

Finding Voice

by

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Abstract

Individuation, as defined by Jung, is a process that we go through which allows us to examine who we are as we delve into our shadows. These shadows both shape and constrain us as teachers, as partners, as parents and as human beings. As we seek to uncover all the hidden meanings, we throw off the constraints imposed upon us by the world. We are then able to mine our inner depths in order that we may discover our authentic selves. Having gone through this process, we as educators and artists, have some profound messages to bring to our students, and the world around us. Through the use of both poetic inquiry and autobiographical inquiry I illustrate how Jung's theory of the process of individuation works. I examine my own process of individuation as I delve into my own shadows and examine my turbulent relationship with my mother, before and after her death.

Keywords: Individuation; poetic inquiry; autobiographical inquiry; authentic self; emotional abuse; youth at-risk

For my Father, Abraham Nish, who gave me my words.
For my children, Sebastian, Rebecca and Alexandra who are my words.
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silence to find where my words hide.
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1. The Roots of Distancing

Poem 1.1. Ghost

Your vision lingers
like chalk dust
caught upon fingertips,
or an odd scent
massaged into moist palms.
Memory celebrates touch
I have no use for empty hands.

(B. Nish)

I have been thinking a lot about distance lately. The distance it is to the moon and how much energy humankind has put into getting there. The distance from a tree's roots to the tops of the newest growth as it stretches towards the sun. How far the nutrients have to travel to reach the tips of branches flung out in a blue sky. The distance between ourselves and family or friends who live other places and the different ways we try to fill the gap. We use phone calls, plane rides, and email. The distance we put between ourselves and someone we love; a lover, a parent, a friend. We have fights, we have desires and we need to be understood. The distance our children create as they grow older and the manner in which we try to keep our love wrapped around them while still giving them space. The distance we sometimes put between the outside world and ourselves when we are having bad days. The distance we have with our past and how it can weave itself through our bloodlines and into our bones. Mostly however, it's the distance we put between our feelings and ourselves when we want to escape something we don't want to feel. The lengths we will go to create that distance (from here to the moon). How long it takes to bring ourselves face to face, to close that distance, to let ourselves feel whatever it is we are avoiding (a full tree length or an entire country) and find our voice.

For me when I can feel these things creeping up from below my belly, into my chest, into my throat and out of my mouth, I throw myself into work, take long walks and make my days as busy as a person can possibly be. I have gotten really good at running

and putting a moon between my feelings and myself. When I finally stop, having simply run out of steam or devices which afford me the ability to keep all memories and knowing at bay, I collapse into tears. The tears, as much as I fight them, release the pent up emotion I have not wanted to face. They allow me to actually confront what is really at the crux of all this. The focus that has been in shadow is the discovery of that small child who was never loved, never held, never given voice, of letting her come out into the light and be.

Tears are a river that take you somewhere. Weeping creates a river around the boat that carries your soul-life. Tears lift your boat off the rocks, off dry ground, carrying it downriver to some place new, someplace better. (Estes, 1992, p. 404)

Poem 1.2. *Bones*

My bones are brittle, cracked, broken
I hear them moaning in the night,
a longshoreman's cry
off a desolate shoreline
of pain
no one sees.

My bones are heavy, worn, damaged
laden with history
carved inside marrow,
sad truths and secrets
passed along bloodlines
in silence.

My bones are fractured, aging, shattered
beaten by time,
shaven down chips
fate twists with content,
words
unraveling, extracting.

My bones are healing, mending, restored
settled with certainty,
determination,
genuine faith
of finding sand to rub
between the wounds.

My bones have shifted, stirred, moved
the chilling fog
of despondency
lifting,
clarity and change
filling pages and pores.

My bones are, linked, connected, sure
cast with hope
resolve, devotion,
fortitude
wraps around stories
changing direction.

My bones are tender,
compassion eases,
fissures fill
with laughter
kindness darns splinters
dissolving fear and sorrow.

'Engaging in arts-based educational research often means that researchers are immersed in a journey of discovery, of learning about themselves as well as learning about themselves in relationship to others.' (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006, p. 1242) Through autobiographical inquiry and arts-based research, specifically poetic inquiry, I hope to unearth the poetics of individuation as expressed through the creativity of discovery, the pain of knowing and finding one's true self, the beauty of change through the process of individuation and the effect of recognizing one's own inner voice.

When I began drawing the mandalas, however, I saw that everything, all the paths I had been following, all the steps I had taken, were leading back to a single point-namely, to the mid-point. It became increasingly plain to me that the mandala is the center. It is the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the center to individuation. (Jung, 1963, p. 196)

Individuation as Jung has described, is a process that we go through when we reach mid-life where we are able to uncover all the hidden meanings in our lives which up to this point have stopped us from progressing in a momentous and profound way. By overcoming the constraints of my family, and society's expectations I am enabled to continue forward as an authentic individual. Becoming aware of the richness of our lives

through nature, art, people and the symbols embedded within the context of these relationships, allows us to move into the latter part of living with greater depth and insight into ourselves and the world around us.

The significance of my research, I hope, will be to contribute to my, and perhaps other educators' gaining access to those qualities recognized by psychologists and educators as being important in creating a classroom accessible to all students especially those who are deemed at risk. For as educator and Jungian specialist, Carolyn Mamchur tells us;

Teachers who encourage their students to make choices, to take responsibility for their learning, to be independent and fulfilled in which autonomy, decisiveness, risk-taking, and caring are recognized and appreciated know that power shared is not lost - but increased.

(Mamchur, 1990, p. 634)

Poem 1.3. *Untitled 1*

Consciously I move
through this life
afraid of the shadows
which lurk around the corner
of my psyche.

I wait for them to jump out
when I am not looking,
unaware the whole time
they live in darkness
afraid of me.

This process is important to us as individuals, as artists and as teachers, because with a deeper understanding of who we are, by uncovering what haunts us and knowing what things have pointed us to pursue certain directions, we are able to create works that are profound and give deeper, fuller meaning to our lives and to society. By going through this process we become free of those things which have kept us from our authentic selves. As artists we become capable of discerning what is important to us. We know. Conventions, which may no longer hold true, need not bind us. These perceptive insights have the potential to change our universe, our art and teaching skills, by revealing what has kept us back from leading an authentic life. Therein lies the

beauty. Jung points out that “many-far too many- aspects of life which should also have been experienced lie in the lumber-room among the dusty memories: but sometimes, too, they are glowing coals under grey ashes.” (Jung, 1976, p. 12) It is through my words that I have been able to close this distance with myself. Through my stories and poems where I uncover those ‘glowing coals’, find my greatest strength and give myself the greatest gift: my voice.

Through the use of autobiographical inquiry I hope to show the journey of change and of a self uncovering itself. Writing my personal story is essential to this process. I have always been a writer. My words live inside me and flow onto the page as easily as my blood passes through my veins. From the time I was in elementary school I began to share my writing. Encouraged by my grade five teacher I had poems and stories published in our class yearbook. I loved to write, but more than this I needed to write. I began to write to save my life. As a teenager I had the sense that life at home wasn’t quite right. I didn’t realize however that my writing allowed all the pent up emotion a place to escape. Professor Cynthia Chambers echoes these experiences:

Being a full professor heightens my responsibility to the word and world. I write to move, to wake up. To remember that the women in my family die young from hardening of the arteries and repressed rage. I write because it feels so good when I am doing it and it feels so good to stop. I write to remember what it was to be a child who was not heard and understood. I write to save my life. (Chambers, 2009, p. 87)

How far into the shadows must I go before I unveil what meaning my words have for others? How does passing on my process, honour my own place in the world? Does my writing change the way I perceive others and the way others perceive me? These are important questions, asked by many writers, educators and parents alike. Educator, Madeline Grumet, explains how autobiographical writing can affect our place in the world.

Rather than parallel play, we must write narratives that pose a question about our experience in the world and invite our readers to join us in the exploration that results. It is a generous and humble act that displays one’s own vulnerability as writer and reader. The research of such autobiography is indeed a reunion as the writer recuperates a wish and the struggle to negotiate its satisfaction in the world. It is a reunion when

the reader following the arc of the writer's question recovers a world worth knowing. (Grumet, 2001, p. 177)

Many tears have flowed with the telling of my stories. They dislodge my words from where they stay hidden, so that I may move on past the pain of remembering. As I float down this stream of consciousness I wonder why it is that I must tell this story? Why bother dredging up what is history at best? Professor of communications and poet Diana Denton tells us that these wounds do affect what we do as teachers and human beings. We must find a place to honour what has gone before. As she says, 'There are no prescribed practices or methods for a pedagogy of wounding. We can't predict when or how the wound will enter our lives, or our teaching. We can only welcome it with love and compassion and look to it for insight and wisdom.' (2006, p. ,138) Trying to shed the skin of that which I have carried unconsciously all my life, of that which runs through my marrow, has not been easy. In trying to resolve the conflicts of my inner and outer worlds, trying to understand that there is a place inside myself that is wholly mine, that I need not fear, has been one of the greatest challenges I have ever faced. Through my poetry I am able to make meaning of those stories of my life, which sometimes I cannot find elsewhere.

I hope through my own poetic voyage, I can show the agony, the joy and the beauty of self-discovery. As poet and Professor, Carl Leggo reminds us,

Poetry is a way of knowing and living, a way of examining lived experiences by attending to issues of identity, relationship, and community. Poetry acknowledges how the heart and imagination are always integral parts of the human knowing. Poetry seeks the truth about the human experience. (Leggo, 2008, p. 165)

The language of poetry allows me to experiment, uncover and finally to play with voice. For it is through play, as Kant said, where I not only begin to find something profound, but the floodgates burst open to creativity and the potential becomes infinite. Through this play I once again find beauty. 'Kant's thesis can be summed up in a fairly brief sentence: the experience of beauty is constituted by the "free harmonious play of imagination and understanding"; the experience of art is similarly constituted, although with certain added refinements.' (Armstrong, n.d., para. 2)

According to Kant we give order to the world. We look at something and our mind perceives it, takes it in and arranges it. That is our understanding at work. But our imagination allows us to play with what we see. It is this free play between our understanding and imagination which gives us the beauty we find in things. We look at the mountains every day on our way to work and see the blue sky above them, the snow on the tops and our mind gives order to them. There is purposefulness to what we see as well. By this Kant does not mean in the sense of what function or value the mountain has but just in being a mountain, in touching the sky and showing me the beauty that is there in front of me every day, in just being. We have given it a purpose even though there is no real purpose there. My mind gives order to this scene making it subjective but it is this purposeless purposiveness that makes it objective and this allows all of us to find the beauty there. Jungian analyst, Jolande Jacobi reminds us in *The Way of Individuation: The Indispensable Key to Understanding Jungian Psychology* that:

The growth of the shadow, like that of the persona, keeps pace with that of the ego; it is, as it were, the ego's mirror-image, and is combined partly of repressed, partly of un-lived psychic features which, for moral, social, educational, or other reason, were from the outset excluded from consciousness and from active participation in life and were therefore repressed or split off. Accordingly the shadow can be marked by both positive and negative qualities. (Jacobi, 1965, p. 38)

There is purpose in looking into my shadows, a kind of beauty in my pain that on one level only I can know. An uncovering which though so terribly painful is in itself beautiful and in that universal. Leggo reminds us of this.

In finding my voice I weave through my history- the stories that have brought me to this place. "In *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*, Christina Baldwin reminds us that "it takes courage to tell our stories" (p. 18). We need to hear one another's stories. We need to embrace the healing efficacy of sharing stories. Baldwin understands that "when we reveal details that we think are excruciatingly personal, we discover that the personal is universal. My story is your story; your story is my story." (Leggo, 2011, p. 85)

Through autobiographical inquiry I share my stories and in so doing reveal the power found within my history. As educator bell hooks tells us, 'The longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in

such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release.' (2003, p. 84). And so it is, I take a deep breath and begin.

Thoroughly unprepared we take the step into the afternoon of life; worse still we take this step with the false presupposition that our truths and ideals will serve us as hitherto. But we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning- for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie. I have given psychological treatment to too many people of advancing years, and have looked too often into the secret chambers of their souls, not to be moved by this fundamental truth. (Jung, 1933, p. 108)

Poem 1.4. *Crying Out Loud in Jerusalem*

The birds fly south
it is too soon to give up
this burning bush
and fly with them.
To cry I chop onions
in the middle of the night,
the staccato of my knife
pierces the silence
and I feel less alone.
What are the words for home?
When you lose the flock
there is no one left to translate.

The breaking of an hour glass
stuns me into movement.
Trying to put the world
back together bit by bit,
tripping over glass
the mind escapes this desert of pain
to nest at the foot of the wailing wall.
There are broken wings piled here;
I cannot touch them
but understand how loose feathers
can bring you peace.

(Nish, 2006, p. 19)

Jung theorized that people are naturally propelled toward wholeness, that we exist in a constant state of becoming who we are, and that all things we do in life (and indeed, all things life does to us) are attempts to facilitate this process. When this process is conscious, it is called by Jung 'individuation'. (Sonik, 2008, p. 97)

In theory this all sounds very simple; look inside oneself and discover what is there. However, Jung recognised that this self-exploration was not always an easy path. He acknowledged that individuation can be a very painful process; one which is manifested into our psyche in many ways. James Hollis, a Jungian analyst who has written extensively on individuation, states that,

Jung considered that neurosis is not only a defence against the wounding of life, but an unconscious effort to heal such wounds. Thus one may respect the intent of the neurosis if not its consequences. Symptoms, then, are expressions of a desire for healing. Rather than repress them, or eliminate them, one must understand the wound they represent.

(Hollis, 1996, p. 69)

I know this so well. I was abused as a child. I was never hit, never had my head smashed against a wall so I saw stars and was never threatened at knifepoint. The abuse I endured was constant and cruel. It was sometimes in my face with words that were used to cut down a small child while at other times it could be subtle, just a look of disgust or being ignored which made me feel invisible. The abuse was emotional, sometimes verbal, often silent, but always there.

Hollis also tells us that “the message of childhood experience, the message of vulnerability, powerlessness in the face of the environment, and the legitimization of one’s dependence, is over learned, deeply engrained, while the counter idea of personal freedom, personal responsibility, is intimidating” (Hollis, 1996, p. 69).

Poem 1.5. *The Big City*

The thing about living in a Big City
is that you so easily disappear,
become invisible,
brush up beside someone
feel the skin of their hand
next to yours and know
you are never even noticed.
It’s not much different than living
as a child waiting to be seen
in a house full of people
where you now become
bits of information that just clutter the day,
like last month’s Newsweek

dropped between the bathroom sink
and toilet, irrelevant and discarded.

The thing about living
in a world where
the voices of strangers are kinder
than the familiar ones you live with
is it is so easy to get lost
to silence,
the only noise to keep you company
as you fall into the deep night
is the howling of coyotes
teasing, beckoning, daring
you to come out of hiding.
Hungry and hurt
you jump at the chance of being
while something sits in bushes licking lips
waiting to devour you
and the terror of disappearing forever
haunts your every dream.

Over the years I have struggled with the voices put in my head from an early age. Having to contend with the way I came to view myself, the lack of self-esteem I suffered, sometimes even the self-loathing which I experienced daily because of it. I learnt to distance myself from my needs and become invisible. Lawyer, writer and activist Andrew Vachss explains how devastating emotional abuse can be.

I'm a lawyer with an unusual specialty. My clients are all children—damaged, hurting children who have been sexually assaulted, physically abused, starved, ignored, abandoned and every other lousy thing one human can do to another. People who know what I do always ask: "What is the worst case you ever handled?" When you're in a business where a baby who dies early may be the luckiest child in the family, there's no easy answer. But I have thought about it—I think about it every day. My answer is that, of all the many forms of child abuse, emotional abuse may be the cruelest and longest-lasting of all. (Vachss, 1994. Para. 1)

I have often speculated why it was that I was abused, but abuse knows no boundaries. It lies in bed with me because it can. It watches me as I brush my teeth and sits on my shoulder staring at me in the mirror. It has become an entity all to itself and if I could I would take it to court and have it put in jail. That is my child speaking; the little girl

who was never protected and wants to feel safe. Over time I have grown to realize that the abuse is not separate from whom I am. It has become a part of my psyche and it is something that I do battle with every day so that I might find my own voice, my own perspective. It is in part responsible for who I am today, a strong capable woman now gaining control of her life and finding the path to healing through her words.

Poem 1.6. *A River Flows Through Me*

I can feel it
beating up against the walls of my body,
skin keeping it in place
as though if I were to burn it all off
I would dissolve to water.
I am water.
Fluid, transparent, flowing
a timeless source waiting to be tapped
if you look underneath.

I am words
captured on paper.
Folded into a bird
escaping into a world
I hope will be kind.
But my heart remains still,
while there is movement
through these dark clouds,
your words heavy as lightning
cover panels of lost frescos
now revealed, cracking
found beauty under ancient mud.

Always in a hurry
to find the next door out
back to the river,
I try to stop, to capture
the essence of this dream
before it escapes.
To find a reflection in a mirror
not held hostage
by the breath of you
beating me into tears,
to find a soul mate in my own eyes

knowing if I search deep enough
I will find love.

The past underlies everything we do. We hold it in our bones, we give ceremony to it and we honour it. Under the black text of the present lies the grey text of the past. Voices haunt us from behind. We need to listen. Poet and post-trauma specialist Clarissa Pinkola Estes, PhD tells us:

It must be noted also that many of the most powerful medicines that is stories, come about as a result of one person's or groups' terrible and compelling suffering. For the truth is that much of the story comes from travail; theirs, ours, mine, yours, someone's we know, someone's we do not know, someone's we do not know far away in time and place. And yet, paradoxically, these stories that rise from deep suffering can provide the most potent remedies for past, present and even future ills.

(Estes, 1993, p. 4)

I was born the child of Jews who were lucky enough to be living in Canada at the time of the holocaust. My mother's parents had immigrated from Poland to England and then to Canada where my mother was born. My father's family moved from Russia to England where his parents were both born. They then moved separately to Canada. My grandparents met and married here. Being Jewish at a time when anti-Semitism was on the rise everywhere in the world was not easy. My father would tell us about a time when restaurants carried signs that read 'No Jews Allowed.' Social clubs were exclusive and there were certain school programs he felt he could not get accepted into because of his Jewish heritage.

My mother loved to tell the story of her grandparents, who, still living in Poland, were asphyxiated in their home one night when their gas stove leaked. She told us how lucky she felt they were. She so often used this story to make a point if she felt we should be affiliating with more Jewish friends or if we were dating people who weren't Jewish. It was her reminder to us of our sad history. They, as my mother loved to point out, were able to die together in their bed, a luxury, she always reminded us, so many others did not have. Her point was not lost on us, even if we did not adhere to it.

We still to this day carry the weight of it with us, the significance my great-grandparents being gassed held. They did not go at the hands of the Nazis, separated

and waiting to die in fear without the comforting arms of a loving spouse. They did not take their last breath wondering what had happened to the other as the noxious gas filled their lungs and eyes. Or there could have been something even worse in store for them.

