticed this word on road signs as I travelled through towns and villages. Slán is not a demand but a wish. When written as *Slán go fóill* the phrase means *see you later* or *goodbye for now*, rather than a final goodbye. I return to the start of this work and my grandmother's introduction and remind myself how hermeneutics and its study of words and relationships plays in my life. I do not need to be standing on the shore to see her. I meet her in the trickle of the stream finding its way to the sea, in worms' wriggles, and in the sound of footfalls as I walk the trails with children. I meet her in the Belleek teacup filled with milky tea, in the words and phrases she might use and that are no longer with us as often.

*Betwixt and between* is one of these phrases that reflects this study. In Ireland, a *long time ago*, betwixt and between places were found in the world of trees and rivers and stones. It is a place where ocean waves meet a sandy shore or the edge of a cliff where the mist reaches to tingle your cheeks. It is believed that if you were to stand in one of these places you might glimpse the *Otherworld*: a world full of possibility. These spaces are not only of other worlds but are of this one. The lived experiences I share attest to that. My grandmother resides in all these spaces and places. Understanding, on



a deeply rooted level, that she has been here all along helping me gather and steady myself has given me a sense of repose and a readiness to go out in the wild of things knowing I am not alone. As Wendell Berry (1990/2010) says,

True solitude is found in the wild places,

where one is without human obligation.

One's inner voices become audible.

One feels the attraction of one intimate sources.

In consequence, one responds more clearly to other lives.

The more coherent one becomes with oneself as a creature,

the more fully one enters into the communion of all creatures" (p. 11) <sup>46</sup>

Coherence can happen when I open to the sweetness as Louise Erdrich (2019) writes in *The Painted Drum*:

Life will break you.

Nobody can protect you from that, and living alone won't either, for solitude will also break you with its yearning.

You have to love. You have to feel.

It is the reason you are here on earth.

You are here to risk your heart. You are here to be swallowed up.

And when it happens that you are broken, or betrayed, or left, or hurt, or death brushes near, let yourself

sit by an apple tree and listen to the apples falling all around you

in heaps, wasting their sweetness.

Tell yourself you tasted as many as you could (p. 274).<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted as written.

I wonder if you and I will meet again, and if you will tell me about your encounters with the old and the new, the stones and the air. I wonder what treasures will turn up along our paths and how we will laugh and know that responding to what arises helps us know we are already home. The past and its places always turn out to be something different. Even this writing will be different. The world and this writing won't just look different, they will *be* different with the passage of time. I am linked to this living world of words and widening network of relationships. I welcome the changes.

As Mink in Lee Maracle's (2014) novel witnesses the story of the people healing, he says:

I am done here.

This is all I committed to tell.

You know what to do with the story now.

I skitter up the hill, away from the humans,

and under the moon's light

I lie down to sleep (p. 269).<sup>xiii</sup>

## Walking Backward – I'm Still Here.

Sometimes stories are lost from my memory, but they are recoverable, dwelling as they often do, in shadow. Bad things hide but they can be found, and the memories, feelings and stories have been rooted out in the company of others who have walked with me. Recovery, in my case, is ongoingly carried through the experience of listening to and telling stories of my life, including my history as a child and as a cancer patient. I am grateful; reading Indigenous literatures, listening to mentors, walking with children and their Early Childhood Educator candidates, has helped me learn to turn my ear to tune in, turn around, listen, and reflect. Rita Joe (2019) a Mi'kmaq author, leads the way, and shows incredible strength when she writes about calling forth her stolen and lost life:

So gently I offer my hand and ask,

Let me find my talk

So I can teach you about me (unpaginated).

It is not enough to tell a story of what happened. I asked, at the outset of my dissertation journey, how I might live well. This intention allowed me to expand my self-awareness and gave me permission to release expectations, and trust in unforgetting. I am learning how I became who I am through my silent and not-so-silent stories and poems, some of which were about survival. I am learning who I am through an inquiry into the past I was born into. I am learning how I am carried by these stories and how I might carry them or let them go as I continue this journey. Some of the stories want to come to life in words. Some of these stories I am still too afraid to look at let alone speak. However, I know the contents of the nightmares are no longer the stories I want to bear. I no longer want to give weight to them. Stories of Indigenous lives (noted already at the outset of this work) revealed through the fiction of Indigenous authors, helped me see more of myself. I see my growing generosity and loving-kindness because of these authors.

