GARDEN AS PHENOMENON, METHOD AND METAPHOR
IN THE CONTEXT OF HEALTH CARE:
AN ARTS INFORMED LIFE HISTORY VIEW

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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Abstract
This qualitative research project uses arts informed life history methodology to explore the garden as phenomenon, as method, and as metaphor in the personal professional lives of two women; one is myself. The garden as method explores my personal experience of integrating work with horticulture into my practice as a counselling practitioner. It also explores the experience of Felicity Lukace, who integrated her practice as a horticulturalist with work with people. It explores each of our discovery of horticultural therapy as professional practice, and considers how the formalization of intuitive and common sense knowledge impacts the practitioner and her work.

As metaphor this is a story which speaks of the influence of the garden—of the life giving forces of texture and colour—on work with people—for Felicity with the elderly, for me with youth; within the institutions of our professions—for Felicity as a horticulturalist and for me as a therapist; within the institutions of our practice—for Felicity in geriatric care facilities, for me in a community based mental health clinic. Considering the garden as phenomenon I explore the particular significance of the people-plant connection, as a forum and mechanism for experiences of authenticity and connection.

In my focus on the practitioner over time, I investigate how innovative practice
is influenced and develops out of the personal and professional history of each individual practitioner. I consider the new practice in the context of personal and professional development. Implications in the area of practitioner health and renewal are explored.

The processes, through which I came to locate a methodological vantage point, that could support, sustain and extend the area of inquiry and my development as a researcher, provide in themselves a parallel investigation to the focal point of my research. My detailed consideration of methodological issues is guided by the principles of creative, aesthetic and imaginative attention to process and relationship characteristic of arts informed research, and as such, offers an alternative approach to the treatment of methodological issues within qualitative research.
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CHAPTER ONE

The Garden:

Phenomenon, Method and Metaphor
I am always so surprised when people ask me if I feel exposed when I write, or speak, personally. Nervous, sure, about whether my points are clear and resonant with others, but never exposed...Writing is a retelling. A shaping of the events that one has lived. In the writing, in my experience, a precious alchemy occurs such that the writer is no longer precisely the same person she is writing about. As a writer I have a relationship to myself as the subject of my writing...I [also] tell myself, life needs more exposing. If anyone has a chance to contribute to an exposé, I say, take it. (Weingarten, 1997, p. xii)
In a brilliant and resonant fundraising strategy, the Alzheimer’s Society of Toronto includes a small packet of forget-me-not seeds with a pledges envelope and cover letter from their executive director. The letter begins: “More than one friendship has been celebrated by the sharing of flowers. I’ve enclosed these forget-me-not seeds in the hope that you will offer your hand in friendship to people with Alzheimer Disease in Toronto…” (Chang, 2000). Along with planting instructions, on the seed packet itself is written the message: “Please remember for those who can’t...These forget-me-not seeds will produce masses of lovely little blue flowers. As they brighten up your garden this spring, please remember all those affected by Alzheimer Disease. Your donation will provide urgently needed services for people with Alzheimer Disease and their caregivers.”

This fundraising strategy blends the use of garden as phenomenon, as method and as metaphor. The seeds are phenomenon: an actual seed packet emerges from the envelope, when I open it up tiny black seeds spill out into the palm of my hand. I am filled with a sense of potential: I will soak the seeds in water, I will plant them in the garden. I see the first green shoots sprouting forth; I see the first tiny blue flowers. Finally, I realize that the forget-me-nots are finished for the season. Through the combination of these actions, and the awareness or reflexivity that accompanies them, the garden becomes method.

The garden is metaphor in the explicit ways suggested by the Alzheimer’s society in the letter and on the seed packet, and in the implicit ways it operates in the imagination of me, the receiver of their message. I am reminded that flowers connote friendship and connection, when the seeds sprout and the flowers bloom they will serve as a symbolic reminder of Alzheimer’s disease. I will remember that I have been asked to offer the hand of friendship by making a monetary donation to the Alzheimer’s society. Utilizing the most commonly understood feature of Alzheimer’s disease, memory loss, I am asked to use the flowers symbolically and metaphorically, to remember for
those who can't. The choice of flowers, forget-me-nots, also intrinsically carries this message. Finally, forget-me-nots are perennials: they will return year after year, in ever greater profusion to remind me again of people with Alzheimer's disease, of the cycle of life, of the garden, and my place in it.

This qualitative research project uses arts informed life history methodology to explore the garden as phenomenon, as method, and as metaphor in the personal professional lives of two women; one is myself. The garden as method explores my personal experience of integrating work with horticulture into my practice as a counselling practitioner. The garden as method also explores the experience of Felicity Lukace, who, arriving at a similar place from the opposite direction, integrated her practice as a horticulturalist with work with people. It explores each of our discovery of horticultural therapy as professional practice and considers how the formalization of intuitive and common sense knowledge affects us in our work. The garden as method looks at the impact of the institutionalization of concepts on the practitioner and her practice.

As metaphor this is a story which speaks of the influence of the garden—of the life giving forces of texture and of colour—on work with people—for Felicity with the elderly, for me with youth; within the institutions of our professions—for Felicity as a horticulturalist and for me as a therapist; within the institutions of our practice—for Felicity in geriatric care facilities, for me in a community based mental health clinic. It looks at the sense of authority that emerges with the authentic expression of self, that is, the trueness we experience—as human beings engaged in moral activity—when what we do is an extension of who we are.

Considering the garden as phenomenon I explore the particular significance of the people-plant connection, as a forum and mechanism for experiences of authenticity and connection. In my experience, the integration of horticulture with therapy is all
about process, that is, making beautiful gardens as product is not what it is about. Rather it is intentional relational work that involves a literal positioning of humans in the natural world. It is useful in its capacity to remind us of our essential connection to the elements: to earth, sun, air and water, our most essential human needs. The common sense wisdom of the garden cuts to the quick of what it means to be human. The experience of this connection provides a literal and metaphoric grounding in context that assists us to understand our human needs in relation. Intrinsically creative and aesthetic, the garden points to our deepest potential as human beings. Through the process of integrating horticulture with therapy, by facilitating and attending to our most essential needs and our deepest potential, a beautiful garden may arise, but it will likely have more significance as metaphor than as phenomenon.

The roots of authentic self-expression and the capacity to recognize it are found in the personal professional stories of Felicity’s life and my life. These are stories peopled with characters from the past that continue to shape who we are becoming as individuals in the present. Looking at these influences in context, family, school and the health care system become the societal institutions where authentic self expression can flounder or flourish. As individuals constantly in a state of becoming, these stories also examine times of disjuncture and tension when who we are seems at odds with what we are doing. Taken together these stories of experience form a series of narrative snapshots that comprise the body of this work.

This forward and backward movement, characteristic of most identity development processes, is also reflected in the research text as my state of becoming as a researcher. Originally I selected life history as the research methodology most congruent with my epistemology and the area of inquiry. Beginning to be interested in arts informed methodologies, I had hoped that the final report would include some representations of the research that were artful. I did not imagine that I would be engaging in an artful research process, or that such processes had anything to do with the area of inquiry. What I came to discover, and chose to reflect upon and incorporate in the text,
is that creative and imaginative attention to process and relationship is less of a science and more of an art. Extending the methodological framework in my original research design past its limits, I began to engage in the research process in non-conventional ways—ways that seemed to resonate as true or right. This experience of methodological authenticity led me back to the substantive focus of the research—and the sureness that with an arts informed life history framework I had found the right ontological, epistemological and methodological fit.

Exploring research issues from an arts informed perspective, therefore, became a central part of the research process. Situating myself in this project in the dual roles of researcher and researched involved exploring the processes through which I use the garden to bring life to my work as method and as metaphor, thereby authenticating who I am, as a counselling practitioner and as a researcher. The self-reflexive process pieces in this work tell this parallel story of my identity development process as a researcher. My detailed consideration of methodological issues is congruent with the guiding principles of creative and imaginative attention to process and relationship in arts informed research, and as such, offers an alternative approach to the treatment of methodological issues within qualitative research. Contributing to the body of work exploring methodological issues from an alternative, arts informed perspective therefore became as meaningful a purpose as the empirical focus of my research. As a result representations of Felicity and myself appear differently in the work; Felicity is more present in the actual garden, while my presence is more apparent in the methodological sections. This difference also reflects the evolution of my relationship to the garden as method, that is, the reality that Felicity is today a practicing horticultural therapist, while I am currently focusing on research.

Situating the self in the research text is good postmodern qualitative research practice (Hunt, 1992; Kilbourn, 1999; Richardson, 1999). There are a variety of ways to accomplish this task. The author can choose to speak of the self as part of the academic text using academic prose, or he or she can choose to employ an alternative mode of
representation such as poetry or journal entries as a vehicle for self introduction (Glesne, 1997; Smith, 1999). Either way, the author inserts his or herself into the text, thereby illuminating her assumptions, her shortcomings, and her strengths.

Consistent with the methodological and epistemological assumptions upon which my project is based, I locate myself at the beginning and continue to “check-in” with you, the reader, as I reconsider my assumptions, and experience shifts in orientation. I have tried to communicate these shifts in a variety of ways in order to allow the significance of their meaning to resonate. Some of the styles that I have employed in the service of conveying my research process can be considered artful. At other times I have chosen to speak directly to you, my research audience, in a conversational style. My voice is casual, informal, we are having tea and catching up; yet, paradoxically, we are catching up epistemologically, methodologically, and ontologically. The conceptual shifts that I make during the course of the thesis can be heard in the changes in the tone of my voice throughout. For example, in various instances I found it useful to quote sections of my research proposal to make these changes in tone audible in the text.

I explore my breadth of cadence and tone in the presentational form of this inquiry; that is, I attempt to take full advantage of my range. There are aspects of this work that are meant to be performed/read aloud. They literally need my voice to animate them. At these moments you will likely join with me in experiencing the limits of text based representational forms.

Other aspects of the thesis are fine read silently. These are the parts that you are more used to finding in a thesis. My voice sounds familiar.

Still other aspects of the thesis blend these contrasting tones. This is my process voice, and you will get used to the sound of it, because you will hear it most often.

Following Hunt’s (1987) recommendation that, as researchers, “we begin with ourselves” in the next section I introduce the context of the research.
Cultivating Context

I first heard about horticultural therapy on a snowy morning in March of 1995 while I was driving to work listening to the CBC radio program "Morningside". Peter Gzowski was interviewing three horticultural therapists about their practice, and the development of horticulture as therapy. I sat in my car outside the youth clinic where I work as a counsellor, listening to the end of the program, watching wet snow accumulate on the flat, treeless Jane/Finch, North York plain—and I felt inspired.

...where a dirty white plastic bag clings to a chain link fence I see a carefully constructed lattice covered with morning glories

...where tangled yellow crab grass holds pools of stagnant water I see moist expanses of periwinkle

...where abandoned expanses of property lie neglected, I see rich fertile soil

...where there is separation, disconnection and isolation, I see people cultivating community.