How did he react, the first time he unloaded corpses, when the gas van doors were opened? What could he do? He cried. The third day he saw his wife and children. He placed his wife in the grave and asked to be killed. The Germans said he was strong enough to work, that he wouldn't be killed yet. (Lanzmann, 1985, p. 11)

I always wondered what it would be like if my great grandparents had died in the gas chambers instead.

Poem 1.7. Bloodlines

In my dreams
there are broken clouds,
clouds pulled apart
by a past that follows me.
The stories that water
the flowers of a history
coming straight from hell.
My Baubie,
too short to reach the top shelves,
listens.
Gunfire drowns out the spring rain
beating against her cracked window.
She is waiting for news of evacuation,
has been told all Jews
will be moved in the morning.
She hides her salted tears
as my Zadie sleeps
in the silence of approaching horror.

In my heart
there are six million guests waving
waiting to be remembered
into daylight,
trapped souls
buried under the weight
of oppression and greed.

Baubie stops cold,
a pounding runs through her core.
The door bursts open
two huge men rush in
throw her out into the hallway,
push her down the stairs,
leaving Zadie behind in sleep
a bullet lodged between his eyes.

In my bones
there are railway tracks
driven straight through marrow.
The narration
of fathers, mothers
children, grandparents
turned into dust
caught in my bloodline.
Baubie is pressed into a lineup
women and children form a crowd
while unfamiliar fingertips
touch in darkness.
The cold rushes past them
as they try to gather strength
in numbers,
try to ignore the whistle of a distant train
filling the night's stage.

In my mind
there are voices crying.
I hear them as I walk,
the cool mist of their tears
settles on morning,
the carried moans
of misplaced spirits
fill my days.
Inside a boxcar
bodies squeezed into bodies,
Baubie breathes fumes
while prayers and screams
fill the evaporating air
and the floorboards whimper in pain
from the burden of extermination.

In my life
there are moments
left unexplained
as though they have come before
visitors I have never seen
holding my hand for comfort.
My children play in the sandbox
unaware how deeply
the sand of remembrance
runs through their veins.
Our ancestors
wait day to day,
their tattered prayer shawls
carried deep within a Shiva house
we keep in our hearts,
this tiny space in the universe
we reserve to mourn our dead.

Dear Great- Baubie,

There is distance between us. The time and years that fill space. Yet I know you. I know your stories. I know your heart and I feel your pain. The pain of watching. The pain of seeing your life disintegrate before your eyes as your children leave to make a better life than the one you have been able to give them. Then under your pain the joy of knowing they escaped. I can only imagine the terror of watching your world as it evaporates. The fumes of what has become a foreign planet, void of breathable air, choking you as the wave of the Nazis begins to sweep through Europe and take over. You, who were so devote. You, who wore your Judaism on your sleeve before the Star of David was forced on you. Did you cry into your pillow at night as you watched your people losing their voice? Crushed into human mortar, I am glad you never lived to see what horrors could befall your, our, people.

Baubie had I known you, we would sit together in the garden. We would wrap our arms around one another and cry together. Cry for those silenced by a sick dictator. Cry for those who saw us as less than human. Cry for those who could not escape this destiny. We would hold Kaddish for those never mourned. For your friends and family who, like you, died from gaseous fumes but who died unlike you at the hands of a fascist murderer. We would pray together for the souls of those who hurt us and hurt our

people. We would pray for the children who never had a voice and for those who still have no voice. Our prayers would heal us. I hear the echoing of a kaddish never spoken on our lips. Let us say Kaddish, Baubie, let us pray

*May there be abundant peace from heaven,
Yehe shlama rabba min shmayya*

שְׁמַיָּא מִן רַבָּא יְשָׁלְמָה יְהֵא

29

[and] [good] life

[ve]shayyim [tovim]

[טוֹבִים] חַיִּים [וְ]

30

*satisfaction, help, comfort, refuge,
vesava vishu'a venekhama veshzava*

וְשִׁיזְבָּה וְנַחֲמָה וְיִשׁוּעָה וְשִׁבְעָה

31

*healing, redemption, forgiveness, atonement,
urfu'a ug'ulla usliha v'khappara*

וְכַפְרָה וְסְלִיחָה וְגִאֲלָה וְרַפּוּאָה

32

relief and salvation

verevah vehatzala

וְהַצֵּלָה וְרִוַח

33

for us and for all His people Israel; and say, Amen.a

lanu ulkhol 'ammo yisrael v' imru amen

אָמֵן וְאָמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ וְלִכְּל לָנוּ.

34

May He who makes peace in His high places

'oseh shalom bimromav

בְּמְרוֹמָיו יְשׁוּלֵם עוֹשֵׂה

35

grant [in his mercy] peace for us

hu [berakhamav] ya'ase shalom 'alenu

עלינו שלום יעשה [ברחמי] הוא

36

and for all [his nation]h Israel; and say, Amen.a

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaddish>, n.d. a)

These are our stories, Baubie. Our ancestors' stories and only by telling them again and again will the atrocities never be forgotten. They will seal the distance between us. I can walk away knowing you are in my heart forever. Your goodness and love are in my bones. I hear the cries from the Wailing Wall.

Love your Great Grand-daughter

My mother insisted my brother and I date only Jewish people and have only Jewish friends. It was an attempt on her part to keep our Jewish heritage alive. We lived in what had gone from a predominately Jewish neighbourhood before I was born to a very culturally mixed area by the time I as a teen. Yet, even as I grew up, moved away from home, married a man who was a devout atheist and started my own family, I somehow carried all of these ironies in my bones. My family history and my own history intertwined. The child of a race of survivors, I became a survivor myself. Psychologist and world-renowned author Alice Miller addresses what can happen when a child is extremely mistreated and never deals with the abuse. The consequences can be extreme.

It is my belief that only men and women who had experienced mental and physical cruelty in the first weeks and months of life and had been shown no love at all could possibly have let themselves be made into Hitler's willing executioners. As Goldhagen's archive material shows, they needed next to no ideological indoctrination because their bodies knew exactly what they wanted to do as soon as they were allowed to follow their inclinations. And as the Jews, young or old, had been declared non--persons, there was nothing to stop them indulging those inclinations. But no amount of indoctrination alone, at school or wherever, will unleash hatred in a person who has no preconditions in that direction. It is well known that there were also Germans, like Karl Jaspers, Hermann Hesse or Thomas Mann, who immediately recognized the declaration.

(Miller, 1998, para.18)

Despite these things humanity has continued to survive. Individuals thrive after some of the most devastating events throughout history. Earthquakes, wars, genocide. Where is the beauty in any of these things? It is in our ability to survive. It is in our hearts as we open up once again to others and let them find space by which to touch us. It is in our faces as we search the sky for a shooting star in the blackest of nights. It is in the strength of our hands as we grab hold of something as our world rocks from underneath us. Finally, it is in our words as we close the distance between the outside world, and ourselves, giving voice to things which need telling. It is in the stories we share and the poetry we create. We bring beauty back into a world sometimes without realizing, sometimes with purpose, opening opportunities for love, hope and shifting in a world that often needs to find these hidden gifts once again.

Poem 1.8. *Beauty*

There must be beauty buried in all of this pain
it is the smell of dirt after the first spring rain,
the crocuses that open under my window pane
and the sound of a voice learning to sing again.

It is the first big storm cracking open the sky
and the touch of new love that makes you want to die,
it is the feel of a hand on unprotected skin
it is the love of a friend from beginning to end.

It is a child's smile when they look in your eyes
it is the sound of the stars shooting across the sky,
it is the knowledge that we have come this far
it is surviving the turmoil to discover who we are.

There must be beauty buried in all of this pain
it is the rise of the self and of finding you again.

2. Saying Goodbye

Poem 2.1. Shedding

An epidural
of quiet numbness,
the pain of shedding
a past life,
the fragile layers, the hidden tears,
the buried shame unearthed,
moments when I silently emerge.

(B. Nish)

This is my journey. This is all my history. I have often wondered how I can help others through what I have experienced. I have wondered what significance my writing has for others. Does going into these places I fear, for fear belongs to the uncovering process, am I bringing anything of value to those around me? What difference does it make to me as an artist, a teacher and a human being? Now I know. Art Therapist Pat Allen tells us that. 'It is in the telling and retelling, as truthfully as we can, and in the genuine witnessing of all the stories of all people that we heal ourselves and the world.' (Allen, 1995, p.199) Allen also talks about the inner-critic and the significant impact it has for each of us. I know better than anyone how the inner-critic can continue to plague. It is through my knowing, my certainty, that I begin to change and the people around me are affected as well. It is this voice, which is both unique to us all and at the same time universal.

The inner critic in some form is universal and has nothing to do with art and creativity as such. The critic really arises from the fact that creative activities wake us up and lead to knowing. The critic says, "Don't know, you might find out something awful about yourself, don't go into that river of life, you might drown." Actually knowing is dangerous because it leads to change. Changes in perception, changes in how we live our life, changes in relationships raise fear. To live is to change. And no matter how positive the eventual outcome, change often evokes feelings of loss and even death.

(Allen, 1995, p. 48)

By creating space for those who have suffered like I did as a child, those who have never been able to put into words or articulate what they have experienced, I am giving them one of the greatest gifts I can, a voice. By speaking the awful truths that are so very painful, the ones that go to the deepest part of us, stabbing right through to the heart; by bringing them to the surface and out into the light we are taking them out of the shadow. When we face them, name them, expose them, we no longer feel crazy, hurt, angry and we are able to stop hating ourselves for our weaknesses. We reflect back to the world what we see of it from our unique perspective. If we can come to these things with a richer understanding of who we are and our place in the world then what we produce and what we share is rich, insightful and holds great implications for our future. Allen also points out that in dealing with trauma we are able to move past these experiences by pushing ourselves creatively. By going into the depth of our experience and moving through them we come out with a greater understanding. Then, as a collective if we put our wills and minds together we can achieve great things and the potential of what we are capable of doing becomes wide-open.

What happened was the imaginations of East Berliners became activated in the coming together to vision an alternative world and to create new intentions to replace the old. Like any capacity, the imagination becomes active through use. We cannot stop change we can help speed it up and we can decide what it will look like. (Allen, n.d., para. last)

My journey has been full of pain, anger and sadness. It is full of desire, wanting and hope. It is not easy but it is, oh so necessary, to give voice to these things for myself. In recording my own experiences I may then open a door by which others can start down their own path of healing and awakening. My hope is to speak the pain for those who cannot. I want to help those who desperately need to acknowledge their own pain, experience it, and then eventually replace it with hope. This is the path to finding our authentic selves.

The hero in each of us is required to answer the call of individuation. We must turn away from the cacophony of the outer world to hear the inner voice. When we can dare to live its promptings, then we achieve personhood. We may become strangers to those who thought they knew us, but at least we are no longer strangers to ourselves.

(Hollis, 1993, p. 116)

I am just one example of how as we grow older, like the earth to which we are rooted, we do not lose importance but merely change perspectives. As Allen pointed out, as we gain insight into ourselves tectonic shifts begin to shake our bones. It is through the process of individuation that I become aware of myself, of what has always been there - my poetic voice. It is through the method of poetic inquiry that I show how my voice saved me, helped me to survive and eventually break free and grow as an individual, teacher and artist. It is through my stories I remember I am still alive and I do have a voice. Unaware that it was always there, this voice has remained alive in my marrow even in the darkest of nights.

Poetic inquiry opens up spacious possibilities for inquiring. So, I write poetry-autobiographical, philosophical, narrative, interpretive, lyric ruminative, pedagogic, performative poetry- mystery of the earth. In all my writing, I seek to dispel absence by disclosing possibilities for presence, knowing how spilling and spelling words can conjure steadfast hope, even, especially in the midst of despair and despondency.

(Leggo, 2009, p. 151)

Poem 2.2. 3 a.m. Rain

Outside my window
a continual stream of consciousness
hits concrete.
The counting of drops between minutes,
the snoring dog,
the only other sound in the world
tells me I am not alone.

These beating drops
a serenade I have yet to find,
wash over me.
My mind wanders
to lovers past,
in the quiet of morning
when bodies in half sleep rise,
to country drives
on lost back roads,
found waterfalls
and nakedness clasping the power
of continual movement.

These light blue strips of harmony
dislocated fragments of disclosure
laid out,
the simple flourishing
of life created
mixed with hollow night,
offer another side
when I am lost,
when I think I can't stand
another moment of this time passing,
when the universe seems
to have turned its back,
I find a vacant spot to curl into,
close my eyes and listen.
Red eyes of a clock
pierce blackness,
a reminder.

The dog turns, silence
broken,
the pounding of water
from cracked eaves
above my walkway.

Coming back to school for me has been one of the greatest joys and one of the most profoundly difficult events of my life. The experience acted as a trigger, pushing me into a raging internal battle. Inner voices told me I was too stupid to do this. How did I dare come back to school? The voices played havoc with me every time I sat down to write a paper or tried to answer a question in class. Even when I tried to turn the voices off, they were always there in the backdrop waiting to jump out when I least expected it. They had lived in my unconscious mind so long; they had become a part of me.

These statements, which were embedded in my psyche from an extremely young age, were taking control of me. Yet I had the desire to heal and to conquer. I went into therapy to deal with this. At the same time as I was discovering my wounds and opening up unconscious memories, I was discovering themes in my writing which weren't there before. As strong as these voices were my creative side took hold allowing for the battleground to shift. My poetic voice was gaining strength.

Poem 2.3. *Between the Notes*

It isn't the song I want to hear
the birds at the mid-winter feeder
screaming for more food.
I had filled it last night
but a squirrel or coyote
must have jumped the fence
while I slept,
all chances now
for recovery stolen
and these empty spaces
nature seems to wrap around us
bitter and fresh, linger.

I warm coffee for someone
who isn't here,
listen for spring
but it is too far off and
there is only a single note left.
I am carried to
the door which was never shut
my arms curled around 13 year old legs
(my knees still as boney now)
holding on for dear life
as I watch out my bedroom window
for something to happen
anything that will let me know
I am alive.

It is too young to die at 13
too young to hear the silence
of your heart shutting down
full stop,
to realize that the loneliness
that sits in your gut has been there
forever, and that you know
no way off this single chord.

For a second I see you
walk down the hallway to my room
I want to turn over in the sleep I walk in
and discard you
but your voice too strong
is an octave above where my range sits.

I bump into your presence
your song wraps me
with a cold melody of loneliness.
I know that by the end of this winter
there will be only a single note left
and I will be gliding through the rest
a miracle that will just happen
when I close the door, keeping
my own voice.

This was just the beginning of what would be a very profound journey. A journey that would make me question my very existence. At the same time I was finding a place inside myself where I could go to honour who I was. As I looked deeper inside I found what I was searching for the whole time; my voice. When I began this thesis I had no idea of the events that were about to unfold in my life. I knew, that in going back to school I had opened up a Pandora's Box of emotion that was deeply entrenched in my psyche. Yet I had no idea of what lay ahead. Halfway through the program both my parents became deathly ill. Suddenly I was on a roller coaster ride, which I never dreamt was possible. In writing poetry for this thesis, I kept being drawn to the theme of bones, of loss and of grief and finally of distance, family and love. I was drawn to the weight of my family history as survivors of war and finally the pain of being a survivor myself and of healing.

Poem 2.4. *From a Distance*

My father watches crows fall
through the night sky into the ocean,
he follows stars across the universe
wants to know where they stop.
He can hear the distant
wishes for his wife grown dim,
feels her hand drop from his.
Wings flap past their heads,
the chill between this last breath
and morning is forever.

He sinks towards twilight
while the moon is caught in pools
of melting snowcaps at the top of a mountain
that forgot to say goodnight to the sky.
The maelstrom that cries in this everlasting fog

rises to meet his feet.
He watches while the sound of crows passing
rolls over clouds
marks the interval between them.
He longs to tell his wife,
her silence steals his words.

He sees the stars shooting by
and remembers her eyes.
There are touches that barely keep him going,
a nurse's fingers rubbing cream on open sores,
a doctor's words encouraging his eating
while old age devours his bones.
Sometimes he hears crows in nearby trees
congregating at sunset,
can smell the span between morning
and her night, the one long since gone.
Her silence clings to him
as he begins his own agonizing escape
from the world.

The distance closes in on me
the cold air of their existence
breathing down my back,
too many words passed on without my asking.
I am thankful for an interruption,
the crows walk my garden fence
begging for bits and pieces of food.
The mountains rise out of their distraction
follow me all day
buffering my parents haunting.
I plant an apple tree and wait
for crow babies to arrive,
for the shooting stars of night
to fill the holes,
a place where I can feel separate
from all that is carried in marrow.
A place where I can shed their skin
without causing more pain.

The process of getting to know ourselves allows us to be more authentic in our work and world. We begin to speak our truths, to play more freely and to find our passions. If we are to be truly great artists, wonderful creators of original works that come from somewhere deep inside, we must be prepared to fully explore what comes up

from our unconscious mind. We must allow it to be revealed and then move into the conscious realm. It is here through the individuation process, that we find the ability to have our true inner-selves meld with our external worlds. As Carolyn Mamchur explains sometimes our greatest gifts come from the darkest places. 'Our demons often become our angels. Consciously using our demons is a very empowering process. I have a suspicion the angels of many a great teacher, artist, person have a birth in their demons.' (Mamchur, n.d. p.208) This is where we become able to create something that is mysterious, wonderful and full.

Passion is what fuels us and like vocation is less a choice than a summons. When he was entering his 10th decade Henry Moore was asked how he could continue so richly and he replied that he had a passion so great that he could never chip it all away.

(Hollis, 1993, p.105)

As school progressed my therapy did as well, as I finally realized and really understood that the message I received as a child of being too stupid had affected me all my life. I slowly began to shed layer after layer of the voices that had told me over the years I couldn't do things, that I was too thick and that the world didn't want me. With each accomplishment, I took away the power the past held over me. I was able to choose a different path for myself with a different outlook of the world. I was becoming free. I began to grieve and to ultimately mend or so I thought. Then everything changed and I became totally unglued.

My parents died within ten weeks of one another. The pain of grieving some days seems unbearable. I understand how people become slashers in a desperate attempt to try to make some kind of tangible feeling of what is going on in their body and let it all out. I understand how they could become drunks and drug addicts trying to push down the overwhelming emotions to smother them. Jungian psychologist Marion Woodman tells us;

Jung, for example worked with one of the founders of AA. 'The craving for alcohol,' he wrote, 'is the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness; expressed in medieval language: the union with God.' Alcohol, he pointed out, is spiritus in Latin. If that wolf energy can be lovingly disciplined and turned in the right direction, it can be powerfully healing and creative. That's what the addict's journey is all about- it's a spiritual search that's become

perverted. You see it in the rituals that addicts engage in. If you work with these rituals creatively, you will often find profound religious activity going on there.” (Woodman, 1993, p. 73)

This was written with the knowledge that I have survived the worst, I will survive some more and I am flourishing even as I am in agony. The wound is sealing as it all comes to the surface and into the light.

Poem 2.5. Tears

I have forgotten what tears are for
what they can do when nothing else
consoles our living nightmares.
How they seep through my hands
wet the brittle bones that no longer bend
hard and empty with the longing of times
now escaping their grasp.

A moment longer than reality
my fingers become woven around words
the ones that pull at marrow,
bring the toxic waste
which runs through me
to the surface
to find fading petals of hope
that can cradle me when I can't escape
these forsaken days.