Over the last eight years, stories of cancer and of childhood traumas arrived through writing and performance. They wriggled out and crackled as they stretched. They smelled bad. However, once I started to write for myself and others, and as I reviewed the words again and again, alongside the words of other authors, my capacity

to understand the stories I chose to encounter grew. Allowing stories room, by walking backward, loosening my grip on them, slacking my pace, looking at them and listening to them with new ears, rather than wrestling them or arguing them back inside the silence of my body, destabilized them and they became less fixed.

This research has helped me learn how silence and I were bound. Writing, rewriting, walking, and revisiting words afforded me time to listen to the stories that I told and to the ones that remain hidden. Writing and performance have helped me cultivate a lively engagement with my experiences. Experience, followed by reflection, revealed meaning. Learning from experiences requires and is nurtured through previous reflections. I have become accustomed to noticing. Through learning to read my life experiences, and how my past is woven with the pasts of others I gained appreciation for my life and the world to which it is connected (Smith, 1988).

My ability to notice has been shaped through the call and response practice with authors. In the early stages of this journey, I saw my call and response in somewhat binary terms. The authors were over “there” (left hand side of the page) and I was over “here” (right hand side of the page). With each new reading the gaps that are part of binaries, began to vibrate and shimmer. As I reflect on this sensation I wonder if this is a visceral understanding of Gadamer’s fusion of horizons and the beginning of my imagining of new futures, not earlier thought possible.

Through this work I realize that I can take a step back before responding to the questions I set out at the start of this dissertation because to live well is not merely a matter of procedure. I wanted to know how to live well, love the earth, and know my heart. My research has shown the importance of asking what story or stories I find myself part of to learn how to understand the stories I tell. The silence of

Don't tell  
Don't tell  
Don't tell

created a wild and thorny landscape that makes consciousness jittery. Writing helps and so too, does performance rich with silence of a different kind. Performance created silent spaces for words to come. Standing, or sitting before a performance and

in front of an audience, I am made aware of my finitude. The silences held the stories to bursting, freeing them sometimes to their death. In some ways, silence preserved a kind of energy for living. Writing has helped me learn that sometimes silence offers a landscape of awakesness and in that place meaning can be created. The consequences of traumatic events and the ripple-like effects of them have often felt wild and unstable. I feel lighter as I talk back to these stories rather than living according to them. New stories are told while unhelpful parts of stories dissolve.

What new stories come into the openings this writing and these performances created? This dissertation is a new story; a performance of resilience. I am strong. This writing, as a story, allows me to live a fuller, enlivened life. I am learning to understand the systems within the stories I told myself. Aletheia steps with me into an opening that cancer created. The stories, once released, showed an unhidden and unforgotten kinship to the ancient Greek descriptions of Aletheia as *truth*. My truth. I am learning that my stories, told and listened to in new ways, are being born into an enlivened understanding of who I am. My story of wanting a *big love* means, in part, wanting someplace to put my stories. This dissertation, therefore, has become a place and a practice of love and courage. A praxis of unforgetting.

The paper mâché bust I created the evening before my surgery is more than the elements it is made of. I have learned to see the bust as a big love. Paper, glue and my skin cells came together out of my body's physical form. The bust became a big love in my acts of connection to it and the connections that were formed by taking this paper mâché bust to beaches, mountains, and into performance presentations. Like me, the bust is more than the sum of its parts. The bust is more than a story. I look forward to what is yet to arrive.

I have learned to *unforget* that stories are stories and that continuing to be overwhelmed or silenced by them limits my capacity to be well. I have learned that meaning is improvised as I write and as I tell my stories to you, the reader, or to audience members. Writing and my conversations with audience members, mentors, supervisors, children and Early Childhood Educator candidates, is rooted in my commitment to furthering a common bond amongst us. Conversation affirms the finite nature of our human knowing and invites us to remain open to one another.