In the following weeks I talked up the idea of horticulture as therapy with my colleagues. After a long, cold, sedentary winter, tapping into our new season energy and channeling it toward a collective project seemed easy. Since there was no money in our budget to begin a new program, we started to look for donations. The tremendous response we received from area businesses, community residents, volunteers, and environmental organizations willing to donate time and materials got the project off the ground. Clients with a diversity of needs began to engage with work in the yard around the clinic in a variety of ways: some dug, planted and tended garden plots of their own, while others worked to develop beds in common areas. Counsellors worked with clients in the garden according to their own experience and inclination, and according to the needs of their clients. Our intake worker, for example, used the gar-
den as a transitional space, to stroll, or to sit and chat, after formally meeting with a new client indoors. Other counsellors conducted entire sessions out of doors while weeding and watering.

The transformation of the landscape surrounding the clinic—from a bleak and barren windswept plain, to a cared for, creative series of gardens—was striking. The change in our grounds attracted people to the clinic—from interested community residents, to nurses working at the nearby York Finch hospital. By mid-season 1996 the psychiatric unit at the hospital decided to formally collaborate with us on the project, since nurses had been regularly bringing patients over to the clinic to work in the garden. By the end of the summer three different articles had appeared in Toronto newspapers about the Youth Clinic garden.

The garden project was also transforming to us as a staff. Most meaningful was a renewed sense of collective purpose and care—for both our work environment and for the people in it. Within a small agency, small gestures can resonate together to produce a striking change in tone. When an office door previously kept shut is left ajar, when flowers appear on a receptionist’s desk, or when homemade ginger beer is brought in to share at a meeting, the overall atmosphere in the workplace improves significantly. Horticulture seemed to be invigorating and therapeutic not only to those overtly seeking help, but also to those facilitating the healing process of another. During a time of relentless cutbacks, it was motivating to counterpoint the continual cut and slash of budgets and services with the alternative rhythms of cultivation and care, growth and harvest. For me, the garden and the positive ripple effect around it proved to be such a deep source of personal and professional inspiration and renewal that I decided that it was a phenomenon that deserved further investigation.

From my first hand experience of integrating horticulture with therapy practice came my desire to know more about the field of horticultural therapy and the practitioners engaged in this work. What is it about the people-plant connection that is so deeply alluring? Do other practitioners experience the same deep sense of personal
authenticity in their work with people and plants? Do gardens in other contexts function as metaphor for the health and well being of the people in that context? How do we bring the garden—the sensuous, textured, fertile garden—to professional practice? How do we as individuals imbue the institutions in which we function—in particular our health care institution—with the life giving force of the garden?

Using my experience of integrating horticulture with therapy as a vantage point I began to consider a broader phenomenon: the processes through which we most fully express who we are in our work. How do context and discipline provide opportunity or constraint for that expression? Where does the capacity for this expression find its roots? Beginning to imagine a research project framed around these questions I started to consider my methodological orientation.

Concepts of what knowledge is, and how it is generated, have led to the development of different research methodologies. A research methodology makes assumptions about how knowledge is generated and how it can be accessed. The researcher’s choice of methodology, usually based, with new researchers, on theoretical knowledge about that methodology, therefore, says a great deal about her epistemological assumptions. It is therefore necessary to explore and explain my epistemology, and demonstrate the compatibility between it, my methodological orientation and the focus of my inquiry.

In my work as a counsellor, I value and believe in the primacy of experience. Firsthand, I know about the usefulness of theories that are generated out of practice (Hunt, 1987). I value the "experienced knowledge" of counselling practitioners, and believe that the pursuit of this knowledge through research is a useful endeavor. Being aware of, and making explicit the kind of knowledge I value—particularly in terms of where it is located, and who holds it—is an important first step in considering my values in terms of accessing knowledge. Situating myself personally and professionally in relation to the area of inquiry (which I have begun and continue to do in subsequent sections) is an essential process in qualitative research. It is this process that led me to
consider situating this research project within a qualitative methodology.

At the core of qualitative research is the assumption that meaning is generated through experiences in the real world. As Eisner describes, qualitative research is based on "the belief that experience is the bedrock upon which meaning is constructed and that experience in significant degree depends on our ability to get in touch with the qualitative world we inhabit" (Eisner, 1993, p. 5). As a result, in qualitative research the people who are "in touch" with particular "qualitative worlds" are themselves valued for their experience. For instance, the experienced counselling practitioner is valued for the knowledge that it is assumed that he/she holds about the qualitative world of counselling. Moreover, this knowledge is seen as more trustworthy, especially in the realm of practice, than knowledge that is produced independently of practice, because the "qualitative world is immediate before it is mediated, presentational before it is representational, sensuous before it is symbolic" (Eisner, 1993, p. 5). Practitioner's knowledge is real world experience; it is immediate, presentational and sensuous. Qualitative research methods allow me to access the kind of knowledge I value while retaining congruence with my epistemology. My methodological orientation is, therefore, connected to who I am both personally and professionally.

Beginning to formulate a research proposal I selected the methodological framework—life history—that seemed to fit with my epistemological assumptions and with the area of inquiry. In life history research, knowledge is assumed to be multiperspectival and dependent on the social conditions of its construction. A form of biographical research that builds on the premises underlying life story methodology, life history focuses on an individual's experience over a substantial period of time (Cole, 1991; Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000). Like the life story account, life history is a personal experience method that values individual story. Life history, however, goes a step further than life story research in its effort to place these stories in context. A form of partnership research where a layered understanding of a phenomenon is generated through a process of intersubjective meaning making, in life history both "synthesis
and feedback are central to the process" (Cole, 1991, p.191).

In recent years, life history research has been used in the study of teachers' lives to better "understand life history influences on professional practice" (Cole, 1994, p.3). Because of its attention to detail in the lives of "ordinary people", life history methods are effective when gathering information about "practitioners' experienced knowledge" (Cole, 1991). As Cole explains, "the life history method is suited to gaining insights into the confusions, contradictions, and complexities of everyday life. It is particularly useful for locating critical incidents or epiphanies in lives, the points of profound change and influence" (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 141). This points to the potential life history research has in understanding and aiding professional practice and development.

Further, the work of Cole and Knowles (1995) is evidence that life history methods can also be used and adapted in a variety of ways to facilitate self-study. For instance, Gary Knowles' (1995) "autobiographical narrative illustrates how the identification and interpretation of critical life incidents can provide insights into some of the complexities of professional practice" (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 141). Or, as in the case of Ardra Cole's (1995) self studied account, information can be gathered using the "three methods typical of life history research: extensive, in-depth interviews; observation within classroom and other institutional contexts; and examination of institutional and personal artifacts, documents or autobiographical writing" (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 142). Since life history has also been used effectively as the "lens for self-study" in professional development, and since I situate myself in the dual role of researcher and researcher/participant in this project, I became particularly interested in a research methodology suited to this enterprise (Cole & Knowles, 1994 p. 141).

I am providing a detailed sketch of life history methodology theory in this section because my initial understandings provide a context for the methodological shift that occurred in the course of the project. Returning to a consideration of how my topic (which originally focused on the development of innovative practice and foregrounded
horticultural therapy as program), would lend itself to exploration using life history methodology, I began to articulate the rationale for the fit in my research proposal:

My wish to understand the interrelatedness of program development with program innovator in an institutional context has led me to choose the life history approach. While the material that I will be gathering will be about both the programs and the people who started those programs, and while I believe that in the final document this data will at times be represented separately, I believe that in order to generate useful knowledge in this area, it is essential to consider program and practitioner together. For these reasons, it is my intention to access the data I wish to gather about each horticultural therapy program primarily through that program's innovator (McIntyre, 1996, p. 9).

Life history seemed particularly suited to my area of inquiry because it aims "in a broad sense... to understand life as lived in the present and as influenced by personal, institutional, and social histories (Cole, 1994, p. 3). Using life history I would be able to identify the "critical incident" that led Felicity to connect her work as a horticulturist to work with people. It would help me to understand "the confusions, contradictions and complexities" that led me to question the way counselling is practiced in institutional settings (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 141). With its focus on "making sense of prior and current life experiences in the context of the personal as it influences the professional", life history methodology had the potential to facilitate professional development (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 130).

I completed my research proposal; a ninety-page document in which I carefully detailed both my methodological orientation and my research design, passed through the committee process, and had the proposal approved. I began to engage in the research process—but life—the "confusions, complexities and contradictions" of everyday life—very quickly intervened (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 141). Now, four years later, when I listen to my voice in my proposal, I am struck by my earnestness, my enthusiasm, and my commitment to research:
I am not shy to say that this research must feel relevant and useful to me first and foremost, because if it doesn’t, I likely won’t finish it. Fortunately, I am experiencing its usefulness already at this very early stage, and expect the benefits to continue and grow. In fact I will be surprised if I don’t find the overall experience of the research process transformative. This belief comes from witnessing “the doctoral thesis journey” of others, and from my deep commitment and passion for this particular topic, and qualitative research in general (Cole & Hunt, 1994). Further, my situation in relation to the topic, (I initiated a horticultural therapy program at the social service agency where I currently work), and my intention with respect to the study (I will be one of the participants as well as the primary researcher), suggests that the research will be useful to me in both my professional and personal development. Finally, as might be the case with the other participants, I have been so busy both doing and defending my work that I expect it will be very useful for me to have the opportunity to reflect on my practice in an organized fashion. (McIntyre, 1996, p. 42)

I am also struck by how much has changed in my life, both personally and professionally, since I embarked on the “thesis journey”. Aware of these changes as they were happening, wanting to complete the thesis (more or less as proposed), and wanting to maintain personal professional congruence throughout, became an impossible intellectual-emotional task. While I could not ultimately make it work for me in practice, I still resonate with the fundamental principles on which life history methodology is based. With its attentiveness to process and relationship, and its focus on the lives of “ordinary” people, life history still reflects my epistemological assumptions. The actual research process, however, seemed dull and lifeless. Gone was the sense of authenticity I had felt as a researcher when I experienced the click of methodological fit while writing my
proposal. Ontologically I was at odds: actually *engaging* with the methodology—actually putting theory into practice—became an experience of disjuncture. Real world experience doing actual research led me to the limits of traditional life history methodology.

Simply put, too much had changed. I had grown out of my methodology, and try as I might, I could not make it fit. I needed to animate, or add dimension to processes that felt constricting and flat. Like the opening the garden provided to my ways of being a counsellor, I needed to expand my ways of being a researcher. I needed to augment my life history research practice with ways of being congruent with who I am as person, and who I was becoming as a researcher.

The processes, through which I came to locate a methodological vantage point that could support, sustain and extend the area of inquiry and my development as a researcher, provide in themselves a parallel investigation to the focal point of my research. Arts informed life history methodology provided that lens—through it I could see and reflect the vibrancy of the area of inquiry—but it took me some time before I fully embraced an identity as an arts informed researcher.