How often do I miss
a touch, look,
knowing nod
that lets the past recede.
The hairline of regret
cracks my worlds
two parts of me interlocked,
blown apart
into earth, blood, fire
the warmth of a hand against my cheek
fuels the flames of tears I had forgotten
wet my brittle bones.

There are days I look in the mirror and I look just like her, my mother. I have her eyes. I have her tired eyes. But that is just today. That is when I have just buried both of my parents and now I am left totally depleted. I work at a job with children some of whom

are like I was as a child, emotionally hurt and neglected and it takes all I have inside of me to keep giving everyday. I have nothing left inside. Then I look in the mirror and there she is, my mother, staring me right back in the face. Her eyes are telling me all those things she said to me as a child. "See no one wants you, no one ever will. You are unlovable. You are so stupid, what do you think you are doing?" It is hard to find a place to heal and find self-love when the person who told you every day of your life that you were ugly and stupid and crazy is staring back at you from your own face. She could cut me down in just one look, make me feel disgusting because that is how she viewed me. Now her eyes stare at me every day and I have to find a way behind them to where I exist. It can be done, it has to be and maybe by doing this the healing begins, in the staring back and the forgiving of myself there is letting go. Renowned Jungian psychologist Jolande Jacobi clearly reminds us of this point in *The Way of Individuation: The Indispensable Key to Understanding Jungian Psychology*,

Most people look unremittingly for "happiness", and it never occurs to them that happiness is not the goal of life set them by the Creator. The true goal is a task that continues right up to life's evening, namely, the most complete and comprehensive development of the personality. It is this which gives life an incomparable value that can never be lost: inner peace, and therewith the highest form, of "happiness".
(Jacobi, 1965, p. 17)

Poem 2.6. *And in the end...*

my mother
now just moments
disappearing with flesh,
the world
which surrounds her fades to ash.

There is nothing to cushion the pain,
no place to smother
the desire to escape the knowing,
each breath as tight as a cobra
pulls at her until
she barely squeezes out a sound.

I, crawl back to the folklore of my childhood,
the same lyrics
that once made my hands clap together in joy,

now push up tears from the deepest part of me
wrinkling this neatly packaged memory
of a childhood gone wrong.

I, a coyote wild and hungry,
wander through these lane ways
in search of something to sink my teeth into,
something that will carry me through the dark
where there are few morsels to chew on.

In the end we reach the same place.
A dragon burns through our minds
her body disintegrating in a ring of fire,
my heart leaping through the inferno
she tossed at me everyday
and when we reach the other side
of this final blaze there may be peace.
She sleeps, I pray.

This is not an easy road. There are many ways to end this journey, not all the best. This is why it is important to help people find a tool through which they can deal with these experiences.

The experience of the Middle Passage is not unlike awakening to find that one is alone on a pitching ship, with no port in sight. One can only go back to sleep, jump ship or grab the wheel and sail on. At the moment of decision, the high adventure of the soul is never more clear. In grabbing the wheel we take responsibility for the journey, however frightening it might be, however lonely or unfair it may seem. In not grabbing the wheel, we stay stuck in the first adulthood, stuck in the neurotic aversions which constitute our operant personality and therefore, our self estrangement. At no point do we live more honestly, or with more integrity, than when, surrounded by others yet knowing ourselves to be entirely alone, the journey of the soul beckons and we say yes to it all. (Hollis, 1993, p. 94)

My dear friend Robin died in August and when I found out I was in shock. Robin and I had similar paths. We spent many hours talking about these things, our past. Like Robin, I have other friends who have been down this road I travel. They were abused and abandoned as children. They suffer from lack of self-esteem and have struggled all of their lives with different issues surrounding this. We all have at various times been overwhelmed by life's day to day challenges and found our own coping mechanisms.

What remains central to each of us has been the painful knowledge of the repercussions endured from the underlying message we received as children in one way or another; that we weren't loveable. We have all chosen different ways to deal with what stems from the core of our childhood and the sometimes excruciating peeling of the layers which have piled up since then.

Robin's choice has affected me to my inner-being. Robin took his own life. This was his way out. I miss him through to my heart and I wish I had another chance to remind him how amazing he was and how much I loved him. But I don't. This is why what we do as teachers is so important. By shedding light on my own shadow and facing all those dark corners where things still come from to haunt me, I take the power to hold on to that wheel. I am in the driver's seat and steer from a place where I have become my true self. In doing this I can then reach out and help others to be who they really are and to survive each day with love and with laughter, because I get it. I know how important this is no matter what. I cannot steer their ship for them but my caring reminders can encourage them to hold on and stay at the helm at the rockiest of times and never let go of the wheel.

Poem 2.7. *When Someone Forgets to Say Goodbye*

In the morning
the rain collapses my garden
long forgotten in the business of summer,
now just a mix of
tree roots and weeds
nothing of substance left to contemplate.
The crows, heads hidden
beneath soaking leaves,
don't try to follow me
down the road,
their babies grown
they have left the street.
I am mindless,
half drugged with sleep
watching as the morning moves
across town, lethargic
with this last weekends shifting.

As I enter the kitchen
remove the sweater

thrown over pajamas,
a chill runs through me
and I ignore the phone
that seems to have been ringing forever.
I can't wash away the fear
that if I pick up
something more terrible
will happen,
that when I hold the receiver,
it won't be your voice I hear,
it won't be your joke reminding me
I can laugh when I don't want to.
It won't be your smile
shining through to my end.

I make tea even though
I know I won't drink it,
keep warm by the fireplace
that gives off no heat,
the day walks away from me
and I don't care.
The world has stopped
and words are becoming too vast
as I drown in a vocabulary
that makes no sense.
The storm that is soaking
through the depths of soil
which surround me
carries away all absolute truth.
I know you would be poking me
in the back if you were here,
telling me to get off it
and move on.

I have been dreaming about you
for a few days
and it is your smile
that always is there,
your quiet voice laughing
as you let my hand slip
and you wave goodbye.
Then in the morning
the frigid rain
again washes dreams into mud.
Now as the tea turns cold

my hands are empty,
there is no answer
when I ask the clouds
if you have found the peace
which eluded you for so long.
A crow flies by and I know
winter will soon arrive.
I return to the garden in the heavy rain
feel the abandonment creep towards me
as I cover snap dragon roots with old tea leaves
well aware that even this will all die too.

(Nish, 2011. p. 60)

When someone you love dies it leaves a big hole, but when your parents die everything changes. You are now an orphan, alone in the world. When you have been abused and you are facing your parents' death, things are stirred up. Everything you may have buried now comes to the surface and while you may have survived it once, suddenly and surprisingly you feel as though all the abuse is happening all over again. You are re-living it and yet you now have an advantage you didn't have before. As much as that small child is hurting it is just memory and the adult in you can now see you didn't deserve it, it wasn't your fault and it is the beginning of the real healing process.

Dead parents live again in memories, plays, and poems by writers like Colette, Eugene O'Neill, and Sylvia Plath. Writing as well as other artistic pursuits like painting, composing, singing, dancing or acting - are concrete ways to celebrate beloved memories or to resolve tormenting ones. Artists conjure their parents in their work to bring them back, to lay them to rest, or to say aloud what could never be said to them in person. Some people produce their best work after they are orphaned, and others cannot produce any work at all until then because they cannot contact their deepest selves in a parents presence. In either case, the living parent is an inhibiting- or even paralyzing force. (Safer, 2008, p.132.)

Even in my deepest sorrow, the promise of tomorrow still burns.

My mother told me things a mother should never tell a child. She told me daily that no one would want me and that I would be alone all of my life. She told me that even my teachers didn't think I could write because I was too stupid. She told me that I was crazy every time my opinion differed from hers, which was almost always, about everything. When my father tried to stand up to her on my behalf she turned on him and

didn't stop until he backed down. When my father got sick she blamed me. There seemed to be no help for me as a child. My mother was fierce and complete in her destructive path. When she died I thought I would have no feelings toward her and I would finally be free. Instead, all of the insults, which she spewed at me when I was young, were suddenly right there in my face and the pain of reliving it was almost too much.

Then, wham a few weeks later my dad stopped eating and ended up in the hospital. Over the next eight weeks we were on another roller coaster ride that was an absolute nightmare until, on January 1st, my father died. He could not live without my mother and while I can never understand why, it is not my place to judge, just to find peace. I am left shifting through memory to get to truth.

Poem 2.8. *Lingering*

How do we survive
when we wait for ghosts
who have forgotten
to leave a sign?
All that is left
are crushed hearts
pounding against rocks
in the middle of the night
as we still linger
killing time.

Saying goodbye seems like it should be easy. This has not been a straightforward passing or a comforting time. I have heard a number of people say that when they lost their mothers they felt as though their roots to the earth had been severed. What if you never had those roots to begin with? How do you make sense of it all? But I have heard from others that when someone who has been cruel to you all of your life dies, there are a million emotions which surface and it becomes very complicated. There is so much loss on so many different levels, what never was, what could have been and just the sadness of what was. Every day brings a new level of depth to the pain, to the search for meaning and for the releasing of what has been buried for so long. With the release comes a tsunami of feelings. The numbness which

was there last week is replaced by despair and agony but behind the pain lies understanding and peace.

The death of parents ushers in a second identity crisis. We revisit the same issues we struggled with the first time around-autonomy versus connection with a more fully formed personality, more life experience, and a more solid place in the world.

Mourning looks very different from this perspective; it is not a time-limited, linear progression of universal stages but rather an idiosyncratic process that is ongoing, episodic and fluid. Buried memories resurface when we least expect them; years do not loosen the links to the past. (Safer, 2008, p. 58)

There is no short cut to grieving, no cut off from the pain or loss. I grieve. I grieve my parents' death but I also grieve my parents' lives. I have never felt the depth of the hurt so profoundly nor experienced anything so acutely wounding. There are times when I feel the only thing keeping me bound to this earth are my children and the thought of what it would do to them if I left. I understand how Robin must have felt. Yet I know this pain is an honest opening of what has been inside of me right through to my bones for too many years. This is an opportunity to uncover the real truth, to let out the sorrow, to share and move on. Hollis reminds us that,

It takes courage to face ones emotional states directly and to dialogue with them. But therein lies the key to personal integrity. In the swamplands of the soul there is meaning and the call to enlarge consciousness. To take this on is the greatest responsibility in life. We alone can grab the ship's wheel. (Hollis, 1993, p. 108)

What I have learnt through all of this is that sometimes when you are in the middle of the pain there is nothing you can do but feel it, close your eyes and breathe. Pat Allen tells us that, 'Un-grieved losses are sources of deep pain that etch patterns into our deepest self. These patterns are called forth and reverberate with any subsequent loss in our lives. Art making is a way of caring for loss.' (Allen, 1995, p. 138) It isn't easy. It is distorted. Sometimes all I can feel is the shame, the pain and the agony.

Shameful secrets cause a person to become haunted. She cannot sleep, for a shaming secret is like a cruel barbed wire that catches her across the gut as she tries to run free. The secrets of shame are destructive not only to a woman's mental health but to her relationship

with Wild Woman. Wild Woman digs things up, throws them into thin air, chases them around. She does not bury and forget. If she buries at all, she remembers what, and where, and it will not be long before she has disinterred it again. (Estes, 1998, p. 381)

I have never before realized to what extent I was neglected and unloved. While I grew up in a house of 11 people (an aunt, uncles, cousins and grandparents) there was no one, absolutely no one there, in my court. Or so I believed. It was terrible to hear the things my mother had to say to me even as an adult but it was the things which were never said that were worse, which became engrained and buried. Her looks, her ignoring me, her desire for me to be someone else and the attention for everyone but me.

On Fridays my mother, from the time I was about nine or ten, would wash and then put my hair in big curlers in an attempt to straighten it. Sometimes she would actually use a powerful straightening solution on it. One particular Friday evening, my cousins arrived early for Friday night dinner. I remember my mother making a huge fuss over the girls, who were new to the family, my uncle having recently married their mother. She went on and on about how pretty they were and how beautiful they were. Meanwhile there I sat with her yanking my hair into submission, trying as hard as she might to straighten my defiant curls. To this day I can still feel how ugly, overlooked and neglected I felt. Suddenly it hit me how she had treated everyone else in this caring way except me. It made me profoundly sad.

Poem 2.9. *On Being Ashley Judd*

Just for a moment this morning
when the fog cleared from the mirror
from the corner of my eye
I thought I looked like Ashley Judd
and I felt beautiful.
I could hear my mother's voice
whispering in my ear
"You are a raving beauty!"
I knew in that second I could do anything.
As the image dissolved with shower mist
I was left remembering
my mother cursing as she yanked
my tight knit curls into compliance
telling me with each stroke

"You better take anyone who will have you
they won't be lining up for you, you know."

Gathering wet towels from the floor
I picked up my inner child
and told her
beauty is not store bought
packaged and labeled and lining shelves.
It is like the fresh clean blue
that makes you want to kiss the sky
when you stare across at the mountains
on a clear day,
or the red of your cheeks from climbing
to the top of the world
when you thought you couldn't.
It is surviving in the world
when your mother couldn't stand the sight of you
and knowing inside, there is an Ashley Judd smiling,
waiting to come out. (Nish, 2003. p. 11)

My mother never bathed me or taught me to wash my face or brush my teeth.
Small but important things. My dad taught me those things. It is the repetition of
situations like these that made me believe I was worthless. The silence on everybody's
part, their decision not to do anything that led me to believe I was all alone and not worth
fighting for.

Today's children and grandchildren are entitled to be aware,
they are entitled to believe what they saw and felt as
children. They need not force themselves into blindness.
They have paid for such enforced blindness with physical or
mental disorders whose real prospect of freeing themselves
of the chains of violence and self-deception, and then they
will no longer claim sacrifices from their own children.
(Miller, 2005, p. 157)

Poem 2.10. *In the Grass Number One*

When I lie down
there is a pain
that runs so deep
there is no way to extract it,
this memory
is grounded into earth,
each time I walk the world reverberates

with the magnitude of this wound,
the great divide
that has sat in my belly
far too long.
I want to take the moment
I remembered,
wrap it in steel wool
and suffocate it
until it can't breath,
until this thing has no life,
until it is gone.

When I lie down
there is a starburst of memory,
little pieces
floating.
I catch them to store
in the hollow of my chest,
the place now
filled with the fragments
of knowing the horror and misery
of the vacancy of kindness and love
in a mother's eyes.
These partial recollections
begin to fill in the framework
of the puzzle,
the truth that has escaped me
but is written in my bones.

When I lie down
there is a million miles
between here and the clouds,
I reach out to them
from this dark hole
where all those evil secrets fell.
The place where I have found
that small child wanting to be held.
There are people
waiting with open arms for us,
I am not ready to leave
until there is dignity again,
when I lie down.

While I felt I was left entirely alone and unloved as a child, there was, in fact, a cohort of people rooting for me. While I thought no one saw what was happening to me, I

was wrong. There were many people who did see. Some tried to influence my mother. Unfortunately for them, as for my father, my mother's control was so complete, her vision so narrow, they could do nothing to help me. At least nothing that seemed apparent at the time. Shelley, my best friend from the age of two, had wonderful loving parents. They treated me with love and kindness as though I was their own child. I spent a lot of time at their house.

As a teen my best friend Liz's parents never said a word when I slept on her bedroom floor night after night. When I first moved away from home I moved into their third floor apartment. They had become my family. I was there for Christmas, for family dinners, I spent my summers at their cottage. When Liz died at the age of twenty-five, having committed suicide, they looked after me. They made sure that I got the help I needed to deal with my grief. After my father's funeral Liz's mother told me that my mother had called her when I first moved into their apartment. My mother asked her to throw me out so I would have to come home. Liz's mom told her, "Why would I do that? She is safe here.' She knew what I was up against at home. My aunt (my dad's sister-in-law), took me aside one day while I was in Toronto visiting. She confessed to me her regret. She recognized how hard it was for me growing up in that house. She could do nothing. She squeezed my hands and face then walked away. People knew. People saw. They couldn't do anything to remove me from the situation as a child. Nevertheless they continued to love me, but I couldn't see it until now, through telling this story. As Cynthia Chambers tells us in *Life Writing and Literary Metissage as an Ethos for Our Times*. 'Part of the power of words- of telling and listening to stories- is that lives can be changed by what is told and heard, what is written and read.' (Chambers, 2009, p.78)

When I saw my father for the last time, I told him how much I loved him. I thanked him for all that he had done for me in my life. With a mouthful of sadness he replied, "It wasn't enough." I can only speculate that he spoke of his regret at not being able to dampen the force of the storms with which my mother attacked me. He, better than anyone, understood the effects of her cruelty. I have no doubt in my mind that if he could have stopped her he would have. On rare occasions he did. For the most part though, I believe he just gave up.

I continued to wonder how is it when so many wonderful things were happening in my life I could still feel so sad, so crazy. Good things don't necessarily take these bad feelings away. In some ways they make the situation worse. Underneath it is the belief I don't deserve anything good to happen to me.

Can forgiveness for the crimes done to a child be not just ineffective but actively harmful? It certainly can because the body does not understand moral precepts. It fights to make our conscious minds admit the truth and transcend our denial of genuine feelings. This is something children cannot afford to do. They have to deceive themselves and turn a blind eye to their parents' crimes in order to survive. Adults no longer need to repress their feelings. But if they do, the price they pay is high. Either they ruin their own health or they make others foot the bill. (Miller, 2005, p. 167)

Recently I had a dream. I was in my basement and I was shocked because so much of the junk I had down there was gone. Someone I knew through the writing community was there and I asked him where did it all go? He looked at me and said, "you have cleaned it out down here."

Like a river, the individuation process follows a natural flow, which Jung perceived as a natural gradient toward wholeness. As the process unfolds, it becomes clear that energy blocks, which are personified in dreams, are manifested in the body in encoded patterns, which shape the body, adjust the posture, determine the movement or lack of movement and ultimately produce symptoms in varying degrees of severity. In the fire of analysis, these encoded patterns may be changed, making the repressed energy available to consciousness. the analysand begins to experience his/her own life, begins to feel free to make the choices that are crucial to wholeness. Now the ego is strong enough to ask the ultimate question. (Dickson, Woodman, 1996 p. 172)

I am shedding a lot of the clutter that resides in my basement. I have no doubt I will get to a cleaner more comfortable space. I realize as these things unfold I have always known at some level I am not crazy and that I am worthwhile. There are safe places we find while we go through these things. Mine is in my words but also with a few close friends.

Poem 2.11. Untitled 2

My days wrought with exhaustion
tire me,

the fear of being alone
pushes me to places
I can't be.
I only want to sleep, to hide,
to listen, just listen.
To hear the howling sadness
of the wind blow past me,
feel the tears of the sky
wash over me
to quiet the forces
that are erupting within.
I only have to listen now
I don't have to look
remember these fireworks
shed light on darkness,
there are hands waiting
in the light to hold mine
and the wind can smile too.

I am finding the space I need to do this work. I can say my mother was sick and she likely was, but it doesn't really matter what made her do the things she did. One day it hit me that if I had been her mother she may have been an entirely different person. The what if's.