There are traces, fragments, stories that I have offered and stories yet untold. I have shared my hope to walk the rest of my life's journey in ways that reflect reverence for the paths I have traveled. When I feel a sense of tightness about what I may accomplish out of this work, I realize that letting go is called for so that I do not sacrifice today for the future. Living well needs me to be present to what arises. It is not just about learning to lift the manhole cover off the darkness of untold or traumatic stories but to take steps once the cover is lifted. This writing is one of those steps. Maybe if I create space by walking backward from the story of suffering, I will see that the story too wants to move.

My body is home and home is full of a wildness that enlivens my living. Life is my body with and without trauma, with and without cancer. Life is verdant. I have studied some of the terrain of my life. In studying my life, I am given places of refuge and inspiration. I am coming to know my body as a palimpsest where multiple texts have been written. Old stories peek through the spaces informing the newer stories that arise. A weave is formed, and a richness comes from this movement of memories. This work is not about storying my lived experiences differently, and then eyeing the results through a new theoretical lens. Hermeneutics is not a lens; rather, hermeneutics is a family of quarrels, puzzles, assertions, and gifts. Hermeneutics offers me moments of grace when I need to get out of the tangles of my own stories. I don't need this story or any other story I might now tell to know that I am ready and able to live my life well or that I have been trying to do so all along. I am like the flowers on Moose Mountain, here one minute and gone the next. But the blue flowers, my stories, me, we aren't really gone, are we?

The words in this dissertation have been chosen carefully and yes, they need room to grow. With time, the meaning of some of the words have changed because I am changed in the writing. I am dancing. I am the hermeneutic circle meaning-making within ever-shifting landscapes. The meaning of my stories changes, sometimes ever so slightly, depending on the context in which and with whom, individual stories are being shared. Through hermeneutic journeying, I understand the landscape of my life, while understanding the stories that have composed it. I know this act of storying and meaning-making is always incomplete and that I will continue to improvise and dance meaning into being. This dance of meaning-making, through a doctoral journey was, at one time, a daunting call because I wanted to rest. Cancer treatments, coming out and into myself, reading deeply, and being in complex and complicated conversation with

others was at times, a pressure that seemed too much. I am learning to be freed from expectations of completion, and of finding an essential truth of my life. I am learning to embrace instead a spiraling openness, that walking backwards out into the wild has called forth. Through writing, performing, releasing, surrendering, loving and living, I am learning to be present.

I return to the story I shared of the flowers on Moose Mountain. Just as a flower is made of non-flower elements, the self is made on non-self elements (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1988, pp. 3-5). I think of how the flowers I saw that day were made of shadows. I too am composed of shadows. When I first wanted a reason for why I could not see the forget-me-nots when I turned around to look back down the hill, I missed the meaning of the flower's appearance and disappearance. The flowers' disappearance was more than the weave of sun and shadow and air. They are more than the call to pay attention; to notice, to be present to my life. They have become an understanding of unforgetting, that dwells within these pages. Unforgetting is a gathering of that awareness and embodied knowing of the storied landscape in which I dwell. The flowers are a reminder to my commitment to call and response. Earlier, I was trying to grasp something that was not graspable. I was trying to grasp the painful beauty of their disappearance, which parallels how I was trying at times, in these pages, in my performances, in my life, to grasp the beauty of cancer or even the strength that be borne out of trauma. *Life and its meaning can't be grasped but it can be followed, and responded to, walking backward out into the wild.*

The previous sentence signals the completion of this work, ever incomplete. I feel open and free. Feeling as though nothing is lacking is a bit like forgetting and unforgetting and how they happen at the same time. While I am unforgetting one thing, another is being forgotten. For instance, when I unforget the beauty that is the loss of the view of the flowers on the mountain I forget the story of losing them. When I unforget stories of resilience I forget the silent and pained survivor. I know I continue to live with scripts that are deeply written but I am aware of them now and they hold less power over me. As Jodi Latremouille's (2019) poem highlights:

...Finding my voice does not make me unique  
It does not make me amazing or special or wonderful  
To claim special is to despair of my entire life of relations.