In the following section, "process vs. product" I introduce the metaphor that led to that embrace.
Process vs. Product

I began the process of generating data for the self-study section of my inquiry by posing to myself each of the questions in the interview guide that I had posed to Felicity (see appendix). I read each question and typed out answers. Some of the answers were short; others were quite lengthy. I liked the questions and I liked answering them. I remembered people and things that I had not thought about in a long time, and synthesized experiences that had previously felt disconnected and unrelated. For example, the question “did you come from a green family?”, intended to draw out the place of gardening in my family of origin, I at first answered with a quick “no”, but then fleshed out when I recalled my parent’s beliefs about lawns and grass. The nature and scope of my self-study expanded as I made links to the research focus. It felt like a useful process of self-reflection and I enjoyed doing it. Meanwhile I was keeping current (mostly) with my personal/professional journal. I used material generated in my journal to provide examples and make the answers to the questions current. I seemed to be getting somewhere, or at the very least, I was “producing”.

Following Merriam’s (1988) advice, I engaged in a process of ongoing analysis of the data as a way of setting boundaries on the scope of my self-study. For example, while I decided that it was important for me to document my early school history quite carefully (since it was my first experience in an institutional setting), I edited much of the material out almost as quickly as I wrote it, once I decided to focus specifically on the unique decision making power my parents afforded me in school contexts. Interpreting my experience as I went along, I sorted and sifted, identifying themes and critical incidents.

Unfortunately, however, the end product of that process: a fifty page self-study narrative—seemed to me to be dense, dull reading, resonant with a “so what?” quality.
Beginning to panic, I reviewed my chronology and cross-checked people with important events. I had been thorough, there were no glaring omissions or holes, seemingly everyone and everything was included. In fact, I almost seemed to tell too much, there seemed to be a lot of detail. “Well,” I thought, “maybe I just need to do some editing”. Yet upon scrutiny, when I checked answers against questions, the information I had provided was virtually all relevant, and the questions themselves in the interview guide were nicely framed around the main thesis question. I was not off topic; the narrative appeared to provide information that with further interpretation would generate knowledge about the area of inquiry. I had tested my work for internal cohesion, and it had passed. So what was wrong? Had my life been that boring? Was I that dull?

“Perhaps,” I thought, “it is a question of form, not content. Perhaps I am finally discovering, at this late stage, this “everything-but-the-dissertation-stage”, that I just can’t write. “Whatever it is,” I concluded, “I’m in trouble”. If a self-study seems uninteresting to the self that it is about, how much more uninteresting could it be to others?

I decided to set it aside. “Instead”, I thought, “I’ll focus on my research participant”.

I started to spend lots of time with Felicity: doing interviews, observing and assisting her with programming, walking around Baycrest Geriatric Centre, the institution where she works, laughing and chatting. Alone I spent time listening to the tapes, reading transcribed material, looking at my notes. And constantly on my mind was the question: how can I possibly write a portrait that will do justice to this remarkable woman? How will I capture her creativity, her life force and her power in words?

During this time I was also working to assist another researcher with a self-study project. The broad purpose of the study was to augment conventional approaches to research with non-conventional methods in order to explore, through collaborative self study, this researcher’s teaching and learning in a fuller, more textual way (Cole & McIntyre, 1998). I was invited to take an approach, throughout the inquiry process, from conceptualization through to representation, which can be characterized
as "artful" or "arts-based". Together we began to look for ways to push at the boundaries created by an over-reliance on linguistic forms to define and represent knowledge. For example, our interpretive process involved listening for rhythms in the interview data and imagining how those rhythms might be physically expressed and represented. We made analysis and representation decisions through cognitive engagement with the data, but also through technical, instrumental, and embodied involvement. Working with the research text in multiple ways we became passionate about what we were producing. Both the inquiry process and the result: a performance entitled "Dance Me To an Understanding of Teaching", that we wrote and choreographed together engaged us individually and together in a very personal way.

Meanwhile I was also participating in an interdisciplinary arts based research group. The group had been formed to provide a forum and working space for researchers exploring alternative processes and artful modes of representation. While many of the participants in the group identified themselves as artists looking to find ways of incorporating their artistry into their research, others of us identified ourselves as students and teachers interested in exploring artful ways of being researchers. Each month individuals or pairs shared and discussed works in progress with the group. The content of each project varied as much as the forms created to represent the work: these inquiries incorporated drawing, photographs, text, painting and performance. Always a keen observer of groups, I was as fascinated (and sometimes as frustrated) by the group process as I was by the work that people brought forward.

In the spring of 1998 we brought "Dance Me to An Understanding of Teaching", in performance, to the arts based research group. Never having identified myself as an artist, let alone a performance artist, this was a huge step for me to take. Further, I had become quite comfortable in the non-artist-student-working-on-her-dissertation role that I had carved out for myself in the group. But with an audience waiting, and my collaborator counting on me I realized that there was no going back. That performance felt to me like a kind of coming out as an arts based researcher.
The next February, having performed “Dance Me to An Understanding of Teaching” with my research partner at an international conference in England in August, I found myself on another airplane going to the “Advances in Qualitative Methods Conference” in Edmonton, Alberta. Tucked away in my bag for review on the plane was my paper/performance: “Re-reading Anne: Using Images in Artful Inquiry”. But almost as soon as the in-flight movie began: Gary Ross’ 1998 film “Pleasantville”, I knew that my paper was not going to make it out of the bag.

In the film, “when 90s teens David and Jennifer get zapped into the perfect suburbia of the black and white 50s sitcom “Pleasantville”, what results is a “visionary adventure” (Peter Travers, Rolling Stone). Pleasantville’s perfect people include “a mild mannered soda jerk, a socially repressed Mom, and a father who always knows what’s best” (New Line Home Video, 1999). Like cardboard cutouts, the people of Pleasantville exist as vacant caricatures playing out the narrowly prescribed roles of white suburbia. But when Jennifer stirs up a bit of trouble and convinces David that Pleasantville really isn’t all that pleasant, things begin to change. When people begin to connect with their imagination and passion, colour (both literally and metaphorically) begins to emerge, and there’s no going back once your true colours start to show. The soda jerk, once ruled by the routine of the meat goes on the bun, and the cheese goes on the meat, realizes that he doesn’t know what he’d do if he couldn’t paint. The Mom, once controlled by the meatloaf in the oven, “honey I’m home”, and dinner-at-six, discovers her own eroticism. Even Jennifer, previously self described as “slutty”, discovers a true sensuality and intellectual passion while reading D.H. Lawrence. By the end of the film, life is more complex: “I don’t know what will happen”, says the father, but he sounds curious. Experiencing uncertainty is unfamiliar, yet somehow inviting.

It could be that by now you’re starting to wonder where I’m going with all this. Where will all these digressions lead?” you might be thinking. “And when are we going to get there?” As a therapist, many times I have been in your position while sitting with clients, listening, listening, listening to their stories, thinking, “Where is this
person? Who is this person? They have so many words, but what are they telling me?“ And then I start, (and hopefully you are too), to listen, as Eudora Welty (1983) puts it, not to a story, but for a story. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis (1997) explain, “the former, [listening to a story] is a more passive, receptive stance in which one waits to absorb the information and does little to give it shape and form. The latter, [listening for a story] is a much more active, engaged position in which one searches for the story, seeks it out, is central in its creation” (p.12).

Well, my “aha!” came, and it really was an “AHA! “, when I realized that my self-study was stuck in Pleasantville. The events of my life were certainly recognizable, yet I was somehow disconnected from the narrative. I had failed to make myself central in my story’s creation, to take an insider approach to researching myself and as a result there was no energy, no life force, no juice in my work. Put another way, the parts were all there, but the sense of the whole, of my presence in the work, was missing. Like the client in my office, there were so many words, all about me, but somehow I was missing. Mesmerized by my own protocol, I hadn’t listened for a story.

As a researcher I was caught in the forward and backward movement characteristic of most identity development processes. Compelled by the commitment I had made in my thesis proposal to particular self study data collection methods (and encouraged by the positive comments my supervisor had made about my interview guide, “these are great questions. I think they “get at” the essence of your study”, she wrote on my proposal), I had proceeded along a comparatively linear, traditional path (the safe path), and lost myself along the way.

Realizing that I needed to make my thesis work current, realizing that I needed to take some risks, make my learning active and infuse my self study with the passion, with the aesthetic, with the colour I had brought to other recent research projects...I deleted the whole fifty pages in one quick motion, wrote “the telling of a life in fragments/arts informed approaches to self study practices”, and began again.

[19]
Arts Informed Research

Gardening engages all five of the human senses as few activities do. We see, smell, feel, hear, and even taste as we garden, and, because all of our senses are involved, what we experience is vivid and specific. (Streep, 1999, p. 15)

Arts informed methodologies invite a similar quality of holistic engagement with research activities by bringing together the systematic and rigorous qualities of scientific inquiry with the artistic and imaginative qualities of the arts. In so doing the process of researching becomes creative and responsive and the representational form for communication embodies elements of various art forms—poetry, fiction, drama, two dimensional visual art including photography, dance, music, multi-media installation, film and video. Representations of research using arts informed methodologies in education include: brown (1999); Cole, Knowles, brown & Buttignol (1999); Dunlop (1999); Finley, Cole, Knowles, & Elijah (1995); McIntyre & Cole (1998); Richardson (1992); and Saldana (1998).

These explorations of alternative representational forms are as wide ranging as each researcher’s area of inquiry. For example, brown (1999) explores the use of fiction as form in her doctoral dissertation about artist’s telling practices of childhood sexual abuse. Cole, Knowles, brown & Buttignol (1999) create a multimedia installation in three parts from information gathered in a life history study of pre-tenured teacher educators. Saldana (1998) uses ethnographic performance text to story the experience of a boy who participated in a six-year longitudinal study about career aspirations.

For some, for example, brown (1999) and Dunlop (1999), the alternative representational form provides a medium to express that which would otherwise be left unsaid—the unspeakable or the “forbidden” (brown, 1999). For others, for example Cole, Knowles, brown, & Buttignol (1999), new forms provide an opportunity to more
powerfully express that which has already been said—but not heard. For these researchers, representing their research as art metaphorically turns up the volume of the research product: by lifting it off the pages of academic journals and creating large scale installations, they demand to be heard. When the purpose of art is “to break through the conventionalized and routine consciousness”, arts informed representations become the medium for messages needing to be heard (Dewey, 1931, p. 184).

These examples share common ground as research that is advocacy work, in substance and in form, and in that, each work has political implications. Broadening the research audience by making the form of the research representation accessible loosens the hold academics have on specialized realms of knowledge. The accessibility of each presentational form—a readable novel, a moving poetic text, and an engaging installation—makes this research relevant both within the academic community and beyond.

Representational forms such as these are both very old and very new. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) points out while tracing her own use and development of arts informed methodologies: “I am not claiming that this form of inquiry and representation is all mine, or all new. There is a long and rich history of dialogue and collaboration between artists and scholars, between novelists and philosophers” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p.5). What is new, however, is the explicit use of arts informed methodologies within education as a mechanism “to challenge the tyranny of the academy...in an effort to build bridges between theory and practice, research and action” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p.7).