Dear Mom, Living Mother

There has always been distance there. Distance between who you were and who you wanted me to be. I tried so hard to find a place for me but it was always you I found inside myself instead. Now as I look at you and your life I want to address the child in you. The child in me wants to ask you to come out and play, wants to sit in the sandbox with you and build castles. Wants to listen to you sing in ways that only you can sing as the walls go higher and higher. I never heard you sing. Never heard you recite poetry or talk about a book you read. I never heard the stories of your childhood. I never heard your stories. I know they must have been in there, somewhere.

When I look at your life I see a woman enslaved by family and desire. You so wanted to be something you could never be, a princess. You wanted to have money and be doted on and loved in ways that only you knew. You had a husband who loved you so much.

Who attended to your every word. Who made you his world. Yet nothing he did was ever good enough for you. Only those in your birth family could ever do anything that was acceptable or good. Everyone else seemed, somehow to disappoint you. You must have felt very alone in not being able to accept others or what they had to offer you.

I appeal to that child in you who was so vulnerable. I appeal to that little girl. She at times must have felt alone and abandoned by the world. She saw what the world had to offer and could never reach out and grab it because it never quite filled her need. She realized that as much as being Jewish enriched her life, it kept things from her as well. It could even bring death.

I want you to know that it is ok to feel alone and live in fear. We all do at times. Had I been your mother, had I been the one looking after you, I would have made sure that you never felt alone. I would have held you, loved you, let you know that even in your darkest hours there was always someone there for you. I would have told you all of the time how lovable you were and how much I wanted to be with you. I would have taught you that things were just things and that it was the people in your life that matter. I would have made sure that you treated those in your life with respect and care. I would have taught you that you must not toss people away like objects. I would have shown you that it was the people who cared about you who mattered and that you also had to take care to show them that they were important as well.

I would have made you understand that you were loved by everyone and it was important to honour those around us and cherish them. I would have been firm but loving, strict but kind. I would have let you know I believed in you. I would have made you feel you were never alone. I would have closed the distance between you and the world that kept you at arm's length out in the cold. But mainly, Mom, I would have been witness to your voice. I would have given you ownership of your stories. I would have given you room to grow, to expand, to explore. I would have let you discover who you wanted to be; apart from me. I would have been so proud of the Lilly that was growing up. I would have honoured you, always. So from me to you, Mom, I address that child who, for whatever reason was never nurtured properly. I give her the hugs

she so desperately needed so that she could have grown up to do the same for her daughter. I send hugs from my child's heart to yours.

With love. Your daughter Bonnie

What of my father in all of this? Where does he come in? I believe like me my father somewhere in his own life had lost his voice. While he could be a stubborn man he was under my mother's thumb and loved her with all his heart. It didn't matter how badly she treated him, he, as my cousin later told me, would look lovingly at her always. Yet there was another side to all of this. When I first arrived in Toronto after my mother died and walked into my father's room in the nursing home where he and my mother lived, my brother was already there. Within minutes of being there I realized that there was so much love between the three of us and that it was my mother that came between us and made life unbearable. My father had become powerless against her and was unable to protect me. Take her out of the equation and it was an entirely different picture. When my mother died, I did not speak at the funeral. My brother gave a speech that suited the situation talking of her as a wife and friend and leaving the two of us out of the equation. When my father died ten weeks later it was an entirely different matter. I wanted to speak and knew each word was important. My brother and I had discussed this after my mom's funeral and while I began thinking about what I wanted to say I couldn't write it until the day before my father's funeral. It had to come from the moment and what was truly in my heart.

Joyce Kilmer. 1886-1918

119. Trees

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,

5

And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in summer wear

A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

(Kilmer, 1914, <http://www.bartleby.com/104/119.html>)

This morning I woke up and the first thing that popped into my head was there would be hundreds of people at my dad's funeral because everyone loved my dad. And yes everyone loved my dad. From his quirky sense of humour to his open kind heart he was a determined man who loved life and all those he came in contact with. In conveying what my father meant to me I hope I can find the right words and Dad I hope I do you justice.

*As a child at our house every Sunday we would order in food often Chinese and then after dinner we would all sit around in the living room watching *The Wild Kingdom*, *The Wonderful World of Disney* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Dad would lie across the sofa and I would lie across the top right above him. I remember always feeling so safe and protected and comforted there. That is how my dad always made me feel.*

Recently, when Dad was sick and I was finding it hard being so far away I went out and bought some Chinese food, sat down on the sofa with my youngest daughter and watched a Disney movie. This childhood memory gave me strength and courage to go on and wrapped me in the love that I felt whenever my dad hugged me or put me on his shoulders to carry me as a young child or simply just lay beside me on the sofa on a Sunday evening. These simple gifts are the ones we cherish, save and pass on. My dad passed on so many wonderful things to me, which I am proud to have. They are not the material possessions that so easily come and go over our lifetime but rather the incidentals; the things that no one talks about because they are the everyday things. The things we take for granted that we all should have and the momentous things that only certain people can give us. These are the things my father gave to me.

My dad gave me my words. Whether it was through a poem, like the one above, recited over and over again through the evening drives we took when I was a teen when he made his business calls, this is where I learnt to think critically, to question everything and to believe in the power of love because my father so loved me. And while that may seem like a simple statement it isn't. Working on a day to day basis with children who don't have a safe place or anyone who

makes them feel loved or special I know it is the most important statement we can make about one another and the greatest gift we can give our children.

My father taught me that through compassion and giving you receive the greatest joys. I know because he was so proud of the fact that he knew each one of my friends not by name but by their street address as he insisted on driving us everywhere. It was his joy and also his way to stay connected and I was really honoured to have him in my life that way even as a teenager. And even near the end when, my dear friend Sue went to visit him, he at first didn't recognize her until she told him she lived on Clinton and he knew right away who she was. All my friends adored him. But Dad did this for everyone whether they were family or friends. He was truly generous with his time and made sure that if someone was in need he could be there to help them. That was who he was.

My father taught me by example. He was strict because he had a sense of justice and what was right and wrong and was determined to pass this along to us. But he also had a sense of adventure, and curiosity. He taught me to skate, took me fishing and showed me that it was never too late in life to switch careers or go back to school. He was always pushing himself to be more and find out what was just around that next corner. I remember being out in a fishing boat with my dad and he made a huge deal every time I caught a sunfish even though he then made me throw it back. Dad made me feel that what I did was worthwhile even in the smallest thing and that he was proud of me. He made me appreciate my accomplishments because he helped me to work hard to achieve. He knew that some things didn't come easy for me like spelling or math and yet he never gave up on me. He pushed me to keep trying. I never did become good at math or spelling. My dad gave me the gift of being stubborn, of trying with all of my might and of ultimately living life on my own terms.

Most importantly my dad taught me to laugh and to play. Whether it was getting down on the ground with my children to play blocks or riding a bike he was there. Ultimately because of this he gave me the ability to think freely and to create. Dad with so many words about you I find I have too few to adequately say what a great man I always thought you were or how much I loved you. So Dad this one is for you.

Poem 2.12. Untitled Number 3

It is in the skies
that our eyes meet,
memories washed against
a backdrop of scarlet
flood around us and as you remember
I remember too.
You are pulling
the string to roller blinds
their yellow tinged stained bottoms
block our view of the world
when drawn.
You release the darkness back
out to earth while robins
and blue jays
swirl near lilac trees.
The cool morning breeze blows
through windows usually shut tight.
We eat scrambled eggs in silence
you read the paper, I look at comics,
it doesn't matter I think, we can talk tomorrow
or next year,
after all when you are seven
you believe there is the rest of your life
to catch up.
But you, you realize that each morning is another day
past being, a pearl you tuck in your pocket
for later, along with the frail pages
of love letters you wrote now forgotten and poems
lost you always remember,
these are the treasures you gather for the days
when you come home and don't leave,
the ones that sustain you when the darkness returns
and the blinds are closing.
I hold your hand; feel your heart beat slowing.
"Can you see the blue jays?" I ask.
You nod, look beyond me to where
the lilacs have dropped their leaves.
The robin's nest is empty
the garden silent.
Your stillness fills the room
your eyes no longer search the skies,
but I know every time a cloud moves
I will feel you once again.

Dad I love you! Bon

This is the unearthing; the facing of all the mistreatment and craziness in my life which is at the root of this pain. It is the reclaiming of that inner child and giving her voice. Of hugging and nurturing and letting this child know she is wonderful. By admitting I was wounded, I am releasing the demons and changing the script. By writing about these things and sharing them I am taking the power away from those who hurt me and taking my own power. It is the realization that there was also love.

So most of all if we are to heal ourselves, we have to ask what our spontaneous healthy child wants. For some, the encounter with the free child will be easy; for others the work will be difficult, so deeply buried is this denied essence. When Jung experienced the Middle Passages, he sat on the shores of Lake Zurich and built sand castles, played with toy figures, carved and shaped stones, bringing his rich intellect and intuition into contact with neglected regions of his soul. To his neighbours he may have appeared crazy, but Jung knew that when we are stuck we are saved by what is within. If this free child is not approached consciously he or she will break through unconsciously and often disruptively. It is the difference between becoming childlike, that is, in touch with ones inner child, and being childish.

(Hollis, 1993, p. 104)

In coming through this journey and finally voicing all the cruelty that was unleashed in my life I let go of all that is painful and come away with so much more. I have unlocked that Pandora's Box and I find I am left with an abundance of hope.

Poem 2.13. *In the Grass Number Two*

When I lie down in the soft grass
I remember my mother,
that place
cushioned by the vibrations
of our bodies moving as one.
When I lie down
I feel the womb of the earth
grass, wind, and air,
embrace me,
smooth the edges of sorrow
and blanket me with a force
I'd forgotten was there.
I can feel it laughing.
moving up my spine

into my veins
inside my heart
where I have been weighed down
with the remembrance of being born.
The place of knowing,
the understanding in my bones,
that I was never wanted
that I should not have come.
I let go just to be.
The freshness of world,
the purity of the moment,
pours into my nostrils,
washes away the pain.
I can smile as the leaves smile
when the wind brushes up against
their underbellies.
I can laugh
like the grass that I tickle
with my toes
full-bodied and whole.
I am thankful
I can lie down
and just be in the grass.

3. Of Love and Bones

Poem 3.1. Heartache

I toss my heart
like mosquito wings broken
in the quiet dark of night
without ceremony.

(B. Nish)

Introduction

One day a bottle of ginger ale exploded all over me. While I was changing and then washing the sticky kitchen floor for the fifth time I was getting angrier and angrier. I couldn't understand where it was coming from. Suddenly I realized what it was all about: the process I have been experiencing. My story is unique in that it is my story, but like anyone who lives through battle there is always the horror, the fear and the silence. I have been afraid to break the silence. To let go of the years of pain to which I had become accustomed. To let go of all the inner turmoil and suffering. To stop stuffing it down and try to forget or worse deny. At some gut level I have always known it wasn't right. I always sensed there was a better way to live, a healthier way. I am a survivor. Like the survivors of war, when one begins to delve into memories one experiences trauma as though reliving these experiences all over again. Yet like survivors of war there is a healing that occurs by the act of telling. Professor Leah Bradshaw reminds us that;

It is only as Jack approaches old age that he has become preoccupied with his past. In recent years, he has joined a therapy group with other Jewish Holocaust orphans, and from his association with these people, Jack has been encouraged to write his memoirs. Jack tells me that this writing of his story has been a great catharsis for him. As he chronicles his life and forces himself to resurrect painful memories, he only now feels that he is becoming an integrated person.

(Bradshaw, 2007, p. 9)

Now as a writer I have the power I never had as a child: I have my words. A friend told me recently, “every day you say it, these things that happened to you and everything that you feel, when you say it out loud, you are taking back your power.”

As my story begins to unfold everything from my unconscious pours out on to the page. I realize that it is time to share, to open up and let what has been buried for so long come into the light of day. It is in the transformative power of words, my poetry, where I find solace, hope and some form of truth. For as the images bounce between the spaces of these pages my heart is released. I only hope that I have done justice to my ancestors, and that as I hold court I have done so with grace. As American poet, distinguished author, Jungian psychoanalyst and post-trauma specialist, Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes. PhD. tells us,

In the best tellers I know, the stories grow out of their lives like roots grow a tree. The stories have grown them, grown them into who they are. We can tell the difference. We know when someone has grown a story and when the story has grown them. It is the latter that my tradition is about. (Estes, 1992, p. 463)

This is my family history, our stories. This is the part that we all wear like medals. Medals that we are proud to have hang around our necks on the one hand but which inadvertently strangle us on the other. We are Jewish by birth, this fact has never left me. Even my children are Jewish by Jewish law. Simply by being a part of this clan I carry the weight of the history my ancestors had to bear. The demise of our race at the hands of a cruel and calculating dictator. The weight of it, though subtle is definitely always there, passed along from one generation to the next. It is always in our bones.

As is this ancient story, as throughout all of human history, and in my deepest family traditions the ultimate gift of story is twofold; that at least one soul remains who can tell the story, and that by the recounting of the tale, the greater forces of love, mercy, generosity and strength are continuously called into being in the world. (Estes, 1993, p. 3)

Poem Series

Prelude

In the death camps my history lives.

I shiver as I begin to collect the data that shows the timeline for the eradication of the Jews. It is not whether to show this here but how much to show that becomes the question. It only takes a few to make the point but the point goes on and on, page after page, year after year as the atrocities grew. My mother told us repeatedly how lucky my great-grandparents were because their gas stove leaked one night and they died together robbing the Nazi's of the chance of splitting them up and sending them to the gas chambers. My stories are of family and history, of love and death and ultimately survival. There is no escaping any of them; they are written in my bones.

1939 - Nazis and Soviets divide up Poland and a there is a forced labour decree issued for Polish Jews above the age of 14. Stars of David are issued to all Polish Jews over the age of ten.

1940 – Auschwitz is chosen for the site of a new concentration camp. Polish Jews are confined within ghettos.

1941 - Auschwitz becomes active. The beginning of the use of gas vans in Poland.

1942 – Zyklon-B is used at Auschwizt-Birkenau for the continued extermination of the Jews.

1943 – Beginning of eradication of Polish Jewish Ghettos. Gas chamber and crematorium are built at Auschwitz.

1944 – Hungarian Jews begin being sent to Auschwitz. The last of the Jewish ghettos are destroyed. The gas chamber at Auschwitz is used for the last time.

1945 – Liberation of camps and Poland.

Poland's Jewish population before the war 3,300,00. After the war 300,000 with a loss of 3 million souls.

Poem 3.2. Devotion

Her eyes have followed
his devotion for over 45 years,
some prayer shawls aren't as long suffering.
He pats her hand as she clears the table
for Sabbath dinner.
He sees the pain of her bones
when she moves,
has watched it travel through her
with time.
She never complains
but he knows,
hears the whimpers at night
when she shifts in dreams.
He holds her close as a sand dollar
found on a winter beach,
intricate designs on a breaking shell
needing to be protected.

In the ghetto they sit across the table
from one another
the grey sky drops warnings
into the mud below their broken window.
They miss the children, grandchildren,
that have left for new countries, new prosperity,
and the ones left behind
who live in fear staying
in a place where they are invisible, hated,
the drone of war growing stronger every day.

He says a prayer for calm seas
she sings a lullaby to babies
now grown.
He closes his holy book
kisses its corner,
takes her hand
and they go to bed.
His arm around her loosely
so that she feels no pain

In the middle of the night
when the world turns
its head the other way
in silence
the fumes of an ancient stove

fill their tiny home
and they take their final breath.
In the sunlight their bones intertwined
are at peace, final and resting,
how wonderful they will never know
the terror of a world exploding
where they would have been ripped apart
into the death showers of gas chambers.
He is smiling
she is free of pain.

Poem 3.3. Kaddish

A Prayer of Mourning

"May His great name be blessed for ever, and to all eternity"

At night I wake in cold sweats
a fever of fear runs through the room
as though the darkness has created it.
I cannot see but hear the voices still
that call out in dreams
distant and alone.
My bones creak the memory
of stories etched into walls cracking
from the weight.
Uncle Henry's tattooed wrists turning
the Yiddish paper,
sits on the sill of my mind.

Uncle Henry,
shorter than my teenage brother,
salami and smoked herring wrapped
in brown crumpled paper
carried carefully under his arm,
permeates the Sunday air, as he arrives
straight from his butcher shop
to argue, tell stories, complain.
His dark eyes laugh
while jokes hide bleak memories
that travel not far behind him,
stories that last a lifetime,

seep into bones
without his saying a word.

In my dreams there are guns
men with no faces
peering through windows.
Nazi uniforms march in unison
up the middle of our street
while I hide shaking behind the sofa,
wait for my father to find me
the smell of something burning
always just a little off centre
pulling at me
as if from another world.
When I wake I find safety
beneath the covers,
calm breathing pushes me
to fall into a pleasanter sleep.

Uncle Henry,
crossed legged
stiff arms around his chest,
jumps up, touches the air above my head
to make a point, I laugh.
His eyes bounce around the room
as everyone watches
his enormous gestures filling space.
The fireplace hidden
behind the TV console crackles,
the momentary smell of smoke
and uncle Henry stops,
frozen in mid-air, his vision
sinks him back into his chair,
to silence.
I can see his mind is full of images,
the ones I have only seen in magazines,
real pictures of blue grey bones
piled as high as our garage,
carcasses rotting in the sun
and his mother lying exposed on a summer day
at the top or at the bottom, no one knows.

Sometimes, at night
I think I hear them,
voices calling words

I don't understand
above my dreams.
Some call out my Jewish name
"Bayaliba, Bayaliba"
haunting cries
over a low steady roar,
as skin falls away
to bones
I taste the ash in my mouth
and all that is left is fire
and a name on the wind's breath.

Blessed be His name, whose glorious kingdom is forever.
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaddish>, n.d. a)

Poem 3.4. Of Love and Bones

Pulling bones, pounding veins into powder,
my mother's blue twisted hands
wrapped around fish dough,
sizzle of ball after ball
dropping into water.
Her triangular body
dances between counter and stove,
blood red hair
bobbing over steaming pot,
she screams to Aunt Betty
for salt, to stir, more salt,
as I lie under the grey metallic table,
listen to life being crushed
into Passover dinner.
Fish guts and sweat fill my nostrils,
blankets me as I doze in the comfort
of the hustle and bustle
of the afternoon.

At night, my mother exhausted,
body clumped into the sofa,
knees pulled up to sagging breasts,
a fish ball crumbling.
The stench of death still wrapped

around her praying hands,
as closed eyes rummage
through a turbulent history
bubbling deep inside her.
She moves from one end
of a bad dream to another,
the death camps,
family carcasses piled against
a wall of stories told over time
pull at her frail bones,
memories burned into each family ritual
fall below the mind's surface,
as in the dark she reaches into thin air,
twisted blue hands searching,
desperately trying to wake up.

(Nish, 2009, p. 6)

In March, I was invited, by the Jewish Community Centre, to be a featured reader at the Sidney and Gertrude Zack Gallery. I put together a set of poems that told of where I had been in the past year. My poems were about grief and loss, sadness, abuse and survival. At the end of my set I chose to perform my *Of Love and Bones* poems. I asked Lorraine White-Wilkinson, who is a member of my cohort, the group of students I went through my Masters course work with, to choreograph a dance for the piece. She is someone I had performed with before and respected. I used Karl Jenkins *Benedictus*, from the *Armed Man*, a piece of music I cannot listen to without crying.