My voice and your silence make us part of something.

Yes, together in our variousness  
Our gut reactions and compositions...(p. 217).

I know that language, like life, is often hazy. As I searched for the right words to understand cancer and other traumas, the haziness often increased. There are no right words, there are no right paths, except the one I/we, lay down while walking. This dissertation was worth the journey to follow the topic's lead—my *one wild and precious life* as Mary Oliver has written. Thus, the stories, my stories, are not the problem. I have learned to dance with them just as I have learned to dance with a diagnosis of cancer. Cancer helped me know what stories I am no longer willing to die for and which stories I am willing to live for. I know that I will be taken care of one way or the other and I am starting to learn how to take care of the earth as part of my living. I belong to the synergistic space of this earth *and* the infinite world of this writing. I hope this work lightens whatever burdens you may be carrying<sup>47</sup>...

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<sup>47</sup> I made this video (<https://summit.sfu.ca/item/37773>) in the summer of 2021. The time was a point of rest in the writing. I showed the film looped for three and a half hours in the dissertation defence, and the interactions of plaster, grasses and water offered viewers comfort. I hope it might offer you something as well.



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## Appendix.

### Found Poems

i.

Here's one more secret about hermeneutics. It culminates, slowly, into the insight that this world will be fine without me, and the great sense of relief that can slowly come from this insight, the great sense of setting down the panicky task of mastering things and feeling somehow essential to their continuance. *That* is what it means to truly *understand* something in the hermeneutic sense (Jardine, 2012, p. 4).

ii.

It is sometimes supposed that it is the business of philosophy of education to tell what education should be. But the only way of deciding what education should be, at least, the only way which does not lead us into the clouds, is discovery of what actually takes place when education really occurs (Dewey, 1964, p. 3).

iii.

By our very attitude to one another we help to shape one another's world. By our attitude to the other person we help to determine the scope and hue of [her] world; we make it large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure. We helped to shape [her] world not by theories and views but by our very attitude toward [her]. Herein lies the inarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life which trust has placed in our hands (Logstrup, 1971, p. 19).

iv.

Because the art and the heart of story-making are capacious and uncontainable, always seeking surprising twists and twisted surprises, the story is a never ending story, a story only temporarily suspended with "once upon a time" and "ever after." There are many possibilities in any story. I write and rewrite, revise and revisit many possibilities (Leggo, 2001, n.p.)

v.

Each stone in the stream helps the water have a different voice, a unique song. We humans are like that too. Each responding to the current of life in our own way. The river spirit tells me though, we are all the same stream. Each individual bears a personal responsibility for the behavior of the species. (n.p. IdleNoMore.ca).

vi.

Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds, luring us further. One insight leads to another; one invention suggests another variation; more and more seems to press through the hole, and more and more we find ourselves drawn out into a chaos of possibilities. (Hillman, 2013, p. 94)

vii.

All along, Mama, it's been someone else's life I've been living. Other people's lives. Now it is my own. From now on it's going to be mine'. And I see that it's true when these words come out of my mouth, words I don't recall ever having thought. It's true. All along I've lived in their world with order and cleanliness and the many other instruments of despair. It has been my life. And now I want no share in it. (Hogan, 1998, p. 211)

viii.

Justice, which entails acknowledgement, recognition and loving attention, is not a state that can be achieved once and for all. There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting. How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter? How to understand what is entailed in the practice of meeting that might help keep the possibility of justice alive in a world that seems to thrive on death? How to be alive to each being's suffering, including those who have died and those not yet born? How to disrupt patterns of thinking that see the past as finished and the future as not ours or only ours? (Barad, 2007, p. x)

ix.

my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved. I have been given much and I have given in return. Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure. (Sacks, 2015, p. x)

x.

The open-heartedness encouraged by practice, is not simply an idea, nor even a feeling, for it involves a particular way of tapping into the energetic potential of the heart center of the body, and from this point, allowing ourselves playful access to ever-larger patterns of energy and greater dimension of space (Klein, 1997, p 146).

xi.