Dewey (1934) suggested the role the arts could play in relation to education, particularly with respect to representing the fullness of the teaching and learning experience. Resisting the temptation to flatten out phenomena through a separation of the parts from the whole, Dewey espoused a holistic approach to research that included texture and complexity:

The reciprocal interpretation of parts and whole, which we have seen to
constitute a work of art, is effected when all the constituents of the work, whether picture, drama, poem, or building, stand in rhythmic connection with all other members of the same kind—line with line, colour with colour, space with space, illuminative with light and shade in a painting—and all of these distinctive factors reinforce one another as variations that build up an integrated complex experience. (Dewey, 1934, p. 171)

"Crossing boundaries" between art and science in order to retain and express the creative integrity of human endeavors, arts informed research “resist[s] reductionism and abstraction” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p.7).


As Brent Kilbourn (1999) points out, however, these discussions have largely been carried out in the absence of actual examples of arts informed research, that is, they read like theory banter between influential academics. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) observes: “Academicians tend to speak to one another in a language that is often opaque and esoteric. Rarely do the analyses and texts we produce invite dialogue with people in the ‘real world’”(p. 97). Continuing investment in this debate is particularly ironic, since part of the purpose of arts informed methodologies is to open up academic research to a broader audience. To dwell on the question “is it research?” sidesteps the more important matter of actually engaging in the work, while it keeps discussion about it erudite and elevated. As Johnny Saldana (1998) says:

One of my colleagues mused after seeing the ...performance (an ethnographic performance text), ‘Is this art? Is this research? Is this artful
research or research-oriented art?" Admittedly, I do not have immediate answers. Admittedly, I do not care. I will leave academic elitists for whom these questions hold importance to formulate their own theories.

(p. 194)

More grounded, and in my opinion more useful, are discussions about arts informed methodologies that contain actual examples of new forms. Articles of this type are especially useful when authors have first hand experience doing arts informed research and cites examples from their own work (see Barry, 1996; Glesne, 1997; Kilbourn, 1999; and Richardson, 1992). In the next section I choose to speak personally and directly about what arts informed research is, why it is useful, and how it contributes to our knowledge about the human condition. Paradoxically, in this endeavor I story a recent experience I had at an academic conference, thereby employing arts informed methods of representation to illuminate my point.

The presenter is a comfortable looking man in his early forties: black jeans, blue denim shirt, cowboy boots. The artsy type maybe—urban and attractive—his baldness looks intentional and maintained. Despite its size—there are over nine hundred people attending—and its international status, this conference "will be informal and fun", the preliminary program tells us "you will be most comfortable in a sweater and jeans".

Approaching the podium he arranges his notes, adjusts the microphone, and scans the audience. "This presenter", I'm thinking, "he got the dress code just right". The subject matter—eating and Alzheimer's disease in home and institutional care contexts—has attracted a diverse audience. For the most part we are health care educators: professors of nursing or social work, a medical anthropologist, a few front line workers, a few students. There are even some men scattered among us. The room is bright and airy; silk flowers decorate the corners, and the views out the windows on all four sides are spectacular. Keenly focused on the presenter, my personal professional con-
nection to the area of research has me sitting on the edge of my seat.

Ten minutes later I find myself getting up out of my chair so suddenly that my pencil and papers fall to the floor. Rushing toward the door I cover my mouth with my hands hoping that any sounds that escape will be taken as uncontrollable sneezing. Hurrying down the hall I enter the bathroom—thankfully its empty—and, leaning against the wall I let myself go, fully allowing my laughter and tears to erupt.

A few minutes later I splash water on my face, “get a grip”, I’m thinking, “com - pose yourself”. The crisis past, I’m starting to feel embarrassed about losing control so completely that I literally had to escape from the session. “You’ll never make it in this world”, I think…” see—you’re hiding in the bathroom”.

Quietly I make my way back to the conference room and stand outside the doorway listening.

“…plate rotation success is maximized using verbal prompts…

“…spousal caregiver strategies paralleled…”

“…assisted or self-uptake…”

“…food-plate junction…”

The overly formal language sounds particularly odd coming out of this laid back looking guy’s mouth. Flanked by an overhead projector and a podium he is smoothly moving transparencies between file folder and screenbed. Illuminated on the screen is an oversized image of the kind of place setting seen in nursing homes; sectioned beige plastic plate, fork, spoon and plastic mug. Approaching the screen with his pointer, the presenter indicates the absence of a knife in the image.

Peeking around the corner I scan the faces in the audience. How are they manage - ing to remain stony faced? How are they able to keep so perfectly still—passively listening to this well-intentioned, well-informed man talk? Are they so confused by the elevated scientific language he’s using that they have forgotten that he’s talking about eating? Do they not feel overwhelmed by both the comedy and the tragedy—of someone talking about something as basic as eating—and not even using the word? Are they just being polite? Or are their senses so
dulled by conforming to convention that this way of representing research seems entirely regular?

I begin to imagine the topic represented using arts informed methods of representation: a skit maybe, or a reader’s theatre. Dramatizing his research findings, the presenter uses a different vocabulary: no academic language, no jargon; smaller words, simpler talk. He paints a picture of each context: so poignant is his description of the nursing home that I can almost smell the peas—it’s lunchtime. Points of emphasis cause him to look out over the audience, pause and make full eye contact, as if to say: “We all need to eat. We are all getting older. This subject means a lot to me…what does it mean to you?”

The faces in the audience express and reflect the presenter’s range of emotion. One woman’s eyes well up with tears: “it must be so hard to be so sick that someone has to feed you”. A man in the front row is fidgety and uncomfortable; he looks defiant even: “I’ll kill myself before I suffer the humiliation of having to be fed”. A woman wearing a terrific hat is laughing openly: “Imagine! Sometime… sometime soon, I will have lost my mind and Bob will have to turn on Jeopardy to remind me that it is time to eat!”. Another woman’s brow is wrinkled with concentration: “This is such basic, human work …but it is so important. This guy has learned a lot about how we help ill people—cognitively impaired people—eat. And he sure knows how to tell it like it is. With an aging population …wow, I hope that he’s going to do more research in this area. I wonder if he knows about the grant…”

Arts informed research representations draw the audience in by captivating the senses. Accessible, available and touchable, arts informed research demands more of our faculties: our imagination, our senses, and our emotions. It is research that blurs the traditional boundaries between mind and body, knowing and being. Arts informed methodologies engage researchers in a holistic and authentic exploration and expression of who we are—as practitioners and as people.
In my experience (2000, 1999, 1998), the relationships and processes that we engage in when we infuse our research with artful influences demands that we remain present as researchers in our work. Unable to wander away into the clean safety of objectivity, arts informed processes touch the researcher and keep her situated in the middle of the work. Fortunately, as Anna Banks (1998) observes, “for a growing number of social researchers, the objective, rational mode and the image of the detached scientist are no longer adequate” (Banks & Banks, 1998, p. 168). When we fully acknowledge different ways of knowing, and when knowing demands more of our faculties: our imagination, our senses and our emotions, we constitute research as an ontological endeavor.

Arts informed methodologies encourage researchers to craft research processes and products that are practical, cultured and graceful, and that promote the conditions of sensuous perception. Like the garden, arts informed research invites a knowing that is emotional, sensual, and embodied. Full of colour and texture, variety and life, arts informed representations are not always well executed or aesthetically pleasing. Like a garden gone wild, however, even less manicured representations show evidence of growth and life.
CHAPTER TWO

Visionary Adventures

[27]
There is an art to wandering. If I have a destination, a plan—an objective—I’ve lost the ability to find serendipity. I’ve become too focused, too single-minded. I am on a quest, not a ramble. I search for the Holy Grail of particularity and miss the chalice freely offered, filled full and overflowing. (Johnson, 1990, p. 135)
In the course of this dialogue that is our daily lives, we experience moments of “vision” and connection in which something new is revealed. We realize some core truth about ourselves or about the world and we’re unable any longer to think, talk, feel, and act the way we used to. We have an experience in which the world splits open and life is irrevocably changed...

Some may be major turning points; others may be quiet moments of awareness. These moments are characterized by heightened emotion and sensory awareness, and they have a “time out of time” quality to them. (Bepko & Krestan, 1993, p. 195)

In this chapter I story two such moments of “vision”. In the first, I introduce you to my research participant Felicity Lukace. In the second, I present a “narrative snapshot” of my first counselling moment. Each snapshot is a visionary adventure which constitutes, in life history terms, a moment of “profound change and influence” (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 141). Seen together projected on a split screen, at first glance these “critical incidents” look very different (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p.141). Looking beyond the details, however, to a sense of the whole, these snapshots tell the story of two people arriving at the same place from two very different directions.
"That's a lovely idea, dear."

The pain in her hand is so intense; the throbbing of the blood in her wrist and forearm is so strong that she starts to feel dizzy. Suddenly she knows she can't make it the final few feet to the nursing station further down the corridor, so she slides into the nearest chair. She leans over gradually and puts her head between her knees, remembering what you are supposed to do—remembering from where? In this position her holster is digging into her side and producing even more pain, so she takes it off and places it on the orange vinyl chair beside her. A small clod of earth that was clinging to the clippers slides onto the floor. With the toe of her boot she discreetly pushes it further under the chair, conscious of how dirty she is in this overly clean, institutional environment: her heavy khaki shorts, sweaty T-shirt, and steel toed workboots caked with mud.

Her thoughts seem to be coming from a great distance now, from a far away foggy place. Slowly, when the intensity of the dizziness begins to pass, she starts to sit up and takes in the scene.

The colour of the corridor, a pale washed out blue-green, has that familiar, seen-it-before-in-many-an-institution feel about it. The smell though, the smell is a little different. Medicinal: cleaning fluids, illness, staleness, but something else? The lack of air circulation and thinking about the smells make her dizzy again for a moment. She presses harder on the cloth that she has wound around her hand. No new signs of blood.

She is positioned so that she can see straight into the nursing station, but the glass barrier makes it impossible to hear the conversation of the women behind the glass. She starts trying to read their lips, but then realizes that the concentration this requires is making her dizzy again.
She turns her head and focuses instead on a woman sitting nearby in a wheelchair. The woman’s knees are almost touching the wall. She is sitting upright; alert, but motionless, staring at the flat blue-green wall as if she were looking out a window. Again the effort of trying to figure out what she is seeing overwhelms her and she turns her head.

Now she can’t quite figure out what she is hearing. There seems to be a rhythm approaching…a repetitive rhythm. Is it syllables and words? A human voice?

An elderly man in a thin blue and green plaid dressing gown is advancing down the corridor. She realizes that it is from him that these sounds are emanating: “Fancy fun down, fancy fun down, fancy fun down, fancy...” He is shuffling rather quickly, and the repetitive phrase trails away as he passes, back into rhythmical syllables. As he wafts by, the smell intensifies and lingers. Jolted out of her surreal dreamlike haze of pain by the pungent smell of urine, she stands up and pokes her head around the glass of the nursing station.