The *Armed Man* charts the growing menace of a descent into war, interspersed with moments of reflection; shows the horrors that war brings; and ends with the hope for peace in a new millennium, when "sorrow, pain and death can be overcome". (Jenkins, n.d., para. 3)

The first time I heard this piece was at a performance by a choir in Vancouver. They had young dancers perform during the *Benedictus* and it was magical and haunting. My friend Sharon who was in the choir gave me a copy of the CD for Christmas that year. I then went on-line to see if I could find the piece to use in a class to go along side something I had written about my mother. I found the most stunning rendition of it on you-tube with Karl Jenkins conducting while images of survivors of a war flashed on a screen behind the choir. It was one of the most powerful things I have ever seen. I knew then I would use this piece again in a really significant way. I knew I had to use Jenkins' (2008; used with permission) music in *Of Love and Bones*.

It is in our own vulnerabilities that we open the space for others to meet their own vulnerabilities and truly do the work of the soul, and more accurately the bodysoul. For the beauty of Sexton's work is the body and soul are inseparable, one gives way to the other.

(Snowber & Wiebe, 2009)

When I feel vulnerable I am sharing a piece of myself that is real. I am showing in my work what is important. Mostly I am liberating myself from the confines of my past, and in so doing allowing movement for my soul. These poems are a part of where I come from. My history. My family history. It was an important piece of what I needed to share it. A part of the story, history that needed to be told. A part of the healing process. It seemed right that I share this with Lorraine through her movement.

Dance celebrates the body in motion - striding, leaping, curving, soaring, holding. Dance - whether it be religious dance, tribal dance, social dance, one soul dancing alone for the love of the dance - dance is an image of ceaseless energy forever moving toward a threshold that begins in what is ending. And so we dance toward a new millennium.

(Dickman, Woodman, 1996, p. 176)

Lorraine and I met to go over the piece and see how it worked together. Repeatedly we walked through the process of seeing how her body fit with my words. As the sun shone through her dining room window it was not lost on me how in another time and another place other women may have been doing this same thing. As her body twisted and moved around my words I was carried away to this other time. I could see them sharing their creative work, as we were now, only to be interrupted by gunfire signifying the onslaught of war. I knew in that instant no matter what else I was lucky to be born in this time. Had I been born in the 1940s' I would have certainly been taken away to some unknown destination and fate. For now I was safe, in sunshine. I turned my attention back to our work at hand. We mapped out where we should be in relation to one another. Then one afternoon when the gallery was empty we went to rehearse. Everything seemed to be working fine. We were set to perform. By the end of our set we had people in the audience either close to tears or crying. 'In relation to metaphor a released body, is capable of resonating. Like a cello, our body is an instrument that vibrates in relation to sound waves. Every cell hears.' (Dickson, Woodman, 1996, p. 186)

When I think of it now it still sends shivers up my spine. This music is so hauntingly beautiful. Lorraine's dance so poignant. I felt it was extremely important to

bring it into my thesis work. It was, a huge part of my journey and so close to my heart, to everything that I had done. It is my history, it is in my bones.

We set out to recreate the piece in the same space, this time without an audience, but with Tara, a videographer. We met on the Monday to rehearse. Tara came to watch us to get a feel for the piece and to see what else we would need. She watched as we tried to remember and map out what we had done a few months earlier. Lorraine's part was partially improvised, so even with her notes we knew things would change. As Celeste Snowber tells us in *Bodydance, Enfleshing Soulful Inquiry through Improvisation in Dancing the Data*:

The word improvisation stems from the Latin *improvisus*, which means, "unforeseen." The element of surprise, wonder, mystery, and discovery is at the heart of improvisation as the dancer, writer, or artist forms the unformed until that which is invisible becomes visible. Improvisation becomes the act of instantaneously finding fresh movement. (Bagley and Cancienne, Edts., 2002. p. 24)

As Lorraine and I went through the work over and over, each time it had more meaning. By the end of the evening the piece felt right. Now, as I stood in the spotlights in the empty gallery, I was ready to read. I had found my voice. I also knew I was not alone.

On Wednesday we met to film and it was a whole different process. Working through the piece, we filmed over and over again, as Tara caught us from different angles. At each iteration the poems became more engrained in my body. I could feel my throat giving out and yet I pushed myself. I moved into a corner waiting while the music played. It was here that I had the most difficulty holding it together. Here, I began to miss my father. I pictured him in his hospital bed. He was in pain missing my mom. Nothing on this earth was left to give him the need, desire and will to go on. I listened to my words as they came out of my mouth. He was there with me. He was one of the reasons I survived my childhood.

Nazi uniforms march in unison
up the middle of our street
while I hide shaking behind the sofa,
wait for my father to find me
the smell of something burning

always just a little off centre
pulling at me
as if from another world.

By the end of the night Lorraine was in tears. Repeating this piece over and over had touched her as well. She reminded me of our first performance in March. When we finished, the curator of the gallery asked everyone to stand and move, to scream, to yell, to shake off the history that had wrapped around our necks. While not wanting to forget the horrific tragedy to which we were bound, we needed to find hope beyond the sadness. I too found hope in the creation of this film. My father was himself a survivor, not of war, not of beatings, but of a life bound to a woman he loved who could not love him back. She was incapable of loving anyone. My father gave me the courage to go on, even when he had none for himself. For that I am forever grateful, forever bound to him. I am a survivor and I do continue.

Rebecca Luke-Kapler tells us that 'Poetry has a way of drawing us toward a phenomenon so that we feel the emotional reverberations of a shared moment.' (Luke-Kapler, 2009, p. 75). In creating this work I found closure in so many ways. Lorraine's dance closed the distance of the work for me. Because of the history of our collaboration, the emotions themselves became so large we were overwhelmed. Because of the history we have and the emotion we allowed ourselves to bring to this piece, it had a profound effect. The experience of performing allowed us to open things up in ourselves. Watching her perform, seeing her become overwhelmed by emotion, something in me opened up. "For me the kinesthetic energy of the live performance gave the text a lifelike dimension and lifted the experiences and voices of the participants off the printed page." (Snowber, 2002, p. 15). The distance I may have felt between myself and the piece closed. I found myself in the piece. In that space I could feel my father with me. His love was guiding me through the pages of our painful family history. It was sustaining me as he always did. It helped me as he always had, to unravel what had passed down from generation to generation. Our collaboration had exposed the terrible history, complex and tragic, yet profoundly moving and beautiful. In working with Lorraine, I found the distance I needed to close the emotional gap that had stifled my voice far too long. I found beauty in all of the pain. For this I will be forever grateful to her.

Poem 3.5. Forgiven

When she dances the airlifts
and the movement
of all the universe's stars are stilled.
My words follow the grace of her body
weaving in and out of history,
while the cries of a million spirits
swallowed into our wombs
for eternity, rest safely.
Any and all burdens
we have captured
are released with the stretching
of her arms toward heaven,
tears fall as her feet
pound out meaning
on the earth's torn soul,
holding us
in this moment
as the world heals.

Later while seeing the piece, which Tara had begun to edit, I knew there was something more needed. At the beginning she had me standing and reading the introduction. It was too much of me and I felt uncomfortable in this. I had images I had used when I first created this piece for class. The images spoke with as much power as my words. I sent them to Tara and she worked her magic. When I returned there was so little I needed to give her. She had a clear vision of her own. Once again the collaboration gave me the distance I needed to know where it was appropriate for me to be in the film. Her instincts to overlap Lorraine and I were bang on. There were a few places where I asked her to change things but they were very minimal. In the end because of time constraints and copyright issues with the photos, we opted to just leave a picture of my Great Grandparents at the beginning of the film. We also believe the words speak for themselves. When Tara had my Jewish name splashed across the page it seemed forced. I asked her to try imposing an image of one of us over it, and as soon as we saw it we knew that was perfect. It incorporated the image of my Jewish name with the sadness of the face. Having my name in there was important for me. It allowed me a deeper place of context within the film. I was brought back to my Jewish roots. Names, as Jewish storyteller Peninnah Schrm explains, are important. They identify us. 'The word shem (name) contains the core Hebrew letters of n'shama (soul). According to

the Jewish tradition, names are important for identification and family history, and, more essentially, for revelation of the soul or essence of the individual. (Midrash Tanhuma). (Schrm, 2006, p. 72) I wear Bayaliba, my given Jewish name, with dignity. It is with pride I have kept my father's family name, Nish originally Nishmus. It is never lost on me the significance of this name, which means soul. Peninnah Schrm continues;

All of these three threads share the same wellspring, namely, Jewish sacred texts and the Jewish vocal traditions. The speaking voice calling out names and telling of sacred tales, and the chanting voice singing prayers, share one thing in common: the human voice. Voice is produced by breath. Once again we have a related Hebrew word to n'hama, that is, nishma, which means soul and breath. Therefore, when words of text are breathed, they unveil the soul.

(Schrm, 2006, p. 78)

Tara completed the mandala Lorraine and I had begun with the creation of this work. They became my family throughout. Careful of one another's needs, we worked through, around and with each other to create something I believe in the end speaks for itself. It is all of our voices coming together as one. Together Lorraine and Tara helped me to breath soul into this work, giving it a full life of its own.

As Carl Leggo reminds us in, *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature*, in telling our stories we open up space where we are able to understand one another and ultimately create together. 'In a similar way, I am suggesting that by thinking about my own life I can enter into the lived experiences of others, all of us engaging in conversations that contribute to the constitution of understanding and connection.' (2007, p.131) I will never forget the power of this collaboration. It is in my bones as much as the history we shared of my family. They now are engraved on my family stone forever. My words opened up the space for us to create together. Combined with Lorraine's dance we were able to close the distance with the history. Tara's work sealed it. Our collaboration, the history Lorraine and I brought to it, overwhelmed us but because of this it was a profound experience. As a witness Tara's film secures it with love.

Working with them both was an honour. It allowed me to find my voice and understand that sometimes the voices of many are needed to hear the voice of one. While this is my story, my history, their vision and creative in-put, allowed me to create

something more profound than I would have on my own. I learned about the affects my history has on others. I learned how the tragedy of what I carry affects others. Our work together helped each of us to grow independently. This collaboration is important work on so many levels. It allowed Lorraine and I to find space within ourselves to go deeper. We created a piece of work that was wholly ours and yet it was owned by each of the individuals involved as well. With trust and love we came to this piece. We each brought our unique experience and ways of working. Thus the piece evolved into something stronger. I was finally unloading the burden I have carried all my life. I am now aware of its impact not only on colleagues and myself but also on the world around us. Most importantly though, this process allowed me to see how my writing allowed me to change. How dredging up this history does make a difference in my own life and allows for me to move forward in so many ways. It allowed me to close the distance for myself on a past which in some ways was not mine but which I carried around with me from my own childhood. I became a voice for all those who could not speak, for my own inner-child silenced by an over-bearing mother and for my grown up Bonnie longing to move on.

The longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release. It was the joy of reunion that enabled me to see that the act of writing one's autobiography is a way to find again that aspect of self and experience that may no longer be an actual part of one's life but is a living memory shaping and informing the present.

(hooks, 1999, p. 84)

Poem 3.6. *Metamorphosis*

Metamorphosis
Metamorphosis
Metamorphosis

I

emerging from the dark side of the moon
the faithful and the dead
come together
forged in the fire of night
spirits remember.

in light
 a discovery,
elegant, fluid

old growth memories reaching.
I sit with endless choices,
 cocooned around the edge
of something I haven't seen before.
 Starting - ending? continuous?
 wonderment and uncertainty
 my blanket.

I try to sleep,
words and pictures
steal my voice
cracked volcanic sentiment
erupts,
 sweeping complexities
reflect elegant moments of understanding
time and blank pages
there is no direct answer.

II

Words.
At the end of the day
there is nothing else left us
but our words.
We sing, holler
hollow out containers
to keep them safe
then store them in places
we forget.
It is hot
I can't think,
want to
crawl inside an icebox.
My words fall away
frozen layers on rooftops
beginning to drip
in daylight.
You try to catch them,
they slip.

not knowing,
open to everything

hoping and wanting.
at night the trees cry
can you hear them?

Listen;

there is a baby singing in the woods
wanting you to know.

IV

I have memories
that bounce around in my head,
push me further
into moments of words.
I wrestle with this inexplicable side
walk behind the moon
and wonder at the depth of craters
that catch my foot.
My lips mouth
the silence of understanding
as I realize
I am not lost.
Words become a backdrop
for the falling
into acceptance.
the releasing of creation.
You watch in silence
ready to catch me,
to answer
the too many questions
waiting,
It is this innocence I hold onto
the beauty that keeps me here.

Metamorphosis
Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis
Metamorphosis

We have emerged
the moon.

from the dark side of

I come out of shadow. I open memory to the light of day. Let it be seen. I don't remember everything from my childhood. I remember enough to begin to understand. These things were essential to creating who I am today. This is now about closing the distance between myself and all of my past. All people deserve to be treated with dignity. This is about knowing the truth and never forgetting. My story while different from my ancestor's is essentially the same. We all paid a hard price for just existing. I am worth so much more. Every child is. Every person is. I am trying to find the beauty in all of this, even if it is just a single moment. Even if it is just a memory that keeps me warm.

Poem 3.7. *In Memory*

There are eucalyptus leaves
on my windowsill.
I don't know who brought them home
or when their browning edges
turned toward a fading sun.
Warmth emanates from the sight;
the kind that doesn't come
from the side of a newly boiled
cup of tea,
or the hug of a child as they pass through
the kitchen to grab crackers
for all the neighbourhood
in the middle of summer.
It is different.
I stop myself
from picking them up,
remember how frail
these moments are if rushed,
the dying of something small
and forgotten
generates the seed of memory.
My mother stooped over a mixing bowl
chocolate covering her apron
the sun of mid-day
heats her back.
No words, no face
yet an eternal picture
she unknowingly presents.

The curling of dying leaves
offers peace, renewal.
I count the times so precious now missed
her presence so desired, never had, now
just a wish dropped at the side of the well.
Tender thoughts wrap me on this cold day,
I hold them just as the leaves grasp for the light
one last time.
The kettle whistles.
I move away from this ledge
the day turns its head towards night,
I am left in my empty kitchen
eucalyptus leaves withering,
the darkness of missing returns.

(Nish. 2012, p. 29)

4. Creating Space

Poem 4.1. Transformation

The dirt of redwoods
and the mid October sun
are the only witness
to old growth
transforming hearts. (B. Nish)

Now as we become more authentic how does this translate to the education system? As teachers we imbue our students with knowledge, this in turn helps them to find their own voice. This encourages their own process into authenticity enabling them to find their own passion. Maxine Greene, a philosopher and educator of arts education, writes extensively about the importance of both educator and student as individuals and the importance of self for each. Greene believes that educators who come to their students as whole individuals, who are sure in themselves but not closed to the world, will allow their students the space to explore, grow and create for themselves. This allows students to realize their full potential and gain ultimate freedom.

Greene in turn believes that the young “are most likely to be stirred to learn when they are challenged by teachers who themselves are learning, who are breaking with what they have too easily taken for granted, who are creating their own moral lives” (Rasheed, 2002, p. 398)

Greene takes these ideas a step further by stating that in doing this the implications for society are huge. She imagines our place of education to be spaces where individuals are encouraged to explore their voice, to grow into their own thoughts and to find their own words for experience. Things, which may be old, then become new for them as they create their own means of expressing the world back to us.

There is always a possibility for different views, experiences and ways of being in the world. As she says “it is within this possibility that space opens up for the pursuit of freedom within a public space.”

Where persons appear before one another as who they really are and what they can do. (Rasheed, 2002, p. 398)

In education, if an environment is created whereby we have the freedom to explore and challenge, there are then infinite opportunities where we may find ourselves. It is here that the imagination kicks in. This is extremely important because it is through our imaginations that we are able to play and expand our worlds and ourselves. It is through all of this that change is feasible.

'Again, it takes imagination to become aware that a search is possible, and there are analogies here to the kind of learning we want to stimulate. It takes imagination to break with the ordinary classifications and come in touch with actual young people in their variously lived situations. It takes imagination on the part of the young people to perceive openings through which they can move. (Greene, 1995, p. 14)

If what Maxine Greene envisions is to happen, then we as older teachers have a lot to offer our students. If, in fact, we take the time to explore influences from our own past, we become far more open to understanding that life isn't always straightforward. It isn't always possible for students to put themselves in their seats and just learn. If we can offer them something more, something to hook them into the desire to discover, then we can perhaps spark in them a flame that gets brighter as they explore and create. They will then begin to understand that which has taken us decades to know. An aging population of educators does not need to be put out to pasture. Rather, there is much we can give if we give of ourselves as James. G Henderson points out,

Good teaching comes from the heart, from the true identity of the teacher, from a long and arduous journey of self-examination. It is not reliant on prescribed lesson packets, meticulously written lesson plans, efficient classroom management, and success on standardized tests. It is reliant on passionate teachers who are engaged in self- discovery and their own continuous growth; creative teachers excited about the possibilities of divers thought; fair-minded teachers committed to the principles of equity; and caring teachers filled with a deep compassion for others. Good teaching is reflective of the teacher as a person in a very holistic way. It is reflective of the mind, the heart, the soul, the very being that is the teacher. It is reflective of the teacher's place along the journey of "becoming." It is reflective of the teacher's disposition toward learning and the degree to which wonder, curiosity, and wisdom converges in his or her work. (Henderson, 1996, p. 199)

As educators, our experience, our authenticity carries weight and importance. It is especially valuable in a society where we see the breakdown of the family, and of rules and regulations. Many young people, especially those at risk, are left to fend for themselves. They must find a place that is wholly theirs. To lead them in this search can be a powerful experience for all involved. Writer, educator and activist bell hooks sums it all up so perfectly.

When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to engage students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. In my classrooms, I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share. When professors bring narrative of their experiences into the classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators.

(hooks, 1994, p. 21)

Pandora's Collective Outreach Society is a charitable organization in the literary arts I started almost ten years ago. Pandora's, over the years, has grown in the number of people it has reached as well as the kinds of events we organize. What began, nearly ten years ago, with a small writing group sitting around my kitchen table every week, has evolved into a whole gamut of weekly, monthly and yearly events which reach hundreds of people throughout the Lower Mainland. Our Summer Dreams Literary Arts festival is a multi-day event now in its ninth year. It is comprised of 17 literary groups with over 100 performers. Along with the festival, we annually feature three poetry contests for adults, teens and children. We have had children enter from as far away as Italy and Egypt. We have created scholarships that we give to a youth every summer to attend the Vancouver Public Library Summer Book Camp. We have also presented poetry workshops at the Book Camp. With Pandora's Collective I have facilitated workshops in alcohol and drug rehabilitation centers, Covenant House, The Gathering Place/Vancouver School Board and inner-city schools to name just a few.