Hermeneutics faces us with the deep scholarly question: what the hell is going on? It rears up as a path that must be followed, a lead that must be trailed, a task that must now be undertaken, of finding out, of investigating, of questioning and facing the afflictions that swirl around the topic, the topography I have chosen to travel—my own deeply personal afflictions in terrible concert with the afflictions of the world I am investigating. It comes on like a summons with my name on it, my life is at stake (Jardine, 2012, p. 2).

xii.

Only repeated practice will help, full of citatiousness, study, and a deepening knowledge of the ancestral lineages that we have often unwittingly inherited, that need to get committed to memory or written out and savored and read to friends and neighbors. Hermeneutics, thus, involves a dedication to the careful, suspicious reading and re-reading, interpreting and re-interpreting the texts and textures of our individual and common lives and worlds. And then, in the middle of all that, hermeneutics demands that I take on the task of composing myself while composing something about this world, while writing a 'hermeneutic study.' (Jardine, 2012, p. 2)

xiii.

Human beings are really human be(com)ings constituted in the play of language. Too often we use language to declare, assert, prove, argue, convince, and proclaim notions of truth. But what happens when we emphasize the use of language to question and play with and savour and ruminate on notions of truth? Language as performance invites collaboration and conversation, and a keen sense of confidence that we are engaging together in creating intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic possibilities. (Leggo, 2005, p. 5)

xiv.

All of this is to say that there is no such thing as innocence or perfection in such matters even when they are experienced innocently, naively, but deeply felt. Language, and our individual and collective cultural inheritances, expectations and the like, color, cloud, and sometimes illuminate, sometimes all in one sentence, one gesture, one word. (Jardine, 2016, p. 141)

xv.

She listened to the voice. The sound seemed to be coming from a being whose body she could not see – a shadow, a silhouette, active and faceless, standing on the periphery of the memory she was immersed in. She wanted to retreat from the memory, step outside it, get some kind of command of it. Her feet remained planted inside the memory. Breath seemed to be making the voice happen all on its own. She could feel her mind whisper to her voice, *Why are you making ugly sounds like this?*

*These aren't the words I want to hear, she told her breath. Make a different voice. Say something else. I didn't ask to hear this"* (Maracle, 2002, 240).

xvi.

Fundamentally, understanding is always a movement in this kind of circle, which is why the repeated return from the whole to the parts, and vice versa, is essential. Moreover, this circle is constantly expanding, since the concept of the whole is relative, and being integrated in ever larger contexts always affects the understanding of the individual part (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 189).



xvii.

[Storying] is a fluid tradition that is as migratory as a winter bird, feeding as it goes from place to place and leaving something of itself behind. Those of us with gardens can attest to the hardiness of “volunteers” that spring up from seeds that have been carried in a bird’s body over countless miles (Yolen, 1988, p. 3).

xviii.

A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in the realm of humility and mystery – as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 23–24).

xix.

[Interpretive research] begins (and remains) with the evocative, living familiarity that this [or that] tale evokes. The task of interpretation is to bring out this evocative given in all its tangled ambiguity, to follow its evocations and the entrails of sense and significance that are wound up with it. Interpretive research, too, suggests that these striking incidents make a claim on us and open up and reveal something to us about our lives together and what it is that is going on, often unvoiced, in the ever-so commonplace and day-to-day act of becoming a teacher (Jardine, 2016, p. 2).

xx.

Understanding is not a making of a home for the mind out of reality. It is more like learning to leave things be; restoration in the wilderness, here and now ... By “leaving things be” I do not mean inaction; I mean respecting things, being still in the presence of things, letting them speak. (Bugbee, 1975, p. 155).

xxi.

Language is something I and others find ourselves in, not something we find in us and at my beck and call. It is not an internal possession. It is an eco-poetic habitat in which we live, contested, multivocal, obscured and obscuring, clarifying, articulate, foolish. It is the soil of the world of our thinking (Jardine, February 2018, personal communication).

xxii.