“Excuse me, I was thinking that this was triage and my hand here needs to be looked at... but I have a feeling I might be... I have a feeling I don’t belong here”.

The three women behind the glass turn, almost perfectly in synch and look at her in silence. She can feel their eyes taking her in, assessing. And then one woman starts to move toward her. As she caps the marker in her hand and reattaches it to the string around her neck, she says:

“That’s right girlfriend... you’re not one of them and you’re certainly not one of us... which says that you’re right. You don’t belong here. But let’s see that hand of yours.”

...And it turned out that it was not the emergency room of Ottawa General now but Elizabeth Bruyere, a long-term care facility run by the Nuns of Charity. They gave me something, a painkiller or something while they were stitching my finger up. And I was looking at the people and I got this great idea. I don’t know what they gave me. But I still had shorts on and construction boots and pruners and I asked to see the Director of the whole place. Anyway I got in to see her that day. And I said
to her, "I've got this wonderful idea. I could be doing gardening programs with these people. They should be gardening. They can do all kinds of stuff." The Director, she kept right on smiling, and then she said: "That's a lovely idea, dear. Why don't you put it on paper? Put your wonderful idea on paper".

So I thought about it and then I went back to work. I quit. Gave my notice. I spent three months putting a proposal together and brought it back to the same woman, the Director at Elizabeth Bruyere. She looked it over and said: "Okay, we'll give you three days a week from May till October, on a trial basis. We'll put you in with the therapeutic recreation department."
The Skilled Practitioner

It’s a miserable November evening in 1993—only 5:00 p.m. and it’s already pitch dark. Cold drizzle made sharp by wind spatters against the waiting room window. I look out across the treeless suburban landscape wondering if my first appointment will brave the weather and show up. I’m not nervous; I feel prepared. I will be a little let down; a little disappointed, if it’s a no show or a cancellation. I’ve done a lot to prepare for this moment: I’ve given up a lot to go back to school. I’ve done a term of course work, studying theories and techniques of counselling. I’ve developed some new skills. Now my first appointment is about to happen, and it’s a couple.

“Why start small?” the intake worker says when he passes me the file. I do some additional reading on marital therapy and consult my supervisor in order to prepare. But by now its twenty-five minutes past five so I leave the waiting room and wander back to my office, wondering if they’ll phone to reschedule.

I plunk myself down in one of the too low, overly easy chairs. Despite my best efforts: plants, swatches of fabric, peacock feathers, dried flowers, blue bottles, sea shells, the office still looks shabby. The carpet, institutional gray to begin with, is worn and stained. The lighting is bad, too dim now with just the lamp that I have brought from home, too bright and obnoxious with the overhead fluorescent. The window is too high for me to get a view, “not that there is anything much to see”, I think.

Startled by the phone ringing,
I am up and out of my chair,
“The couple has arrived; they are in the waiting room”.
Walking up front,
My hand outstretched in introduction,
Dealing with coats,
My office door is closing...

I have closed the door. I’m sitting down in my chair; I’m crossing my legs.

Clutching cups of coffee poured in the waiting room, nervous fingers flicking bits of white Styrofoam, anxious eyes exploring...

I’m reaching for my water. I have my water glass in my hand; I’m drinking in the moment.

Fingernails caked with soil, faces bent close to the earth, the scent of manure flares our nostrils, it is so acrid, pungent and rich. Eyes captured by a slug who is slipping, sliding, slithering through the damp soil, a telltale trail of sticky, slug sludge left behind. Bent closer wanting, but not wanting, to poke it, finger forward to feel the whiteness of its flesh, concentration so complete that all of a sudden it seems that it has jumped up, and... losing my balance I fall backwards out of my squat, startling them both, landing with a thump, suddenly we are sitting squarely on our bums in the dirt. Startled by a slug, they’re laughing, this couple; I’m laughing, the skilled practitioner, startled by a slug.

Gazing over at them, this couple who has come to me for help, the moment catching in my throat, the four walls around us closing in, I remind myself: “This is what is done. This is what I do”.

Rubbing my by now clammy hands together, feeling short of breath, I take a long drink of water. Swallowing the moment I clear my throat ordering myself to now: “Just do it...”

Moments of “vision” can have profound consequences. For both Felicity and me, in each of these moments, once something new about the world and our place in it was glimpsed, there was no going back. The “truths” that were revealed came as a kind of “aha!” that necessitated immediate and significant change in each of our professional lives.
In a moment of heightened awareness, Felicity actually felt both the constriction of the institutional environment—its colourless atmosphere and cold sterility—and the human potential of the people enclosed in the place. She experienced the knowledge that the residents in this long-term care facility could do more and be more as a personal moral imperative to facilitate change. Moved by the moment—by the deep sense that not only was it not right, but it wasn’t necessary to send the elderly to Pleasantville and call it care—Felicity imagined an alternative filled with colour, texture and life. She felt certain that something new, something different was possible, and that she could create it. Her image of the alternative was not something difficult and complex requiring consideration and deliberation, but a simple common sense reality needing to be implemented. She needed to bring the garden—the touches, the tastes, and the textures of the garden—to Pleasantville.

In my first counselling moment, I heard my office door “click” closed with frightening finality. There I was: “the skilled practitioner”, and there they were, my first clients. Experiencing something quite different from the normal jitters of the new counsellor, I suddenly saw, as I hadn’t seen before, what counselling in an institutional setting actually means. I had learned techniques, I had developed skills, but I had not fully appreciated what the norms of practice entail, on a human level, until that moment. Confined and constrained within the four walls of my office, how could I begin to forge a connection with this young couple? Disconnected by age, race, social status, culture and education, what and where was our common ground?

Like Felicity, I felt moved by the moment—by the deep sense that not only was it not right, but it wasn’t necessary to send youth (or anyone else for that matter), to Pleasantville and call it care. I felt certain that something new, something different was possible, and that I could create it. My image of the alternative was not something difficult and complex requiring consideration and deliberation, but a simple common sense reality needing to be implemented. As a first step, we needed to get up out of our chairs and relocate to a common context. We needed to literally find some common
ground. I needed to bring the garden—the touches, the tastes, and the textures of the garden—to Pleasantville.
CHAPTER THREE

Garden
As
Phenomenon
“Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. (Genesis, p. 1)

We behold the garden with awe. Intuitively, we know that it is bigger than we are; it came before us, it will exist after us. We have information about the garden, we have knowledge, but the garden remains miraculous. Inviting and mysterious, we feel its wisdom.

The garden is phenomenon, it is: “a thing that appears, or is perceived or is observed... the cause of which is in question. [It is] that of which the senses or the mind directly takes note; an immediate object of perception. [It is] a highly exceptional or unaccountable fact or occurrence” (Onions, 1956, p.1487).

No one can deny it; gardening is ‘in.’ It is spring in Toronto and greenery from every corner store in the city overflows onto the sidewalk. Here at the supermarket, the clay pots, fresh cut flowers, flats of perennials and annuals, shrubs, and yes, even small trees, have their own section complete with knowledgeable staff wearing heavy, green canvas aprons. Dragging myself away from a rack of seed packets, I notice a variety of gardening gloves positioned just outside the area given over to gardening. Carefully arranged atop a tower of canned black beans, I pause to consider what the arrangement is meant to suggest to me, the shopper. Am I meant to remember that beans, not cans, grow? That I can grow beans? That I can buy beans? That gardens sell?

Navigating my shopping cart in amongst the produce, between the Romaine and the red leaf lettuce, I encounter organic Boston lettuce individually bagged with the roots attached. I notice that iceberg lettuce is out, and mesclun mix, (“tasty salad greens, including chicory, endive, lettuce, arugula, and cress”), is in. Fresh bunches of thyme and rosemary abounds, but the basil is given the most privileged herb status—
each plant is individually potted in soil.

In urban North America, it is impossible to get through the check out line in a supermarket without encountering countless magazines fronted with glossy photos of fields of lavender, honey suckle vines trailing over cedar latticework, and white wicker furniture framed by wisteria in bloom. Standing in front of a rack covered with magazines, I am in awe of the magnitude of the fashion gardening is currently enjoying. The names of the publications appeal to a wide range of hobby gardeners. Scanning the titles, I see: Cottage Gardens, Canadian Gardening, Gardens Illustrated, Garden Escape, Garden Design, Organic Gardening, Landscape Solutions, and Fine Gardening, to name just a few.

Statements made on the front make invitations and promises to the prospective gardener. Harkening back to a time governed by the meatloaf in the oven, “honey I’m home,” and dinner-at-six, one magazine contains information about “ten fabulous flowers that your neighbors will envy”. The feature article, titled “how to capture that classic look”, is set off by paired images of flowers captioned, “how knockout combinations can deliver”. Another magazine promises “inspiring garden makeovers”, and “the perfect backyard”. Yet another declaring “big backyard drama”, suggests, well, almost anything.

Moving forward in time, I am invited to “take the plunge with a water garden”, and to enjoy the “allure of lavender”. I can “grow a spicy salsa garden” or learn about “carefree climbers”. I can “shop smart at garden centres,” and then “see double,” having achieved “twice the colour with variegated plants”. Finally, www.garden.com promises “endless garden plans, thousands of tools, plants and gifts”.

Positioning my shopping cart in line, I get comfortable with the latest addition of Gardener’s World. While the garden seems here to be just another fashion to keep up with, I like seeing Canadian Gardening vie for position with Cosmopolitan at the check out counter. I notice that particular flowers, sunflowers for example, that were ‘hot’ a few years ago, are now taking the back row to ‘old fashioned’ plants like
peonies and hollyhocks. Better glossies of gloxinia and roses, I think, than corsets and curlers. Let the mass media put coy pictures of pansies on the front of their magazines. Let them 'bring back' the peony and appropriate images of the marsh marigold.

That the garden is being marketed as phenomenon is also in evidence at the bookstore. Here too, spring is in the air. Gardening books of every shape and size, though most nowadays tend to be big books filled with fabulous photographs—are fully featured. A wide ranging collection of over sized, hard bound, coffee table style books fills the display window. Texts that are both culturally and class inscribed, these books are for folks with the big back yard. An encyclopedia of roses follows the 'important book' tradition of being sheathed in its own cardboard case. Stunningly decorated with raised images of roses in various stages of bloom, I cannot stop myself from running my fingers over the cover. Turning to make sure that no one is watching, I take a quick whiff of a particularly vivid white rose embossed on the spine. Mesmerized by that new book smell, where there should be the scent of roses, the price—$187.99—startles me out of my reverie.