In 2005 we started a book drive that collected and sent 500 books to Zimbabwe. The following year we were able, through a web of partnerships including

Creative Insight Communications, the Vancouver Public Library and Rotary International, to increase this number to over 33,000 books. We then transformed this initiative into a Loonie/ backpack drive which inspired classrooms to collect a Loonie from each child. With this drive, so far, we have been able to send two children to school for an entire year in Zimbabwe. As Executive Director I oversee every aspect of the organization and ultimately am responsible for making sure all of these things run smoothly. This thesis would not be complete if I did not address how the work that I do with Pandora's affects me. As well, what I do both as an artist and teacher and what I have been through in the last year has affected what I do at Pandora's. As Educator Kimiko Akita tells us, 'A teacher's personal life intersects with her students' lives. A teacher's critical life-event could have a significant impact on her students.' (Akita, 2006, p. 57) If we are authentic in our classrooms then what we bring with us, what we carry inside of us, will impact our teaching and our interactions with our students. Not leaving our lives at the door makes us vulnerable, more human, better equipped to understand the stories of those coming into our classroom and better able to engage with them in a real and profound manner. Carl Leggo echoes this. 'All my autobiographical research is devoted to my own professional development and the professional development of other educators. But for me to grow professionally, I also need to grow personally. Autobiographical writing is both transcendent, and immanent, both inside and outside, both internal and external, both personal and public.' (Leggo, 2007, p.124)

Only Hope was left within her unbreakable house,
she remained under the lip of the jar, and did not
fly away. Before [she could], Pandora replaced the
lid of the jar. This was the will of aegis-bearing
Zeus the Cloudgatherer. (Wikipedia, n.d., para. 7)

Pandora trapped hope in the box. According to this version of the myth it was the will of Zeus. This is what Pandora's Collective is about. Giving hope. How can we give hope to those who are abused and neglected? At Pandora's we emphasize that we believe as long as there is a single hope, human beings are able to preserve no matter what the circumstances. Maxine Greene re-enforces this idea. 'Dialogue, that is, cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. People trying to be more fully human must not only engage in critical thinking but must be able to imagine something coming of their hopes: Their silence must be overcome by their search.' (Greene, 1995, p. 25)

How do we give hope to those who are in dire need? What are the key elements necessary in making all students feel valued, heard and ultimately worthwhile?

Poem 4.2. Morning

A light scattering of silence
dusts morning,
peace washes the sky
as we in observance
stand hand in hand.

Tomorrow will bring
a thousand new meanings
released with each breath of wind.
This is faith,
the time together never enough
but imagining still.

Through Pandora's and the school system I have worked with both adults and children in need. I have seen how a kind word can make a child's day; a child who has come from a home where they are severely neglected. I have been witness to how writing opens up a door for people with drug and alcohol abuse. It allows them to move through their healing process, which then allows them to move on to other opportunities.

The process of making peace with our stories requires us to identify, understand, accept, and embrace everything in our past that has caused us pain'(Ford 2002 103).When you have a mix of students of different ages, sexes, experiences, it is only normal that folks will have different developmental paths. It is essential that there are no predetermined expectations, but rather attentiveness and an open acceptance and celebration of whatever comes.

(Mamchur, 2008, p. 202)

Providing youth a safe place to express themselves, that is the key. Opportunities, caring and guidance are essential in aiding them to find alternatives to violence, substance abuse and even self-harm, which often can result in death. We cannot, as teachers, remove these individuals from the often grim situations in which they live. We can make sure they are treated with dignity and respect, give them encouragement and space to grow and flourish. We can encourage a sense of entitlement as to who they are and the possibilities of what they can be. We can give

them hope. What we offer is the knowledge that they have a significant voice and they should be heard. It is their right and we as educators have an obligation to fulfill this need.

As a teacher, I recognize that students from marginalized groups enter classrooms within institutions where their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed, whether these students discuss facts-those which any of us might know- or personal experience. My pedagogy has been shaped to respond to this reality. If I do not wish to see these students use the "authority of experience" as a means of asserting voice, I can circumvent this possible misuse of power by bringing to the classroom pedagogical strategies that affirm their presence, their right to speak in multiple ways on diverse topics. (hooks, 1994, p. 83)

More than anything else the question then becomes how do educators achieve this? After all educators are not therapists. Yet, if they are working with an "at risk" population, it becomes ever so clear how very important this is. At some point in our lives each of us have experienced trauma, whether it is an injury, a death or abuse at the hands of someone we loved. Educator Celeste Snowber reminds us that given the proper space the classroom can be an important place for our students.

I do not see the classroom as a therapy group, but I do see that it continues to be therapeutic, an important distinction. Many times students and I have found the prayers of tears and laughter as central to the classroom. If we teach who we are, as Parker Palmer says, I also believe we re/search who we are. All of who we are and are becoming can be brought to the possibilities for transformation. (Snowber & Wiebe, 2010)

Poem 4.3. *Slipping*

I am here now waiting
for the walls you slip through
to hold you still, just for a moment,
for the wounds that heal us
to seal the hole you created
while passing.

I am two again
in my crib
feet bound in shoes
held together by a metal bar
meant to correct pigeon toes.
I hear my voice

so small, trying to reach up
over the bars
to find you, like then
you walk around me,
my voice falling so easily into air
pulls at you.
You turn into forever sleep.
My cheek burns
where your hand
should be, reminders
that I believed you walked
on water
while I swam under the table
needing to be close
knowing to stay out of your way.

Tonight
I put out candles,
draw a door,
say a prayer to keep me still,
there is no going back,
no holding on.
I burn for a peace, for rest,
walk my own crooked path
knowing saying goodbye is now forever
and just for today.

(Nish. 2012, p. 66)

We know how hard it is to focus and commit ourselves to our work while going through the emotions associated with these circumstances. For those who live in this state everyday, how can we expect them to be able to learn? It is a part of our job to find a way to connect with these students. So often students slip through the cracks because no one understands what it is they are going through in their personal lives and how it affects them at school. If we don't have the ability to go beyond the surface of our student's lives, sometimes we as educators miss the essentials.

German educator Kurt Hahn described modern youth as suffering from the "misery of unimportance." In earlier times they were indispensable for the survival of the family unit. Working in the fields and shops beside their elders they built a life and a nation. Experiences in extended families and cohesive neighborhoods made cooperation an everyday occurrence. The young and the elderly helped one another, and large families offered abundant opportunities to give and receive love.
(Brendtro, Brokeleg, & Van Bockem, 1990, p. 43)

I also work for the Vancouver School Board. As an educational assistant I work with children who come from some of the poorest families in our city, from a First Nations Reserve. I struggle when I imagine what their home life must be like. They come to school hungry. They become stressed when it is time to go home. Caught between two very different worlds they are slipping between the cracks. Bused into school, they mix with children who come from very affluent families. Their dire circumstances become even more apparent. The community, from which they come, turns its eyes away from their distress. Sadly I am witness to how the demise of their culture has left them stranded in a system, which does little to acknowledge their losses, or the particular circumstances in which they live. They have lost their language and traditions. They are losing any place where they can find themselves. They are losing hope.

Poem 4.4. *Tied*

Because you are here
sitting in this room
watching as your words
walk by the window,
trying to figure out
how to make them stop
from colliding with a world
where you are lost.

Because your language
is never invited inside
to play or stay
for conversations about your ways
only bits and pieces left
to gather in a basket
your grandmother wove
in happier times.

Because you are here
in this chair
trying to understand
how slipping numbers into place
will make your life easier
put food on the table,
when the numbers don't add up
in your life today
or tomorrow.

Because the change
that rattles on the table
is loose
and nothing in your pocket
rattles when your hand
digs deep
coming out to search
for what you really need.

Because the songs
we make you sing
are of laughter and hope
we assume they resonate
when you are left
alone
to find someone
to tuck you in.

Because the sound
of a bottle cracking open
or the banging of a door shut
are your lullabies
the sound of stomachs crying
in the darkest of nights
your companion
till morning.

Because in the morning
you are here
sitting in this room
watching as your words
walk by the window,
trying to figure out
how to make them stop
from colliding with a world
where you are lost.

There are those out there fighting to keep these children afloat. Fighting to pull them through a system that leaves them stuck. There is little I can do to support them other than help with some schoolwork. I bring in some snacks. I give them a smile whenever I greet them. It is my wish everyday that I bring them a bit of hope. I understand it is little enough. One of philosopher and educator Nel Noddings' areas of

focus is that of the ethics of care and how we treat children within the school system.

She tells us;

Schools today pay some attention to the satisfaction of physical needs. Hungry children often get free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch. However, American society still has a long way to go in providing for the physical needs of children. Many need dental work that their families cannot afford. Too many have no medical insurance, and some need eye examinations and corrective glasses. Children who are hungry, in pain, or handicapped by poor vision are unlikely to be happy, and a classroom filled with such children cannot be a happy place. (Noddings, 2003, p. 240)

There are all kinds of people at risk. Teenagers are just one group. Children, who live daily in homes where they are neglected or worse, are at risk of falling off the edge of the world. Adults, who have some kind of addiction they are struggling with are at risk of falling back into the abyss from which they are trying to escape.

Poem 4.5. Forgetting Mr. Low

Downtown on the Eastside
where diners close late
with metal bars
strapped up against the flat belly of a doorway,
rumours spread faster than rolling paper
between junkies and pushers.
It's Saturday morning, early, three a.m.
Vans begin to roam the streets
looking for good drugs, bad girls
and Mr. Low sits in his corner, undisturbed
as a buzz begins to stir
in an already buzzing street life.
Pimps scream up and down the road
ready to jump on encroaching vendors
while their girls smoke cigarettes in bunches,
hunched under a street light
with shirts hiked up almost to their pelvic bones,
night air slips under to remind them business is slow,
the long fingers of hunger
stretch across their thinning young bodies
pushed to the limit of uncaring.

Mr. Low shifts position
lifts his eyes down the street

where a tomb has formed in the alleyway.
Boys pounding boys into the pavement
screams in the night,
the sound of an empty bed,
a mother's terror,
wakes her miles away.
Mr. Low listens,
shuts his eyes and remembers,
there were times when woman touched him,
boys followed him,
now he sits as drool drips down his double chin
into his soaking lap.
A siren startles him, someone pokes him.
'Hey old man! Go home.'
Mr. Low nods, they move on.
He waits for the smell of coffee
from across the street to permeate the air,
until then he sits comfortably watching, undisturbed.

The buzz is quietening to a dim hustle
the hookers have all been picked up,
their pimps sleep on cots
in the cramped boarded rooms of a burnt out building.
The boys have bandaged their cuts
and gone home to mother
while the morning dew settles
on Mr. Low's shoes
and he knows he is forgotten,
just as he forgets.

(Nish, 2012, p. unknown)

Over the last five years I have been going into a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center to run monthly poetry workshops. Doing these workshops has been one of the most rewarding things that I have done with Pandora's. I have been in groups of 5-25 people writing poetry. I have watched as they shared their stories. I have been honoured as they included me in this journey they have bravely undertaken.

The time for story is most often dictated by inner sensibilities and outer need. Some traditions set aside specific times for telling stories. Among the pueblo tribes, Coyote stories are reserved for winter telling. Certain tales of Eastern Europe are only told in autumn after harvest. In archetypal and healing work, we weigh when to tell stories. We carefully consider the time, the place, the person, the medicine needed. But most often even these measurements are frail. For the

most part we tell stories when we are summoned by them and not visa versa. (Estes, 1992, p. 462)

Over the years I have developed a set of exercises that have worked effectively to bring out some interesting and often moving and evocative work. I begin by having the participants brainstorm to the word journey. We then go on to write a group poem. This can be fun, deep and allows them to become comfortable with what we are doing, especially for those who have never written poetry before. The participants seem to enjoy this and usually everyone participates. We then move on from here with a series of exercises, which allows them to dig a bit deeper, to open up more and more layers. I realized sometime during the last year that I had done these workshops for so long I could do them blindfolded. Now as I was entering into my own painful journey I felt I needed to connect with what I was doing on a different level. Psychologist Patricia Wilnesky discusses trauma and treatment.

One-way of looking at treatment is Shaprio's 'the onion versus the artichoke' approach. Those of us trained in the sixties and seventies were taught the onion approach; you keep peeling the onion of memories with lots of tears; you peel a layer and weep, then another layer, more tears, and so on. However, when you get to the core of the onion you are left with nothing, except maybe bitterness. If you peel an artichoke it's very difficult at first, tough, even scratchy, and painful. But the sweetest part of the artichoke is the heart that is protected and hidden inside (Wilnesky, 2008, p. 58)

I discussed my thoughts with a member of Pandora's. We talked about the workshops we ran and how we could make them more meaningful for the participants. To help facilitate this endeavor we thought it would be a worthwhile process if I would bring in an art therapist to do a workshop with us as writers. This would give a different perspective to what we do. It would be a very interesting experience for me on so many levels. For one, I had to tap into something that I don't usually tap into; the visual arts. I was excited and intimidated all at once, knowing how important this could be for me. Art Therapist Catherine Hyland Moon, tells us that, "in cultivating the artist within, we become better equipped to empathically connect and cultivate the artist in others." (Moon, 2001, p. 48)

There were eight of us involved, five writers and three non-writers. We held the workshop on a Saturday afternoon at the bachelor apartment of one of Pandora's

member's overlooking the ocean. It was quite a charming place. Warm and welcoming, at least in the beginning. The two women, whom I brought in to facilitate this workshop, were students doing their Masters in Expressive Arts Therapy. This would count toward their practicum. They were both young with varying experience. Each had a different mode of operation and related differently to the group. It was their first time working with a group in this kind of a setting and for many of us in the group, our first time participating. It was interesting to see how these two women, who were students themselves, set up the workshop and the similarities to what I do. It re-enforced for me what is so important in creating space for students.

Beneath the smooth veneer of good manners and polite etiquette that greets me on the first day of class, there are always pockets of energy hidden in the room. Often they center around pain and disturbance, but sometimes around great beauty or mystery. These pockets of energy can be triggered accidentally or intentionally, skillfully or clumsily, but they're always present, waiting to be activated. If I create a classroom environment that is accepting of these pockets without getting lost or absorbed in them, students will tend to get more involved in the course. The more permission they have to be their true selves in our undertaking, the stronger their participation will be. (Bache, 2008, p. 167)

While I had taken part in and run numerous writing workshops, some combined with dancers, I had never been involved in this medium of visual arts. I was excited by the prospect and scared to death all at the same time. So were these two young woman and yet, they came into the apartment and totally took command, moving furniture, covering the walls with paper, negotiating good spaces for us to work in and making sure nothing was in a spot that would be damaged. So many of the things which they brought into this workshop were similar to what I bring into the many different workshops that I do. They had us start by introducing ourselves to make everyone comfortable. They asked us to each find an object in our bags. We then introduced ourselves to the group by telling something about ourselves through the objects. Something personal, something telling, something daring, if we chose. Most of us did.

Mine was a small book 'The Tao Te Ching' which I have carried in my purse as a kind of talisman since 1995. It was given to me, years ago, by one of my closest and oldest friends, Dave. It was his inscription in the front of the book which really touched me. 'December, 1995, Dear Bonnie, Old friends are the best friends. There's more to it

than that of course: we honor love and friendship as ideals, expressed in words; but only devotion can express devotion.' In light of everything that has happened in the last year this seemed extremely important to share.

We all found a space where we were comfortable. We were told to choose a few pastels and close our eyes. I stared at the big white sheet of paper in front of me, excited and terrified all at once. I had no idea what would come out of me. We started with a visualization, which began in our feet and took us up into our arms. Gradually we began to make movements on the paper with our pastels. I found myself moving my arms in a rhythm of circles, over and over again, alternating between light and hard pressure. These circular movements engaged my whole body. We then started to add paint. This to me was the interesting part. I randomly added colours. One part of my picture was very light, bright yellow, while the middle was darker. As I added and took away paint from my creation I found, as I got really dark I didn't want to go there anymore. I wanted to keep it lighter. I added dark, scraped it off, added it again, always keeping one side light. To me, this whole process seemed like a metaphor for my life at the time. Just as I was going into the dark shadows, I still found light on the periphery and I did not want to remain in darkness. I was shifting. My perspective was shifting. Visual artist and Arts Educator Elliot Eisner has been a pioneer and opened many doors in the Arts Education field. He believes that,

Becoming aware of our capacity to feel is a way of discovering our humanity. Art helps us connect with personal, subjective emotions, and through such a process it enables us to discover our own interior landscape. Not an unimportant achievement. All of the process that I have described contributes to the enlargement of human understanding. We cannot take such conditions or characteristics or feelings into account unless they are available either by our volition or by the impact of others upon us. (Eisner, 2008, p. 11)

Later the facilitators told us to add other things they had gathered in a box. I had ribbons, pictures, film, a conglomeration of odds and ends. I shattered C.D.'s and glued them on. I then cut up film strips and a picture of a waterfall. All these pieces were put together in a chaotic fashion but clearly belonged. Later someone said they thought mine to be the most chaotic piece of everyone in the group. Perhaps it was, but I saw pieces reflecting a self trying to come together out of the darkness into the light. I completed the work by stencilling on a few words: "I find me."

Image 4.1. Letting Go, Mixed Media 1



Note. Bonnie Nish, 2011.

Image 4.2. Letting Go, Mixed Media 2



Note. Bonnie Nish, 2011.

The final part of this process was for us all to give words in response to one another's work. We then wrote freely using the words we received. After this we broke into groups to share our process. Our group being all the writers, wanted to share what we wrote as well as talking about the process. When we came back together we shared a bit of what we had talked about in our smaller groups. A lot of emotion came up for people in that room. It was an incredibly powerful experience. There wasn't enough time for us to totally debrief due to time constraints. Some of the women were feeling as though they had entered a place that wasn't safe for them. Later, after all was said and done, some of the emotion spilled out into the group as a few people got into an argument and I realized that the facilitators did not give us enough debriefing time. People were being triggered by their own issues coming up through this and bringing it into the group. There was nowhere else to go with it. As religious studies and education Professor Christopher M. Bache tells us,

We don't get to choose our students. They choose us. They come to us as they are, as life has made them. Some have been treated gently by circumstances while others carry deep scars already at an early age. The older our students are, the more life experience they have tucked away and the more they have formed opinions on a variety of topics. As we lecture, we bump into these opinions and experiences. We touch areas of life that they have history with and they react. Sometimes they react strongly because their history is deep and painful.

(Bache, 2008, p. 167)

Being in a position to observe the facilitators was an important process for me. On a personal level I revealed and released so much of what I had been going through. The death of my parents, the process of finding myself through the pain of discovery and finally what was important in what I give to my own students.

Changing and Finding Voice

What also is in the literal meaning of *vulnere*, "to t(ear)" is ear. In our tearing or in our tears, we come to a listening. This is the listening that turns us towards the inner life, and in turn towards the outer life. If one cannot hear the interior quakes of a life, it is very difficult to hear the quakes and questions of our students. We are beckoned to listening, to ourselves, the world and to each other in our capacity to tear and have tears. We write with our tears, both of joy and sadness, and here is the incarnation of word. Word becoming flesh. Flesh becoming word. An embodied writing, and embodied practice of teaching.