...remaining with the object of meditation, this gathering, requires, then, of me, a certain level of 'cultivation' (*Bildung*), but what is thus cultivated is not exactly my "self" but my ability to forgo how myself persistently tries to foreground itself". It is a sort of "getting over myself" by giving myself over to detailing how things are (Dharma) with say, that species of bird, or this unseasonal warmth of clothes on the line, Jan 28, 2016 – both a pleasure and slightly nightmarish portent. Of course. Buddhism, ecology, hermeneutics: these are all lineages regarding how to come to understanding and intimately experience what is happening to us. Pedagogy. (Jardine, 2016, p. 80)

xxiii.

A part of the reason that we live in this world is to experience the terrible hermeneutic angst of remembering. There are times we wish to swim the River Lethe and forget, and there are times we are afraid we already have and we clamour to reclaim what is lost from memory. There are things we wish would no longer live and things we want to keep alive forever. In hermeneutic understanding, we know that things must be awakened, recalled, remembered, and suffered. It is why we embrace with "trembling and fear" (with all due respect to Kierkegaard) that which we have to be prepared to meet in this kind of research. We have to face the living presence of what we come to suffer or as Kearney and Caputo suggest – a preparedness to meet the stranger at the door who may be kind or may be a monster. There is hospitality to aletheia – an openness to what might come to, and maybe enter, the door (Moules, 2015, p. 4).

xxiv.

There are all sorts of walking – from heading out across the desert in a straight line to a sinuous weaving through the undergrowth. Descending rocky ridges and talus slopes is a speciality in itself. It is an irregular dancing – always shifting- step of walk on slabs and scree. The breath and the eyes are always following this uneven rhythm. It is never paced or clocklike, but flexing – little jumps- sidesteps – going for the well-seen place to put a foot on a rock, hit flat, move on – zigzagging along and all deliberate (Snyder, 1990, p. 121).

xxv.

Seeing the frailty of your life through seeing the breath is the meditation on the recollection of death. Just realizing this fact—that if the breath goes in but does not go out again, or goes out but does not come in again, your life is over—is enough to change the mind. It will startle you into being aware (Chah, 2001, p. 44).

xxvi.

Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds, luring us further. One insight leads to another; one invention suggests another variation; more and more seems to press through the hole, and more and more we find ourselves drawn out into a chaos of possibilities (Hillman, 2013, p. 94).

xxvii.

Walking calms turmoil. prisoners circumambulate the yard, animals exercise back and forth in their cages, and the anxious pace the floor – waiting for the baby to be born or to hear news from the board room. Heidegger recommended the path through the woods for philosophizing. Aristotle's school was called "Peripatetic"-thinking and discoursing while walking up and down; monks walk around their closed gardens. Nietzsche said that only thoughts while walking, *laufenden* thoughts, were of value – thoughts that run, not sitting thoughts (Hillman, 2006, p. 253).

xxviii.

Walking can be meditative therapy-not an idyllic hike by the ocean.... One goes for a walk to get the stuck, depressed state of mind or its whirling agitations into an organic rhythm, and this organic rhythm of walking takes on symbolic significance as we place one foot in front of the other, left-right, left-right, in a balanced pace. Pace. Measure. Taking steps.... As we walk, we are in the world, finding ourselves in a particular space and turning that space by walking within it, into a place, a dwelling or territory, a local habitation with a name.... There is probably an archetypal cure going on in walking, something profoundly affecting the mythical substrata [Sisyphus] of our lives. (Hillman, 2006, pp. 252–253).

xxix.

this woman that i am becoming is a combination of the woman that i am and was this journey backward will help me to walk forward... (Rendon, 1984, p. 219)

xxx.

Once I deeply realize that all these things are not here for me, they begin, so to speak, to turn away; they no longer pay any special attention to me, they are not formed up and tarted up for my perusal. Suddenly, I am no longer the displaced, post-Copernican, questioning stranger, the colonizing interloper, the condescending intruder to whom attention must be paid and who can make demands without attention to where I actually am, without attention to what is *already at work without me*. Suddenly, I belong here. I live here. The Earth is my home. I can finally experience my being as resonant, indebted and interwoven with these things. (Jardine, 1998, p. 99)

xxxi.