For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death. In the less than two decades of their use, the synthetic pesticides have been so thoroughly distributed throughout the animate and inanimate world that they occur virtually everywhere. They have been recovered from most of the major river systems and even from streams of groundwater flowing unseen through the earth. Residues of these chemicals linger in soil to which they may have been applied a dozen years before. They have entered and lodged in the bodies of fishes, birds, reptiles and domestic and wild animals so universally that scientists carrying on animal experiments find it almost impossible to locate subjects free from such contamination. They have been found in fish in remote mountain lakes, in earthworms burrowing in the soil, in the eggs of birds—and in man himself. For these chemicals are now stored in the bodies of the vast majority of human beings, regardless of age. They occur in the mother's milk, and probably in the tissues of the unborn child. (Carson, 1962, p. 24)

Rachel Carson wrote those words in 1962. Today, in the spring of the year 2000, my partner and I sit in our garden, reflecting on a seemingly minor piece of regional
news. Efforts are afoot to prohibit the use of domestic pesticides in Ontario. Municipal bylaws are also being put before local councils to stop the use of pesticides in parks and golf courses. A mild mannered family physician from a small Ontario town talks on public radio about the harmful effects of these chemicals as evidenced in his daily practice. Visible in patients who present with minor allergy-like symptoms, such as sore throats and runny eyes, this doctor, a man now in his late sixties has been practicing long enough to see symptoms like these develop into serious illnesses. Advocating a ban on the use of pesticides in his municipality, he speaks calmly and sensibly about the issue. “Another day we will talk about farms and pesticides and such”, he says, “today let us focus on making our household lawns and gardens healthier”.

On the other side of the debate, opponents are up in arms. How will the grass stay greener? What about the landscaping industry? What about golf?

Shaking our heads we marvel at the innocent weed at the centre of this heated debate. The dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*. Somehow it has come to pass that we consider them weeds. Despite their tastiness in salads, their tendency to increase the aroma of herbs, and ability to help fruits to ripen, in North America we go to great lengths to keep them off our lawns (Streep, 1999). Gazing at the diversity—particularly the anthills, gray-globed seeded dandelion, and creeping Charlie—that is our grass, we wonder about the origins of the dandelion free lawn. Now a politically driven debate, was the dandelion free lawn originally an innocent aesthetic?

It is a beautiful time of year where we live: the apple blossoms are so fully in flower that they enfold the trees, the dark purple iris are showing their beards, and lily of the valley scent the moist evening air. Rachel Carson’s silent spring seems a far cry away from our corner of the world. Her “fable for tomorrow” seems like old news—my paperback volume is marked with a price—75 cents—in the upper left corner. How is it then, that we are still debating the use of pesticides to prevent dandelions—thirty-eight years later? What value do we attach to the garden as phenomenon?
Understanding the People-Plant Connection

On December 18, 1999, after spending two years and eight days living in a tree, Julia Butterfly touched down to earth. Having saved the huge redwood (now commonly known as Luna), from the saws of Pacific Lumber/Maxxam, Julia ended her world record tree-sitting stint. Since then she has appeared regularly in the media, and has written a book (Butterfly 2000) titled, The legacy of Luna. The story of a tree, a woman and the struggle to save the redwoods.

The story of the Luna tree-sit began on January first 1997, when a mudslide, caused by clearcutting, but explained by the lumber company as the result of heavy rains, destroyed the homes of seven families near Stafford, California. Situated in the “heart of California’s redwood country”, many of the “displaced residents were employed at Pacific Lumber’s Scotia sawmill” (Wilson, 2000, p. 35). Having been offered meager compensation for their loss, many people chose to sue the company after it declared the mudslide to be an “act of God”. Cutting of the ancient redwood forest continued.

A mass rally in September of 1997 to preserve the Headwaters Forest drew Julia, (then Julia Hill) to Stafford. (Many environmentalists engaging in acts of civil disobedience take on ‘forest names’). Joining with the environmental organization Earth First!, Julia was the last, (and longest) activist to tree-sit in the fifteen-foot diameter, twenty-story high Luna (Wilson, 2000). Wilson describes Julia’s perseverance, and the attention her commitment to Luna began to draw:

She withstood harassment with all-night spotlights and bullhorns wielded by company security; survived buffeting by a giant logging helicopter hovering overhead in an attempt to drive her down with wind blasts over 100MPH; and stubbornly refused to give up her perch. One hundred eighty feet above the...
ground, she stayed in Luna, living on a platform the size of a queen-sized bed, and as the days became months, reporters began seeking her out for interviews.

(pp.36-37)

Now an icon for the environmental movement, Julia invites people who have been inspired by her tree-sit to connect with their own capacity to make change in the world. Advocating social activism for all, Julia demystifies processes of change, emphasizing their accessibility to each individual:

"A lot of people look at me almost as a mythological creature or something... But the magic and power of Luna tree-sit lies in each and every one of us. And all we have to do is tap into it and recognize that every one of us has the power within ourselves to make incredible change. The corporate and political power has made us feel like our voice and power has been taken away from us. But the power of the individual, the universal power that lies deep within each and every one of us, can outweigh any other force out there if we just grab hold of it and run. That's what I've really been trying to encourage people to understand is that the Luna tree-sit, the Julia Butterfly, everything that people are connecting with is already inside of them. All they have to do is look inside and find it"(Butterfly, 1998, June in Wilson, 2000, p. 40).

Julia identifies disconnection, or what she terms “separation syndrome” as the largest problem in our world today. She explains:

We have disconnected ourselves from our life support systems and from each other so deeply that oftentimes people who live in the same apartment complex, sharing doors opposite each other, don’t even know each other’s names. That’s a symbol of how disconnected we’ve become. We need to go back to a symbiotic relationship... (Flischman, 2000, p. 80)

Reflecting on the story of Julia Butterfly and Luna, I find myself unable to form an opinion, to figure out what I think about a young woman living in a tree for two years and eight days. While her tree-sit was a purposeful act, and is itself a political
phenomenon that has sprung up in the environmental movement in response to the
destruction of forests, I am particularly interested in the intense interconnection people
like Julia feel with the natural world. Representative of an aspect of the people-plant
connection that seems to defy understanding, (and invite a degree of consternation),
Julia has been called both a media savvy environmentalist, and a dirty, New Age, tree-
hugging hippy.

How can those of us ‘on the ground’ make sense of ‘the spirit’ that moves folks
like Julia? Is it significant that we live in a world where environmental activists are tak-
ing on ‘forest names’? What does it mean that Julia’s face is now appearing on the
cover of magazines? Has tree-sitting become fashionable? Does supermarket con-
sumerism have something in common with Julia Butterfly? Does the conviction Julia
expresses about our essential connection with nature have anything to do with the
well-dressed, well-groomed, urban professional buying organic basil rooted in the pot?
Does the current fashion in gardening express a yearning for something deeper?

Encased in my Eastern, urban intellectual shell, I too have trouble relating to
some of Julia’s language. Apparently she found strength through Luna during her vigil
by listening to the sound of her leaves rustling, and by feeling the touch of her ancient
bark. Apparently the tree talked to Julia, and the woman, she talked back to the tree.

But when I hear Julia describe her feelings as she: “entered the great majestic
cathedral of the redwood forest for the first time,” I remember how moved I felt when
I first encountered a thousand-year old tree (Wilson, 2000, p. 36). While I did not do as
Julia did, (“my spirit knew it had found what it was searching for...I dropped to my
knees and began to cry because I was so overwhelmed by the wisdom, energy, and
spirituality housed in this holiest of temples”), I too felt overwhelmed by nature’s
magnificence (Wilson, 2000, p, 36). Perhaps I have just been socialized into a way of
being in nature that involves a greater level of inhibition. Encountering a living organ-
ism that old, however, I did feel awe and reverence in its presence. Not only had it
existed through over a thousand years of human history; it seemed somehow to have
borne *witness* to the world unfolding. In other words, it felt to me as if the tree itself had a palpable presence.

The French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, in exploring this sensation, uses the term "Flesh" to describe the quality of perception that links all living things (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Merleau-Ponty's "flesh of the world" encompasses all organic matter, plants and animals, including human beings, in its matrix (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Grounded in the notion that we are sentient before we are thinking beings, his notion of the Flesh suggests that the entire natural world is animate, and that human beings are first and foremost a part of that reality. At once perceiver and perceived, we are aware of our senses in the world, precisely because we are a part of it.

Merleau-Ponty illustrates this concept through a consideration of the senses. The eye, which sees, can also be seen, and the hand that can touch, is itself also touchable (Abram, 1997). Merleau-Ponty's work suggests that "perception, phenomenologically considered is inherently participatory...perception always involves at its most intimate level, the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives. Prior to all verbal reflections, at the level of spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world around us, we are all animists" (Abram, 1997, p. 57).

Emphasizing the continuity between all living things, Merleau-Ponty wrote about the natural world as an active and alive, contributing presence (Abram, 1997). His frame of reference suggests that nature is "a dynamic presence that confronts us and draws us into relation" (Abram, 1997, p. 56). It is only through a denial or forgetting of our sensuous involvement with the natural world that a process of objectification of it can occur. Further, by separating ourselves from it in order to consider it, we often imagine ourselves to stand above it. Privileging either the sensible field in abstraction from the sensory (as conventional scientific discourse does), or the sensory in abstraction from the sensible (as New Age spiritualism does), creates this separation (Abrams, 1997). Abrams (1997), in his discussion of Perleau-Ponty's notion of the
"Flesh" explains:

Although commonly seen as opposed world-views, both of these positions assume a qualitative difference between the sentient and the sensed; by prioritizing one or the other, both of these views perpetuate the distinction between human "subjects" and natural "objects," and hence neither threatens the common conception of sensible nature as a purely passive dimension suitable for human manipulation and use. While both of these views are unstable, each bolsters the other; by bouncing from one to the other—from scientific determinism to spiritual idealism and back again—contemporary discourse easily avoids the possibility that both the perceiving being and the perceived being are of the same stuff, that the perceiver and the perceived are interdependent and in some sense even reversible aspects of a common animate element, or Flesh, that is at once sensible and sensitive. (Abrams, 1997, p. 67)

When humankind is situated as part of the actively sensing "Flesh" of the world, reconnecting with the natural world becomes a part of reconnecting with our senses. Pausing to experience the variation in nature, through our sight, smell, sound, touch and taste, we find relief from the repetitiveness of human made structures and systems in the stimulation our senses provide. Turning from the human-made to the organic, "whenever we assume the poise and position of the human animal...then the entire material world itself seems to come awake and to speak" (Abrams, 1997, p. 65). Allowing our senses to be stimulated and enticed by the diversity in nature, we find that "organic, earth-born entities speak far more eloquently than the rest" (Abrams, 1997, p. 65).

The soothing properties of plants can be understood in terms of "overload and arousal" theories, that is, in the complex modern world of constant overstimulation, natural environments are "less complex and have patterns that reduce arousal and,
therefore, reduce our feelings of stress" (Ulrich & Parsons, 1992, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 22). Research into brain wave activity shows that "blood pressure lowers, muscle tension relaxes, [and] the skin warms, not only when we look at a natural scene, but even when we look at a picture of nature" (Harris, 1996, p.57). The health and productivity related benefits of window views of vegetation are well documented. For example, Moore (1982) reported that "inmates who had a view of nearby farmlands and forests had fewer sick call reports than those with a view of the prison yard" (Reif, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 26).