(Snowber & Wiebe, 1211)

Initially what this workshop did was create a safe space where we could explore. We were all able to create something personally important. We had been introduced to one another by bringing something of personal importance to the group. The visualization allowed us to get in touch with ourselves. The artwork allowed us to open up and later gave us the words to complete the circle. It also made me realize the importance of how we create space for our students and how it can impact others. It reinforced the need to make sure we bring closure before we let our students leave. Mostly it showed me the shifts I was personally undergoing and how these things were affecting me in a huge way, both as teacher but also as an artist.

This opening has changed how I write. I feel I found something that day that let me get in touch with a part of my creative self I hadn't reached up to that point. For me this poem says so much about the last year and the true healing, which has begun.

Poem 4.6. *Saying Goodbye to My Mother and Lover on the Same Day*

I already miss
the lingering of your touch
on my hip
on cold wet nights,
the tender kisses
that kept me close
while your ocean blue eyes
begged me to fall into you.

It's been comfortable
and lonely and sad,
sitting in shadow,
waiting for you to arrive in whole.
The largeness of my loss, your fear
eclipses everything good.

The whispers of promises
you could never keep
slip so easily out of place,
puzzle pieces we tied together
now snapped,
our hearts heavy as death,
heavy as the moment I buried my mother.

I feel your breath on my shoulder
close my eyes
to become lost in the unspoken prayers
that belong to another place
another humanity,
the dirt of regret kept in both my pockets
haunts me still.
I say goodbye to each of you
and push on into the light.

I began to think about what I had experienced in this workshop. How could I apply it to what I do in the workshops that I conduct? It was not long afterwards that I found out. On one particular day I sat in a class comprised only of women. They sat across from me wondering where I would take them. A bit on edge, a bit excited, we began.

“What do you think of when I say the word journey?” I asked.

“I will write your words down on this flip chart. I do all the physical labour, you do the mental work. That is how I like it on a Sunday morning.” They laughed, the fact that this was somehow going to be a significant moment was not lost on anyone. The tension was broken and the words began to flow.

‘Rome, excited, views, recovery, a start point, hopeful, a finish point, death.’

We wrote a poem together about journey. I then had them write a poem of their own. The floodgates opened up for them. They wrote with honesty and poignancy about their journeys. These works were beautiful and frightening. A testament to where they had been. Usually I would next have them write a poem about being tiny and how that felt but from the perspective of a snowflake falling through the sky or a faerie on the tip of someone’s nose. Instead I read a poem by American poet Li-Young Lee named ‘Out of Hiding’. It is a poem of self-discovery, using a garden as metaphor for a place of hiding. I told them they were also on an incredible journey of self-discovery. They were coming out of hiding. What did that mean to them? What happened when they heard someone call their name? What happened next was amazing! Their work was honest, painful and yet open, rewarding and hopeful all at once. They all chose to share and by the last one we were all crying. I was honoured to be a part of their journey; proud that I could help

them find a safe place in which to do this. What they had carried in their bones came to the surface and finally they had an opportunity to oust it, to own it, to see it and share it. "When the soul is seen and heard, it fixes itself. When we witness a person's story, we are sometimes privileged to be standing beside them when a miracle happens. These miracles come in many shapes and sizes." (Bache, 2008, p. 187) This, to me, is what Pandora's is about, opportunity and giving hope. By allowing these people to find their words, to share their stories, they are healing. In healing they can then hopefully go on to lead productive fulfilled lives. They can once again become a part of a community full of supportive interested people.

Pandora's for me is just that! Community is such a huge part of what we do. None of this could have been done without community. It is the people who email me to say that they feel connected because of my e-newsletter. It is the girl who stopped me on the street a few Christmas's ago to tell me that she had done our workshop in a drug rehab centre and was still straight and still writing. It is all the volunteers who come out year after year to keep the festival running. It is the poets, established, emerging and beginners, who grace our stage at Twisted Poets open mic, or who read their poems at the end of Word Whips Writing Series or who give their thoughts at the drop of a hat at Book Talks Book Club. They are what keep this whole thing alive. Some days, when I am tired, I wonder why I continue do it all. The answer when I really take the time to think about it is very clear. It is because of this great community, with all its positives and negatives, of which I have become a part. I am so thankful for this.

In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying, and the like Community cannot be produced empty through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common; they have to find ways to make intersubjective sense. Again, it ought to be a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming. (Greene, 1995, p. 39)

Part of Pandora's mandate, from the beginning, was to provide a safe space for all writers to be heard. This has personal importance to me, as I understand the need to be heard. I will strive as long as we are doing this, to keep Pandora's an inclusive place

for all writers, where they can find community, where their words are taken seriously and they are able to continue to find their voice.

When I go in to conduct a workshop with teens at Eric Hamber, a secondary school in Vancouver, British Columbia, I am very aware of Pandora's mandate of inclusion. One of my goals in helping these kids to write is to allow them space to find their voice. I encourage them to explore within the context of the exercises, things that may be a bit different for them. I try to bring them exercises that not only enhance their writing abilities and teach them something about poetry but that will also help them to begin to connect with who they are; writers.

Last April, we invited them to feature at one of our reading events, Twisted Poets. They loved it! They read alongside a local established poet. They had wonderful feedback from the audience and begged me to come back. We will now make this part of our reading series every April. April also happens to be National Poetry month. This is not why they come back every week. It is because they have found they love to write. Writer, poet, essayist and teacher Betsy Warland says it best in her book about the writing process and finding space *Breathing the Page*. "Ultimately, our most crucial and reliable companion - the one that sustains and incites us- is the act of writing itself." (Warland, 2010, p. 157)

For me it is another reminder of why I do what I do. One night as I stood in a line-up for the bathroom after a movie, the girl in front of me exclaimed, "Bonnie!" It took me a minute to realize who she was, as it was totally out of context. One of my students from my Tuesday after school workshops was in the line-up right in front of me. She seemed so thrilled to see me. We started talking about the movie and writing. Her friend jumped in to tell me how great this girl's writing was. I responded with pride as I told her I knew. Afterwards, while I was standing in the lobby sending my daughter a text, I heard this girl come out and tell her friend she had just talked to me. Her friend, also one of my students, started to look for me. I went up to the group to say hello. They recruited another friend on the spot to our next meeting. While just a small vignette these really are the things, which keep me going. They in turn give me hope.

As for myself, many things have begun to open up. The way I write has shifted. I continue to write and process this journey I have been on in the last year. It doesn't matter that there are days in which I feel good and days when I feel badly. Life just goes on and I work through these things as best I can. I realize that while I am more than just those things which my mother said to me, I was affected by her cruelty, every day. It was a shock, to realize that not only had her words stayed with me all of these years. They not only stayed, they had become the core of my belief system about myself.

To align oneself with those forces within rather than reflexively adjusting always to the powers without, thereby furthering our self-alienation, is to feel grounded in some deep truth, the nature of our nature. In those moments of contact with the deep truth of the person. The encounter with what Jung calls the Self, one feels the connection and support necessary to assuage the universal fear of abandonment. As Caritenedo puts it, maturity implies not so much avoiding being abandoned but of abandoning ourselves with few illusions... If we succeed in bearing the anxiety of solitude, new horizons will open to us and we will learn finally to exist independently of others. (Hollis, 1996, p. 10)

Seeing this, helped me to understand I needed to let it go. I needed to appreciate what I bring to the world and not what someone else had planted there for me. Now, as I move past the pain of knowing, I come to a place where, when I pray I don't feel my words are lost into air.

Poem 4.7. *Open Book of Prayers*

In the morning
I pray
on my knees
hands folded origami birds
resting against my chest,
the energy of flight
moving up into my eyes
searching, like you, the heavens
for a resting place.
I get cold
when the vacancy of love
strokes my naked breast,
your distant voice
calling me
to spread my legs,

to remember caresses
that held me prisoner
to a bed sinking.

At eight the sky still hangs blue
waiting for the full moon
to rescue it from duty.
In the garden
rose petals, dry mouthed,
erase your words
from my pages.
I ignore them
sip merlot, circular presence
filling my mouth to distraction,
sharp kisses fermenting
on my parched lips.

And again I find myself
on knees, searching cracks of cement
that open up wounds
in the earth,
devour centipedes, June bugs
and my devotion.
Just as the moon crests
the top of the trees
the roses silenced,
close their mouths
no one listening
to their pleas.

I back up into the world's night
simply wanting to sit
legs crossed against
the flood
rising up toward my heart.
The liquid stars exploding
in veins, runs away reason
and I skip past
all of the childhood wishes,
right to the moment the heavens
dropped me on a doorstep
for you to pick up.

I pray
once again fall to my knees,
your name escaping

the image of you
cast on paper,
us, holding hands, eating mussels
by the ocean, rolling our forms
into wet sand, heat melting
clothes against bodies.
no expectations
to hold onto
but my open book of prayers.

As I move along my own creative path and things open up I can feel a dramatic shift taking place.

Poem 4.8. *The Healing*

When the healing begins
there is a space
that has been vacant for so long
I don't know what to do with it,
I am so used to having it empty.
Gradually I begin to fill it
rise to the occasion
and know
it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks
I am, I just am.

When the healing begins
I stop taking on the world,
stop looking at it as another injury
as another thing I have done wrong.
I breathe, find the time to let the ironies
slip off my back,
hold on without holding on,
just be without being disappointed.

When the healing begins
I stop noticing those little moments
the screw ups that make me
forget that it is sometimes ok
to just laugh at myself,
forget I am in pain.
To remember
that there is time to be held,
that there is time for help,
that there is time to reach out,

that there is time to be strong,
and weak and who I am.

When the healing begins
I realize that the walls
won't be there forever,
that I have been living in the night
when I want to live in the day,
that I am strong enough for a million sorrows
and weak enough for just one,
that strangers are just strangers
wearing a different suit than the one I wore yesterday,
that the times I helped someone count for something,
that the times I was hurt count,
that I am ready to let go,
to walk away.

When the healing begins
I know today I want to live,
that tomorrow I might not,
that today the pain is bearable,
that tomorrow it might not be,
that I refuse to be silenced,
that in silence I gain the courage
to speak out,
to uphold the truth,
to wonder why it is there are borders,
to understand people get shot for crossing some,
for staying on my side of the fence,
for listening when the whistle blows,
for looking at my dog sleeping and thinking he could be god,
for wanting to know god but forgetting,
for not believing,
for wondering if the world will explode as it does in my head
sometimes,
for needing to lie down in the grass and just be.

Dear Mom, Mother after Passing

Now that you are gone there is a circle around me that keeps me safe. It is made up of friends who love me, my children and even my dog. It is comprised of those who come

together when I am hurting and feel the world is just too much. They don't always understand where my pain is coming from but they seem to know when it is I need to be held up and when it is I can stand on my own. They form a mandala by which I am able to pass through layers of years of torment in order to find who I am and love myself. They are the gatekeepers, so to speak, making sure that if I falter I come back to the door. They allow me safe passage through their love. They help me to close the distance that formed between myself and a world I believed did not want me. They hold my hand in prayer and help me to find the heart of all that is important.

This has not been a gentle time, your passing. There have been days where I have felt I was all alone on a distant planet, separated from those I loved, not knowing where to turn or whom to trust. Those who have been steadfast, have always known and could understand that the pain I felt came from you. They recognized that you, my tormentor, dwelled in a part of my world where I alone could go in order to find a place of peace.

Today, Mom, as I think back over the years we spent together, you never wanting me, me always wanting to be wanted, I see so clearly how this has affected me throughout my life. I see it in the faces of the children I work with and I understand their pain. I know how difficult it is to concentrate in school when you never believe that anything you do will matter, because no one has made you think you matter.

But Mom, because of you, because of your lack of caring, your self-absorption, your lack of understanding for anyone but yourself, I have compassion. I know how important it is for these kids, that I be there for them. That I give them a simple smile in the hall or go to bat for them when someone, even a teacher has done them an injustice. How quickly we categorize and give up on those we see as having issues. How quickly we forget that if we stand by those in need of our caring they are then able to gain confidence.

It has taken me a long time to find this, Mom. A lot of years of not understanding that it was you who put these thoughts in my head. It was you who told me I was stupid, you who said that I couldn't do well in school. It was you who told me no boy

would ever want me. You said that I would be alone for the rest of my life. It was you who told me over and over again that I was ugly, stupid and crazy. It was you who didn't want me, not my friends, not my lovers, not my children, not even God.

Today Mom, I take back a small piece of myself. It is just a seed but it is a start. It is something I will cherish forever. It is the knowledge that I can be loved. I found it despite years of torment. Even after years of hearing your voice in my head every day, telling me I was no good. My Mandala is there and I have moved into the realms of my unconscious self to find you, execute a rite of passage and come out the other side holding onto this seed. The distance is closing now Mom. I can say goodbye to you. I have those who love me acting as a pillar. I am taking my seed and burying it deep into the soil beneath my feet. This is a beginning. It is my voice, Mom, not yours anymore, which moves me through my days. I am excited to be here. I can feel it now, growing. I am watering it with love, with trust, with kindness for myself. I say a prayer every day. I pray that you have found the rest you need. I have let go of my anger toward you. I don't want to hold onto that anymore. I want to live as a free individual, not bitter, sore and tired. I want to find love. I want to live a full life.

So, I let go of you. I send you back into the universe where you belong. There is no longer a place for your voice here. Only space enough for my own growing stronger every day. As my own branches grow and spread there is more distance between us all the time. More blue sky than black, I push toward the blue. I am ready to write my own stories now.

Goodbye Mom.

Rest in Peace where ever you are.

Your Daughter. Bonnie

Prayer Upon waking up

Main article: [Modeh ani](#)

אמונתך רבה, בחמלה נשמתי בי שהחזרת וקיים חי מלך לפניך אני מודה.

Transliteration: Modeh ani lifanekha melekh hai v'kayam shehehezarta bi nishmahti b'hemla, raba emunatekha.

Translation: "I give thanks before You, Living and Eternal King, that You have returned within me my soul with compassion; [how] abundant is Your faithfulness!" (Wikipedia, n.d.b. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modeh_Ani)

5. Coming Home

Poem 5.1. *Unintended Touch*

A touch unintentional
can loosen the wedged in pieces of a soul
bring to life the mysteries of love
and forgiveness.

A simple unintentional touch
opens the desktop file
where all of my memories
of love are stored

A touch can break a monsoon
into whips of whispering wind
Unintentional we live on touch.

(B. Nish)

A letter to Self today, Who am I now?

When I began this journey there was a distance between myself and my authentic child that could have filled the whole surface of Jupiter. Now as I am coming closer to the end of this part of my process, while there are bumps and crevasses on the surface, the distance around has been greatly reduced. It will never be completely closed, but it will be forever smaller.

I find everyday the voice I have discovered in this process is mine. When I feel weak or closed down I can hear it. I am not so quick to respond in a way that brings silence. Yet it is in the silent spaces that I have discovered myself. It is the times when I can sit and be with myself that I heal the most. I still have a tendency to run from the pain, the grief and the knowing. But the time between my starting to feel things, and when I actually stop running from them and just let them be, is greatly diminishing. What is it I feel? So much. So very much.

Today I woke up feeling extremely sad. I am an orphan. I have lost my parents. Both of them. For the first time in a really long time I have felt sad about losing my mom. There is a hole in my heart but it isn't black anymore. I am sad because I realize I never really had a mom. At least, not the kind I wanted or needed. My own mother was in desperate need of some mothering herself. Today I feel sad for her as well.

*This morning my fingers
desperate to type impressions
do not move as fast as they did a week ago,
struggle to find the keys of memory
that wait to be put down on a new screen.*

*My parents, in my dreams
take pictures, make moments
which don't include me,
a life full of people I have never seen
except at their funerals.
I stir from sleep,
alone in my daughter's vacant bed
she hundreds of miles away
discovering a tomorrow which leaves me behind.
I am caught between them
my parents and children
holding onto wishes
I never created.
I can feel them slip away
with each minute I lie stagnant.
I begin to look for other directions
to my morning.
find on the kitchen counter
cheese left out molding,
my black hat thrown
just where I left it yesterday,*

*the dirty dry flowers from the man I loved
still collapsed after months of neglect.
So many things around me
discarded without thought.
I loosely assemble boxes and cans
re-cycling of items no one needs
into piles I think I can carry to the trash.
They drop along the way
I sit down in the grass and cry
sorry I can no longer
keep the small things in life lined up,
can't hear the background music
I used to hum in my lover's ear
in the middle of the blackest night,
can't see the sand box my children
kept sacred on hot summer days
in the back of my mind.*

*This morning my fingers
desperate to type impressions
do not move as fast as they did a week ago,
struggle to find the keys of memory
that wait to be put down on a new screen.*

Yet I know there is some good in all of this because I did have love. I had my dad as much as he could be around and as weak as he was at times. As much as my mother overpowered him with her domineering nature and mean streak, he still, even if in the shadows, loved me. When I look back at my childhood this is what I have to hold onto. This is the seed that was planted long ago. This is the seed that I had to go down deep to find in myself. There is love. With that love there is hope. Hope that I can rewrite the script that was put there so long ago. Hope that I can find love enough for the child in me. The child who waits in the shadows to come out to play and stop being afraid. There is hope and that is enough. It is what my ancestors held onto throughout the

war. My Uncle Henry who survived the concentration camps, who came to Canada without his family to create a new family. My dad who loved my mom so much. He never gave up hope that she would come back from the darkness she fell into with Alzheimer's. That she would recognize him just for a second. When she finally passed and there was no more hope he let go himself and left the world.

This is my story. It has been full of sadness, pain, healing and joy. My words are a vehicle from which I have been able to share all of this and hopefully shed some light on things which have pained me far too long. I miss my dad terribly today but I am thankful that while the road we walked down together was a convoluted one it was still one filled with love. That is what I carry in my heart. Finally this is what closes the distance for me between myself and a world I believed for so long did not want me. I walk into tomorrow knowing I have love.

Jewish Prayer for Peace

Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever."

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/End_time_n.d.,_f._para.13)

When the silence speaks, one has gained companionship with oneself, moved from loneliness to solitude, a necessary prerequisite to individuation. (Hollis, 1993, p. 103)

It has been a year since my father passed away. In the past year I have walked through the pain of my childhood and come out the other side holding tight to something precious. I have seen my life from the perspective of an adult living in a moment gone by. This distance has given me a great advantage. This new perspective has shown me

beyond anything else, that the pain I have felt all my life, was real. I was not crazy. I spent much of my life feeling sad. It came from such a deep place that I knew I would have to go to that cellular level, to find the very moment it was born to loosen its grip. In taking control of my pain I was freeing myself. In validating the experiences I had as a child I was allowing myself the acceptance of what had happened. In shedding so many tears I was finally able to release myself from the pain. Honouring my past, not avoiding it brought truth back into my life. Psychologist Patricia Wilensky reminds us in *Pursued by Demons* that, "Acceptance frees one up to fight back and redeem one's honor because the resulting truthfulness, courage, and legitimate suffering change one's identity back to liveliness- 'After all, I choose to live' -from the 'I may as well be dead,' script." (2008, p. 40)

Poem 5.2. Wind

There is no wind today
but I am listening anyway.
Messages repeated
in the silent coughs
of the universe
hold me.
Crow-like, I have flown
through the breath of it's storms
bruised wings, cracked, broken
have carried me into the heart
of clouds so burdened
with tears, the world fears.
Land-mines of emotion explode
in fields of blown wheat
pulled over to earth.
A seed sits in mud, stirs,
takes hold,
listens for the wind.