It's like making a path through the forest. At first it's rough going, with a lot of obstructions, but returning to it again and again, we clear the way. After a while the ground becomes firm and smooth from being walked on repeatedly. Then we have a good path for walking in the forest (Chah, 2005b, p. 83).

xxxii.

A fog of forgetfulness is looming over education. Forgotten in the fog is that education is about human beings. And as schools are places where human beings get together, we have forgotten that education is primarily about human beings who are in relation with one another...It's not a matter of waiting for the fog to dissipate. Instead, it is an active pursuit while the fog still lingers (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 5).

xxxiii.

Once an interpretation gets expressed in language, it becomes the shared property of a community of speakers. As we become competent in speaking, we become acculturated to a form of life. Possibilities are handed down, shared and safeguarded. In this manner, we come to inhabit, though in a largely tacit way, a definite heritage and tradition (Leichter, 2011, p. 74).

xxxiv.

Sauntering off the trail is the practice of the wild. That is also where – paradoxically – we do our best work. But we need paths and trails and we will always be maintaining them. You first must be on the path, before you can turn and walk into the wild. (Snyder, 1990, p. 165)

xxxv.

Magic has no occasion for explanation; It can never be grasped in our thoughts or memories...experiencing the magic means nothing separates the *I* – and the observed (Meyer, 2006, p. 9).

xxxvi.

Things speak; they show the shape they are in. They announce themselves, bear witness to their presence: "Look, here we are." They regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what we intend with them, and how we dispose of them. (Hillman 2006b, p. 33)

xxxvii

The child was immediately curious. She moved closer to her grandmother. Lena straightened the blanket saying, “We not the only ones what lives. Some others maybe think they’s the only ones what live. And too, things ain’t always that they look like. We walk round and round – moving through life. Life so big. It’s mysterious and it all around us, ever where. Lots times though, us people’s can’t see whats round us. It gonna be there though, sure enough.” (Lee Walters, 1984, p. 145)

xxxviii.

Only by coming to terms with my own past, my own background, and seeing that in the context of the world at large, have I begun to find my true voice and to understand that, since it is my own voice, that no pre-cut niche exists for it; that part of the work to be done is making a place, with others, where my and our voices, can stand clear of the background noise and voice our concerns, [our fears, our joys, our love, our hopes, our presence] as part of a larger song (Wilson quoted in hooks, 1994, p. 177).

xxxix.

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, but that implies that meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it. (2004, Gadamer, p. 363)

xl.

I do not know what answers humanity will one day finally arrive at concerning how people will live together, either in relation to the rights of the individual versus the rights of the collective or in relation to the violence that comes from the family or from the state. ...I do venture to say, however, that if we do not learn hermeneutic virtue – that is if we do not realize that it is essential first of all to *understand* the other person if we are ever going to see whether in the end perhaps something like the solidarity of humanity as a whole may be possible, especially in relation to our living together and surviving together – if we do not, we will never be able to accomplish the

essential tasks of humanity, whether on a small scale or large (Gadamer, 1986, pp. 7–8)

xli.

Life will break you. Nobody can protect you from that, and living alone won't either, for solitude will also break you with its yearning. You have to love. You have to feel. It is the reason you are here on earth. You are here to risk your heart. You are here to be swallowed up. And when it happens that you are broken, or betrayed, or left, or hurt, or death brushes near, let yourself sit by an apple tree and listen to the apples falling all around you in heaps, wasting their sweetness. Tell yourself you tasted as many as you could (Erdrich, 2019, p. 274).

xlii.

I am done here. This is all I committed to tell. You know what to do with the story now. I skitter up the hill, away from the humans, and under the moon's light I lie down to sleep (Maracle, 2014, p. 269).

xliii

*What if there are miracles*

What if there are miracles beneath the soles  
of your forgotten path  
twigs, branches, moss, and mist waiting for your attention

to say yes to what calls you

Listen to the earth's knowing one which tenderizes  
the tyranny of busy

Watch the lily pads' faces greet water through floating creating an aesthetics of  
place oxygenating from their roots

Here is a model for sustenance providing shelter for fish where light and dark  
meet in a hidden curriculum

Give yourself the same a refuge for pondering all in a morning walk (Snowber, 2021, p.12)