Evolution theory complements this notion by suggesting that, because we evolved in a plant filled environment, our responses to plants are both physiological and psychological. As Marjorie Harris (1996) suggests: "We need nature near us in some form or another, partly because our attachment to nature is primordial. We evolved along with plants, and we are, in many senses one with them" (Harris, 1996, p. 51).

While it seems like common sense that urban locations that offer views of a natural scene, or even direct access to the outdoors, should be valued highly, the importance we place on these locations has to do with both our psychological and physiological responses to the natural world. Understanding this need, we attempt to punctuate our urban environment with green space to provide brief opportunities to reconnect with nature. This idea of the urban oasis began in ancient times with the small walled gardens created by the Persians, and has been interpreted since then in a variety of ways by almost every culture around the globe (Harris, 1996).

Roger Ulrich's research into the people-plant connection "strongly supports the idea that our immediate responses to plants are evolutionary with an affective or emotional basis and physiological response" (Reif, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 24). When we feel the healing properties of nature while in proximity to the natural environment, we are experiencing this response. The "psychoevolutionary perspective holds that this emotional response to nature is central to all subsequent thoughts,

Charles Lewis, a researcher at the Morton Arboretum in Illinois has found that plants are a stabilizing influence that helps people to accept change. Observing the cycle of life in the natural world sends human beings the message that change is a natural part of life (Harris, 1996). “Knowing and understanding plants can give... hope and reassurance that with death there follows life and the great cycles of seasons are part of even greater rhythms of the universe that are not dependent on mortal man’s [sic] manipulation” (Olszowy, 1978, p. 8).

Steven Kaplan’s (1992) research into the restorative qualities of nature experiences identifies four criteria that are required for effectiveness:

*Being away*, which requires a profound change in physical surroundings;

*Extent*, which refers to the qualitative aspects of the setting, that is, that it is large enough but boundaried enough to feel manageable; (Extent therefore refers to “conceptual” size);

*Fascination* “elicits involuntary attention”, that is, intrigue without focus. Fascination provides a rest from the stress produced by concerted attention;

*Compatibility* means that the individual and the environment are well suited, that is, personal goals can be realized in and through place.


Restoration can be experienced as active (digging in a garden), or passive (looking at a landscape). Kaplan’s concept of “extent” is particularly compelling because when extent is not defined by physical size, “a miniature garden, a terrarium, or a vegetable plot may provide for one person what acres of wilderness provide for another (Relf, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 24).
Intention and Connection in the Garden

The earth’s vegetation is part of a web of life in which there are intimate and essential relations between plants and the earth, between plants and other plants, between plants and animals. Sometimes we have no choice but to disturb these relationships, but we should do so thoughtfully, with full awareness that what we do may have consequences remote in time and place. (Carson, 1962, p. 36)

As Peg Streep observes, there is nothing “natural” about a garden (Streep, 1999, p.69). The garden, as overgrown and unkempt as it might be, is also contrived and contained. Unlike nature in the wild, the garden in some way always shows evidence of human intention. How we go about revealing that intention is as diverse as the human beings that hold it. Beholding the garden as phenomenon we create spaces according to individual inclination, culture and tradition.

The carefully controlled Zen garden, for example, demonstrates human intention at work in the placement of every rock, plant, or pond. The spiritual traditions of Zen Buddhism, and the legacies of Shintoism and Taoism on which these gardens are based, inscribe all elements of the garden—rocks, water, trees and plants—with meaning and significance. In Shintoism rocks, mountains, and rivers are believed to house deities. Where the inanimate and animate mix, the sacral in nature is seen both as ever changing as the leaves on a tree, and as permanent as a mountain (Streep, 1999).

The Zen garden is based on the principles of balance as expressed by yin and yang:

Their design is based on the balancing of opposites, expressed in the landscape: the stasis of rock set off against the fluidity of water; the pairing of the horizontal and the vertical; the linking of light and dark, and high and low, which allows each to be seen with clarity; the juxtaposition of sound, achieved by the
rustle of grasses or falling water with silence. (Streep, 1999, p. 100)

Zen gardens are designed for meditation or prayer. A space created to aid in the process of spiritual enlightenment, plantings are symbolic of the themes of permanence and transience (Streep, 1999). We are intended to move through the Zen garden slowly and carefully. Beholding it as phenomenon it is seen as part of the journey of "progressive revelation" that is life:

The viewer is meant to look past the specifics in the landscape and to meditate instead on the aspect of truth embodied in it...garden design and sacred cosmology are one; the landscape doesn’t represent the sacred story but, for the purposes of meditation, is the sacred story (Streep, 1999, pp. 104-105).

Native North American spiritual traditions also blur the boundaries between what we usually in the west distinguish as object and subject, inanimate and animate. With a belief in the “oneness of all existing things...all the parts of creation—trees, plants, animals, stones, even humanity itself—[are] equal as the children of Mother Earth and Father Sky”(Streep, 1999, p. 18). With all of life “ceremonial in nature”, the cycles of time and the cycles of life between the human and the non-human become indistinguishable. Perceiving that which is human as embedded in the natural world, reciprocity is central to the Native North American way of being in the world:

Ritual, song, dance, and the making of offerings assured the continuance of the cycles of growth, death, and rebirth in the sun’s and moon’s rising and setting, the planting and harvesting of the crops, and the birth and death of each individual. (Streep, 1999, p. 19)

Hierarchical thinking that sets humankind above nature has no place in a spiritual tradition where reciprocity is the quality guiding all interaction between natural phenomena.

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In creating a garden, we cultivate a direct connection with the earth. We plant seeds, weed and water, encounter an earthworm, and watch a hummingbird feed from the nectar of a flower. As host, we invite nature to reveal itself in our midst. Intentional acts blend with serendipity to refresh our spirit and revitalize our own life force, reminding us of our connection to the natural world. Situating ourselves in this larger context we experience anew our most essential human needs:

The template that nature provides is not that of the hermit but that of community, and the mutually beneficial relationships among plants both in the wild and in the garden provide us with a model for seeing our lives and all of our relationships—both the intimate and the casual in a spiritual context. In the wild, plants grow in close proximity and thrive because one plant offers another precisely the living conditions it needs; thus a deep rooted plant provides its shallow-rooted companion the broken-up soil it requires to flourish while the shade cast by a tall plant filters the sunlight for another. (Streep, 1999, p. 63)

Spiritual traditions in different cultures around the world all identify the earth as feminine (Streep, 1999, p. 113). Giving of life, the earth is seen as “inherently sacred, whole unto itself, and a living organism” (Streep, 1999, p. 113). Even the smallest of gardens connects us to the earth as a whole by inviting a sense of stewardship for the land. Creating a garden with conscious intention requires responsibility. The act of nurturing and caring for the earth reminds us that the earth ultimately “belongs” to no one and to everyone (Streep, 1999, p.68).

The garden as phenomenon is both a part and an image of life. Beholding the garden with awe: we feel the presence of a thousand year old redwood, we see dew beading on a cabbage leaf, we touch a spider web on a cedar hedge in the morning, we see the iris blooming, we smell the lilies, and then the sweet pea. Sometimes we stand back and look; sometimes we step forward and participate. Beholding the garden as
phenomenon we experience wonder. Encountering the garden as phenomenon ignites our senses, and with them, our passion. Where we experience potential for growth, hope is renewed.

In my minds eye I see Rachel Carson bumping into Julia Butterfly at the supermarket. Surrounded by racks filled with gardening magazines, they are suddenly united by time and place. Peering into each other’s shopping cart, what would they see?

In the next chapter I introduce the garden as method. Through a series of narrative snapshots from my own and from Felicity’s experience, I look at our early efforts to combine people and plants as method in the context of care.
CHAPTER FOUR

Garden As Method
The healing garden is not so much one of elaborate showiness, good design or a display of taste but something more profound. It is a means of connecting with other living creatures in the community we share. It is a way of discovering both empathy and sympathy for their survival. You become so intimate with the garden’s life that the symbiosis between garden and gardener becomes complete. And the healing garden performs its miracles.
(Harris, 1996, p. 72)

Felicity

These are people who all have stories

I got right in there. Hands on. There was this one woman: they said she couldn’t comb her hair, she couldn’t eat, and she couldn’t lift anything. But she was coming to the plant room with me. Felicity leans forward and says with emphasis, ”She was coming to the plant room with me and using Felco pruners which are heavy and tight. And here she can’t comb her hair or eat soup.” So I started telling people what she was doing, and they said: “No. Impossible”. So I took a picture of her. And she’s posing. Felicity likens the woman’s pose playing up to an imaginary camera: sassy and fun with pruners in hand.

And then, in that very first week, the lady who had used the pruners, I was holding her and then something changed... I heard a funny kind of ... noise. I gave her a bit of water through a syringe and I started calling for the nurse. I knew something was not right. As soon as the nurse came in I said, “Well, I’ll come back.”

You see I hadn’t realized she had died. “That noise you heard”, the nurse said, “That’s the death rattle”. That was the first time it hit me what was going on. One of the therapeutic recreationists, we were really quite close, she was showing a film and I
went in there just because it was dark. I stood at the back and I was a mess. I was thinking “Geez, I was holding her.” It was hitting me what I was doing, holding that woman in her last moment of life. My friend, she said: “You know we always, it’s always for us that we feel sorry because for her it’s a lot better that she’s gone”.

I documented each person I saw. I have notes. I was really careful and methodical in a way, but also fly by the seat of my pants. I guess I went with my heart. I kept thinking, “These are people who all have stories.”

I devised a huge tabletop for the wheelchairs: a working surface for seeding and repotting. I took them out to this garden. A six-acre farm where I ended up building a log cabin. It’s not really wheelchair accessible at all. So I got a couple of the guys who were working there to help me. They were pushing wheel chairs on gravel and up hills.

We went to Montreal to the botanical gardens and they wouldn’t let anyone go with me. It was an issue of staff. They said, “You have to go by yourself”. It’s a two-hour drive from Ottawa to Montreal. We’d leave at nine o’clock in the morning and we were usually back at two o’clock in the morning. Of course the nursing staff were so upset with that. It was all people who were really quite ill and a lot of medication. I had sat down and written out med times and that. But I mean I had diapers, I had people with strokes, and I was trying to do transfers to the bathroom. Give everyone his or her meds. It dawned on me at one point; “I’ve given somebody the wrong medication. Oh my God”. I didn’t tell a soul because I didn’t want to alarm anybody. So then I phone back to the residence and I’m whispering into the mouthpiece, “I don’t know if I’ve given this one, but I may have, I don’t know. I’m not sure what to do.” And they said, “Well, the worst that can happen with that medication is not much, so don’t worry about it.”