Man's fate unfolds itself stage by stage, like a bud that harbours within it a blossom. The idea of these stages has penetrated deep within the soul of the people, leaving its deposit in countless documents of folk-literature and often also in poetry and the arts.

(Jacobi, 1965, p. 6)

For me this journey has had significant consequences. There have been times when the writing has brought tears and others when I have been stunned into silence by

the recognition of something that I had never noticed before. My words open doors and close distances. I have never before articulated how I felt about the fact that I look like my mother. It has always been difficult for me to look in mirrors, to see anything of beauty to hold in myself. In putting on the page that I realized I had to look past my/her eyes to a place where I could find myself was the one of the most powerful moments in writing this thesis. It was transformative. Educator, writer and activist bell hooks speaks to this.

When words call, to answer, to satisfy the urge, I must come again and again to a solitary place- a place where I am utterly alone. In that moment of grace when the words come, when I surrender to their ecstatic power, there is no witness. Only I see, feel, and know how my mind and spirit are carried away. Only I know how the writing process alchemically alters me, leaving me transformed. Other writers tell of how it works within them. Written words change us all and make us more than we could ever be without them. Still the being we become in the midst of the very act of writing is only ever intimately present to the one who writes. (hooks, 1999, p. *xvi*)

For me the most significant time of healing came when I wrote four letters for this thesis. I realized my mother was desperately in need of mothering herself. Through these letters I understood that life could be different. I believe that if you show compassion to someone, show them that they matter, healing is possible. I also realized the most important piece to this puzzle through these letters. I needed to find some compassion for myself. Again turning to bell hooks;

Writing the autobiographical narrative enabled me to look at my past from a different perspective and to use this knowledge as a means of self- growth and change in a particular way.

In the end I did not feel as though I had killed the Gloria of my childhood. Instead I had rescued her. She was no longer the enemy within, the little girl who had to be annihilated for the woman to come into being. In writing about her, I reclaimed that part of myself I had long ago rejected, left uncared for, just as she had often felt alone and uncared for as a child. Remembering was part of a cycle of reunion, a joining of fragments, "the bits and pieces of my heart" that the narrative made whole again. (hooks, 1999, p. 86)

Poem 5.3. Stories

Our eyes hold us
to stories
gathered to remind us

to look over the edge,
to see there is another
page to turn, always.

I continue to work with children in need, to do workshops with adults who are suffering from alcohol and drug abuse and teenagers who are trying to break away from the constraints of family. At the same time, I have also learnt something significant about myself. Writer, lawyer and activist Andrew Vachss reminds us of what is important.

For the emotionally abused child, healing does come down to "forgiveness"—forgiveness of yourself.

How you forgive yourself is as individual as you are. But knowing you deserve to be loved and respected and empowering yourself with a commitment to try is more than half the battle. Much more.

And it is never too soon—or too late—to start. (Vachss, 2010. par.)

I have always resisted calling myself a survivor. For me this seemed to have negative connotations, indicating someone who is extremely weak and stuck in the pain. Now, I realise that having survived my childhood and come out as whole as I am, is quite an accomplishment. I am a survivor!

Many people who have been treated badly do not strike out at the abuser but instead dampen down their own life force (Eros). They end up in a perpetual metaphorical defensive crouch. In effect, they have lost an essential, lively part of the self. People bury their rage out of fear (of retaliation and further injury) and ethics (they do not want to become abusers themselves). They can turn the shadow impulses upside down and, without conscious choice, force themselves to be very nice and help others instead. This can work for a long time but in the end someone either susses you out or you do it to or for yourself. Denying the shadow means that you could become a shadow - of yourself. Reparation includes accepting the truth of the major childhood loss- this is what happened- confronting the shadow- this is how I truly feel about it - and realizing that in spite of everything, something essentially good survived- an ethical, good self that allowed one to go on.

(Wilensky, 2008, p. 38)

Poem 5.4. River

A river flows through me
I can feel it
beating up against the walls of my body,
skin keeping it in place
as though if I were to burn it all off
I would dissolve to water.
I am water.
Fluid, transparent, flowing
a timeless source waiting to be tapped
if you look underneath.

I am words
captured on paper.
Folded into a bird
escaping into a world
I hope will be kind.
But my heart remains still,
while there is movement
through these dark clouds,
your words heavy as lightning
cover panels of lost frescos
now revealed, cracking
found beauty under ancient mud.
Always in a hurry
to find the next door out
back to the river,
I try to stop, to capture
the essence of this dream
before it escapes.
To find a reflection in a mirror
not held hostage
by the breath of you
beating me into tears,
to find a soul mate in my own eyes
knowing if I search deep enough
I will find love.

As I moved through the process of individuation and examined my history, I found myself. In telling my story I am unearthing what has been there for so long and I am transforming as I write. I started to find that while I had discovered my own voice, there were other voices. They hid in the background waiting, wanting to be heard.

And herein lies the challenge in autobiographical writing. We begin from the perspective of I, but this I is never isolated and alone. Each of us, wrapped up in the seemingly singular inequity of an autonomous I, is really always connected to others. Sorting out those connections occupies our whole lives. (Banks, 2008, p. 162)

Poem 5.5. The Language of the Dead and Dying

a poem written for two voices

Silence silence silence silence

here is where I

find what it is

you can not breath anymore.

Meaning surrounded by white space-

space- space- space- space- space- space-

the exhale of a cry stifled

or the final look toward heaven

blocked out by a gaseous prisonwall

prisonwallprisonwallprisonwallprisonwallprisonwall.

I touch your words with my pen

find the exclamation marks of your life

falling onto my page,

my letters form the shapes your lips

have ceased to gather.

I understand what it means
to drop out of site unwillingly,
of how being silenced
can kill you
even as you live.
We are the walking dead
walking dead walking dead walking dead walking dead
you and I
as I replace times hands
with the movement of my pen across this page,
my pen across this page, my pen across this page,
this page, this page, this page,
I give birth to us
let the blood of our infancy
move through the ink
staining the world
as our sadness
turns to beauty and our voices finally found
found found found found found found found
ring out.

As I began to play with my writing, I felt freer and freer with this process. I was letting out the voices of the past. Not only mine but also my ancestors and suddenly I felt less alone. I realized that these voices have always been there with me, guiding me,

directing me, and influencing me. As I crawl back to the folklore of my childhood my ancestors complete my mandala. They protect me and give me the strength to go on. Suddenly out of the darkness comes the light, the love. There is beauty in finding myself in this world and the pain is less. My voice gains strength every day. More confident, I uncover a myriad of voices from my past. As their numbers grow louder, the more certain I become of who I am. I know what my place is in this world. I have come home. I can speak for all of us with conviction. None of our stories will ever be forgotten.

Poem 5.6. *A Life Repeated*

a Poem for three voices

Don't hold me to anything
Don't hold me to anything
Don't hold me to anything
anything holds me in place
anything holds me in place
anything holds me in place
in place I am hiding
in place I am hiding
in place I am hiding
hiding the text of my life
hiding the text of my life
hiding the text of my life
my life in this restless cage
my life in this restless cage
my life in this restless cage
a cage held together by an orange sky
a cage held together by an orange sky
a cage held together by an orange sky
sky of honour
sky of honour
sky of honour
honouring a hush that fell
honouring a hush that fell
honouring a hush that fell
fell over the world
fell over the world
fell over the world
a world you escaped
a world you escaped
a world you escaped
escaped the text of your life

escaped the text of your life
escaped the text of your life
 your life restless as an orange cage
 your life restless as an orange cage
 your life restless as an orange cage
caged into scarlet worry
caged into scarlet worry
caged into scarlet worry
 worry and bliss
 worry and bliss
 worry and bliss
bliss that falls short
bliss that falls short
bliss that falls short
short of holding and comforting us
short of holding and comforting us
short of holding and comforting us
comforting us in our time of sorrow
comforting us in our time of sorrow
comforting us in our time of sorrow
sorrow and resilience
sorrow and resilience
sorrow and resilience
resilience opens the bars
resilience opens the bars
resilience opens the bars
the bars are broken
the bars are broken
the bars are broken
broken wings we hold and we can't fly
broken wings we hold and we can't fly
broken wings we hold and we can't fly
can't fly away from the text of our lives
can't fly away from the text of our lives
can't fly away from the text of our lives
of our lives
of our lives
of our lives.

In using poetic form I convey to the reader my profound interior experience. Poetry allows us to use metaphor to express with greater feeling. We are bodies. It is through our bodies that we find memory. We are triggered by a sound, a touch, a smell which brings back memory. In writing about it I can make the moment as real as though I

was still there. Except, in writing about it I uncover things I never saw before. As Professor Renee Norman tells us,

For the poem, I select images and incidents and words which best represent the impression of what I am trying to say; and I often don't know what I am trying to say until the poem is written, or until I receive responses to it. (Norman, 2009 Par.)

I am able to feel the pain of the longshoreman's desolate cry. It allows me to retell my history, to change it, give it meaning and therein lies the real key, meaning making. I take my life and lay it across the page with all senses lined up. My metaphors show what is there. I share my experiences in a new way. Memories touched only by my fingertips can now sit in my entire hand waiting to be massaged. My words, colourful metaphors for experience bring my memories to life. Smells, sights, feelings, days, nights are all laid out in front of me like a picture moving across the screen. I can make it sparse with just a few words to make a point, or I can weave through my history like a battleground exploding every few feet. So much to see every inch. I take my life and expose it to make a point. It is my hope the point is valid. Even as I lay it out on the playing field there are things that I haven't seen before. Things that lay in shadow now sit exposed right in front of me on the page. Images can be extremely powerful tools when mixed with metaphor. What I lay out for you with my stories, I can explode for you with my poetry. As I move through the pages of uncovering self I am not only exposing my inner-workings to you but sometimes to myself.

With these powerful words as a reminder, and in considering what poetry brings to inquiry, I recall Max van Manen who writes about all "the meaning captured by or embedded in poetic language." Van Manen comments that in self-examination we discover what it is to be human, what is at the heart of our being, and that "we need other selves, others, the Other, through whom and with whom we seek understanding." (Norman, 2009, par.)

Poetry allows me to move through these memories, to remember and to let go. It is in the act of creating that we are best able to release. It is this epiphany, this moment, when I have planted the seed, seen it take root that I know something significant has changed for me. I am excited. The language of poetry allows me to believe. For as Marion Woodman (1993) tells us, "Soul work is an act of the imagination. The soul lives on metaphor." (p. 76)

Today there is only time, tomorrow there will be only memories.

Going back to the idea of beauty, in 'How Beauty Will Save the World: William Blake's Prophetic Vision' Suzan Skylar writes:

For many years I wanted to find the beauty that saves the world. I wanted to define it. Then I worked as a social worker in Chicago and one of my protégées threw back her head to sing "Amazing Grace" at a birthday party. When she sang grace did fill the room, for Tamika has a voice that is more than amazing. She had been homeless and horribly abused. I took her to breakfast the next day.

"If I couldn't sing," she told me, "I'd have to take drugs. Because the drugs kill the pain. But beauty is bigger than pain. "

The beauty that saves the world is Tamika. The beauty that saves the world is transformative. It is the divine in the human. It cannot be abstracted from a living being. It is to be experienced not defined. This beauty does not objectify and it cannot be objectified. It does not set itself apart: it connects each creature with all others in God. The beauty of Dostoyevsky's Natalia or that of fashion models and film stars may inspire envy and/or desire, but in the beauty of Tamika's voice or a glorious sunrise or William Blake's poetry I feel connected to every living thing and can see divine beauty in all that lives. The prophetic poetry of William Blake (especially his Jerusalem) can help us see how this world-saving beauty works."

(Skylar, 2007, p. 3)

Our art, as Skylar points out, can take us beyond the tragedies in our lives to a place where we create something beautiful. It is so profound it touches us on a very deep level. It transforms us.

I am finding new discoveries in my poetry. The more I play with what I do, the more I find myself. I am giving myself the permission I need to walk away from the traditions of a past that weren't mine, to experiment and finally, to find who I really am. Pema Chodron, an American Buddhist nun, tells us in *The Wisdom of No Escape and the Path of Loving Kindness*,

The whole journey of renunciation, or starting to say yes to life, is first of all realizing that you've come up against your edge, that everything in you is saying no, and then at that point, softening. This is yet another opportunity to develop loving - kindness for yourself, which results in playfulness - learning to play like a raven in the wind.

(Chodron, 1991, p. 55)

Poem 5.7. Play

I play here
roll up my sleeves
to begin digging
through the mud
of my, your past.

I play here
remembering that things
which aren't pretty
sometimes can be viewed
from another angle.

I play here
listen for the sound
of my voice laughing, crying
and the whispers of wishes
held deep in my belly.

I play here
enter the room with sorrow
leave with beauty
content to share
all there is here and now.

I play here
hoping you will join in
hold ceremony
around the stories
which play with our lives.

It is also important to remember that in playing with, in my case language, I find those things, which connect me to both my past and my everyday experience. While the connection to my past is vitally important to whom I am, I live in the present. Who I am now is a compilation of everything that went before and what I do now. These are all my stories.

I am creating, teaching and being as myself and there is nothing more to ask for in life. I do not hide who I am but rather let the stories of who I am speak for myself.

Now what lies ahead? I look on toward the future with hope. There is love and kindness in my life. My children are almost all grown and are leaving the nest. The

distancing between us begins and yet we stay close. My oldest daughter is about to go off to Australia for a year. She has asked me to come visit her soon. My youngest daughter is about to go off to Europe with her boyfriend for the summer. She has asked me to take some time to go to Germany with her to explore some of the Jewish Museums. My son still wakes me in the middle of the night to tell me he is having a bad time and needs a hug.

Poem 5.8. For My Son

This morning I found him
lining the kitchen shelves
with old comic pages
he doesn't read anymore.
'Collector items,' he says.
I can still smell his new born skin
across the years,
see the infant smile
reaching around the universe
to find me.

Moments too old to grab
now a sleeve of memory
I want to hold
just a second longer.
I teeter,
hear the deep rooted cellar
of his voice,
ask him to read me a few lines,
the desire to hear him laugh
the way he did when he was two
holds me still.

He shakes his head
moves on while I hear
the celery crunch of time
plod down the hallway
his door closing tight
against the past,
a different moment begun.

My children want me in their lives. For me this is the greatest joy of all. I have broken the cycle of abuse. I have given them the strength of a survivor's life. I have given them our family history without giving them the pain.

Only unflinching realization of one's own past reality, of what really happened can break through the chain of abuse. If I know and can feel what my parents did to me when I was totally defenseless, I no longer need victims to befog my awareness. I no longer need to reenact what happened to me and take it out on innocent people because I know what happened. And if I want to live my life consciously, without exploiting others, then I must actively accept that knowledge.

(Miller, 2005, p. 168)

I bring to the students I work with a new found optimism which allows me to see their world a bit differently. I look for ways to connect with them, which are meaningful and brilliant. I focus on what brings them joy and sadness and opportunity. I bring them a part of myself I never could before because I hid from it. I bring them the whole of myself. In so doing I allow space where they are now able to be, where we can share stories and engage with one another with trust and freedom. As Carl Leggo so elegantly put it; "Imagine a pedagogy of listening and attending so we could hear the wing beats of butterflies." (Leggo, 2011). We create together out of our pain and sorrow, joy and laughter. This is what it is all about. This is why this journey has been so worth it. Why it continues.

Poem 5.9. Spaces

We live in spaces.
The place between here and the moon
where shadows and light mesh
the Intangible moments we crave.
We live in spaces.
The distance between us and them
those that hold our hearts and remember
or the ones in crowds who never notice.

We live in spaces.
safe, alone, disconnected,
together, joined, whole.
Existence is.

We live in spaces.
Time caught on microwaves
a moment, an hour, a year.
We watch, we listen, we are.

We live in spaces.
Twirl, weave, hope.

*We dance, walk, slip.
We live in spaces.*

We all come into this world as distinct individuals. In some ways the writing is already on the wall as to who we will be in life. We have our chemical make up and then it is just the luck of the draw where we end up. We come from loving families, rich families, and poor families, people who beat the crap out of their kids without thinking twice.

However, reparation begins when an individual is able to voice the worst that has happened, and communicate his or her deepest fears and darkest night of the soul. Survivors are really experienced with denial-denying reality, pain, goodness, mercy - denying need, suppressing desire, avoiding hope. When they speak out and realize that talking to another person who cares for them and who believes that shame and guilt are normal and healthy releases the pressure of blocked grief as does talking to a "witness," someone who is not necessarily involved but will listen. Children who have no one to talk to may end up devising coping strategies that, later on in life, can be self-defeating.

(Wilensky, 2008, p. 39)

It is all there and we come to it not by choice or with any power to change it initially. As we grow older we begin to find our power and take control of our lives. Our power does not come by ignoring the past and moving on into a future that resembles something familiar. Our power comes from going into the past, living through it again and uncovering sometimes the most painful memories. We then can grieve for ourselves. By owning our pain, knowing its depth, understanding its origin we can finally move on. As Jolande Jacobi tells us

We learn by experience mostly unpleasant, through collisions of all kinds, through disappointments and illness, that we as much as other people have shadow qualities. This insight leads to self-knowledge, which has always been considered the supreme spiritual goal, as witnessed by tradition.

(Jacobi, 1965, p. 39)

I was brought up in a house being told I was ugly as the slime on the bottom of the toothpaste container. I grew up empty and quietly suffering. That was my script - then.

Jung suggested that neurosis “must be understood, ultimately, as the suffering of a soul which has not discovered its meaning. “ Note that he does not rule out suffering, only the meaninglessness of life against which neurosis is a defense. Similarly he considered neurosis to be “inauthentic suffering” Authentic suffering is a realistic response to the ragged edges of being. The purpose of therapy is not, then, to remove suffering but to move through it to an enlarged consciousness that can sustain polarity of painful opposites.

(Hollis, 1996, p. 9)

This is my script now. I come into the second half of my life not merely as a sun sinking in the sky but as a sun ready to fill up the sky as I go down. I see from the top of the hill the magic that can happen when you believe, when you understand. Having gone into shadow and come out the other side I find hope. Most importantly I have found my voice. Now I can say to the world not only have I survived, I have arrived!

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Appendix A.

DVD: *Of Love and Bones*

Creator

Video Concept Bonnie Nish

Poetry Bonnie Nish

Music by Karl Jenkins, 2008; used with permission.

Choreography: Lorraine White-Wilkinson

Videographer: Tara Flynn

Description

The poem series 'Of Love and Bones,' tells the story of my family during World War II. Set to Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* a mass for peace, Benedictus, Lorraine White- Wilkinson, depicts through an elegantly choreographed creative dance, the sadness and pain unravelling through my words. Beginning with the story of my Great-grandparents who were affixiated in their home before the war, the narrative runs through my Uncle's memories and ends with the burden my own mother carried with her. The long lasting affects of the Holocaust and how it stayed within our family through generations, comes to life in this short narrative film.