This one man who kept his money in the front of his pants, he was French and he’d yell. The volunteers didn’t want to get his money out when we got there, but some people were already buying lunch. So he’s yelling, in French, cause he’s hungry.
Of course I had said that I’m bilingual. So I go up to him and try to get the money out of his pants. And then he’s smiling, and people are looking at me wondering: “what is she doing to that poor man?”

I’d let people eat what they wanted. This one woman, she’d always order a brandy. Ninety seven years old, “A brandy would suit me just fine, dear.” So everyone the next day that was eating garlic and you named it was sick; they had diarrhea or whatever. And the nursing staff was just furious with the Director of Recreation. But the residents, they had a good time.

They had so much trust in me. Sometimes inside my head I’d be saying, “Oh my God, I don’t know how to do it.” Like a two hundred and fifty-pound woman who is paralyzed and needs a diaper change. But she just accepted what I did as doing my very best.

_A lot of what I learned was like hands on. I mean I did the taking courses and this and that but there’s nothing like being thrown in. I was just drinking in everything that I could get._ Therapeutic recreation welcomed me.

One woman, she’d fight and kick and bite. Everytime we’d go to Montreal, to the Botanical Gardens, as soon as we’d get out of Ottawa she’d start talking to me. She’d tell me about when she was a lawyer’s assistant and funny stories. Then we’d get back and she’d shut down again.

_So when people ask me: “What are some of the benefits of horticultural therapy?” I don’t know where to begin._

This one man was so angry when I first knew him. His wife had been with him in hospital and she’d died. His leg was amputated to diabetes, he’d had two massive strokes, and his wife had gone and died. His teeth wouldn’t stay in because of the stroke, so they kept falling into his lap, and I’d put them back in and I’m craned forward trying to catch a word from the sounds coming out of his mouth. And finally, I don’t know why I didn’t think of this; he took out a piece of paper and wrote “patience”. It took him twenty minutes to tell me he lacked patience. I mean both of us
just lost it—it was so ridiculous. “Well”, I thought, “it really looks like you’re going to develop patience if you work with me.” We became really close. He used to play piano years ago, but after the strokes he could only use one hand. When I had a flower-arranging program, he wouldn’t do it. Flowers were “sissy work.” But he’d accompany us with one hand on the piano.

For the longest time I didn’t know, for maybe the first two years I didn’t know anyone else was doing this. I didn’t know horticultural therapy was a field.

We’ll call it Flora and Fauna

I’m still friends with this one man. He came in at 38 years old, paralyzed from the neck down from MS. His wife was divorcing him and was trying to take his pension. He’d been a professional football player so he was an athletic guy. I tried so hard to rig up the yard so that he could do something, but it just didn’t work. He got interested in neat plant stories, like what wild thing can you get from this or that. What this plant is used for. He worked from a voice-operated computer and took notes. We put in a proposal for an accessible garden together.

Finally they gave me a room where at least I could put bags of soil. I had been dragging bags of soil around my desk and trying to mix it in these stupid little pots. It was crazy. So they gave me a room. A north-facing window blocked off by a stone wall. Linoleum covered concrete floors. But we got grow lights and we got things going. They designed these storage bins. I did things that now I wouldn’t even think of doing. I mean we stretched three hoses across a parking lot. I’d have to leave someone in a wheelchair while I went around the building to go turn on or off a hose. Cars would park on the hose and you’d get exhaust fumes. But it was good. Once we had a whole afternoon of discussion about the feel of a pussywillow.

I contacted a hatchery in South Mountain, which is about an hour outside of Ottawa. I asked them if they would donate some eggs for Easter. I phoned the Ottawa Board of Education and got hold of an incubator. Then I thought: “Well, once they
hatch we’re going to need a spot for them.” So I got maintenance to build a pen: it was about six feet by six feet. That’s when nursing started to get really upset: “How are you going to clean it? It’s gonna smell.” And I didn’t know that birds carry parasites.

The birds, though, they all hatched and it was amazing. People who had never really spoken to me were coming out of their rooms and telling me stories of years ago. And one woman, she had pneumonia, she was ninety-seven, and she really wanted to make it to be 100. She had 2% hearing and 2% vision. They had all been saying, “We really don’t think she’s aware of her surroundings”. But I knew when I went up to her and touched her in a certain way that she knew it was me. I thought: “If I bring her a chick, she’ll think: “Okay, I’ve made it through another winter: it’s spring.” Afterwards she said to me: “My goodness, aren’t you thinking of creative ways to get my attention?!”

So twenty little chicks went, “peep, peep, peep”, they hatched right there in the common room. It was such a miracle, so affirming, but the nurses were just flipping out, they were going wild. The residents grew very attached to them, so when they got big, what we did, we didn’t want them to end up on any dinner plate, so we set up adoption papers (a resident did it all up in calligraphy), and we had a raffle, made some more money. I doubt very much that the people who won them kept them as pets, but we like to think so.

Then the director, he has a talk with me and says, “You know it’s getting so it’s not just horticulture”. So I said, “We’ll call it Flora and Fauna”. Well that was just a green light. We grew carrots. So that’s how I thought: “Okay we’ll get a horse in.” And I remember walking down one of the halls and this one woman she wanted to come outside and see the horse. They’re saying, “No dear, you have to go to bed”. I had to go in and say, “No, really. There is a horse in the parking lot.” They thought she was delusional.

I kept having to put proposals in to keep myself there. I was termed on-call for five years.
Maura

Looking closely at nature is important in healing. In pain or in sickness, we feel as if we are alone. When we observe nature at work, we are aware almost immediately of the extraordinary sense of peace that takes over the mind and probably the soul. The sense that we are not alone, the sense of being attached to that former innocence, makes a pause in what can be, during an illness, relentless terror.
(Harris, 1996, p. 70)

Katie

Her face turned in so far, her shoulders rounded up and in, now when I look at the long curved line of her spine I realize that my glimpses of her face were so fleeting, that I would be hard pressed to describe what she looks like. The feeling is full for sure, the feeling around this young woman, this curled-up-and-over, all I can see is her back, rocking, back and forth, rocking, shivering, shaking, back rocking. Blond hair pours over her shoulders and partly upside down over her head, dangling toward the floor. The toes of her running shoes are slightly turned in, tight stovepipe black jeans, a gray sweatshirt. Letting the moments pass I gaze around my office, up at the ceiling, at the picture a client drew of me, at my fake fruit dangling from the vine. "Would you like a Kleenex?" I offer, "or a glass of water?" No response. The sobbing continues. "I’m glad you’re here with me", I venture. The rocking continues, up and down, up and down, up and down, the motion too quick and staccato to be comforting, rhythmical, but jerky at the same time. I still can’t catch a glimpse of her face. "Would it be nice...would you like me to put my hand on your back?" No response. The sobbing continues. Fully focused on the full feeling before me, I feel clear-headed, my mind blank. No thoughts intrude. No thoughts about the trauma that this young girl must have suffered. No images. No wonderings. Keeping myself focused on her feeling, her full feeling about to pour over it is so big, I wonder for a second, for a second my focus
breaks, and I wonder how long I will be able to sit with her like this, helping her hold her feeling. Looking at my watch I realize that thirty-five minutes have elapsed since she sat down and rolled over and started to sob and rock. Thirty-five minutes of full feeling silence. Looking out my window I decide that at the forty-five-minute mark I will invite her outside for a breath of fresh air.

The security guard stationed at the back doors of the courtroom is standing so stalk still that as I pass him by I don’t immediately register his presence as human. 

Settling myself down onto the cool wooden bench I throw my glance back over my shoulder, just to make sure. There! His eyes moved… He’s real for sure.

All rising for the judge, quickly up and down, the court officials are efficient and business like, the first case is already in progress. Gavel smacking down with the clear thump of completion, papers are stamped, sorted and passed on. Number two is beginning.

Eyes rise instinctively, quickly up and down, as the accused is led into the room. Slumped shoulders, like a tethered animal he shuffles into position. Waiting, eyes downcast, I notice that the fingers of his shackled hands are clasped lightly together. Called to the witness box, as I hear her name my back straightens with anticipation.

Entering the courtroom, her eyes—knowing where and where not to look—immediately lock onto mine. Clicked into connection, clear headed and fully focused on soundlessly supporting this magnificent girl-woman before me, I see her roots firmly set in soil. Shoulders back, head up, even from this distance I can see the tightness in her jaw. This exertion, this act of courage is costing her. Pliable willow waving in the storm, dropping dead wood, I tell myself, makes room for new growth.

Keeping myself focused on her feeling, her full feeling about to pour over it is so big, I wonder for a second, for a second my focus breaks, and I wonder how long I will be able to sit with her like this, helping her hold her feeling. Looking at my watch
I realize that thirty-five minutes have elapsed since she sat down, shoulders back, head up, and began naming indignities, cruelties, atrocities—crimes perpetrated against her. Bark carved and hacked way, revealing belly white flesh, smoldering stump abandoned. Clutching the photo in the fingers of her right hand, the corners turned in by the warmth of her sweating palm, I see the vine twisting out of the image and up her forearm, encircling her trunk, bold orange and yellow flowers heralding her telling, her truth—a trumpet vine—no silence, no secrets. No lies here.

David

Scanning the file way too quickly, searching for clues, for a point of entry—I struggle with the barely legible scrawl of the intake worker—he must have been in a hurry too, I think. I have to go now, I have no choice—reception has buzzed me twice—this boy is in crisis, there is no one else who can see him, and he can’t wait his way through the waiting list. I pick up key words—psychiatrist two years, PostTraumatic Stress Disorder. Residential school. Learning disabilities. Low I.Q. Conduct disorder. Corrections. Masturbating in a public place. Mother depression. Father—but I don’t have time to learn about the father, the phone is ringing again, and instead of answering it, I walk up to reception.

Extending my hand in greeting I am struck by the sheer mass of the man. The size of his head, the thickness of his neck, the length of his jaw. Dull looking eyes, it seems to me that he’s not expecting much here—another stopgap measure from a system that hasn’t served him. Who hasn’t been in a hurry, I wonder, with this boy? Who has taken the time? Has anyone ever been fully present, fully available to him?

Doing my job I assess for suicidal ideation, for personal safety, for violence toward self or others, for food and shelter, relationships and support. I confirm that he doesn’t need to be admitted to hospital. I confirm that he has nothing, that there is no one.
Stepping out the side door I know in my heart that this boy needs something way bigger than these itty-bitty garden plots, this urban greening effort, this therapeutic garden. How long ago, I wonder, was there farmland outside this back door, instead of strip malls and suburban sprawl? How long ago did cultivated fields, cattle, and farm machinery fill this very same view? And what if I had the keys for a shiny red tractor in my hand? What if this boy had good hard physical work to do—cutting corn, baling hay—what if the land itself needed him? Who would he be then? Who would I be then?

Realizing that I had drifted away, he gently calls attention to his presence by letting the screen door he had been holding open, close shut. Shifting his weight from one foot to the other he gestures at the scene we’ve been silently surveying. At the back of the herb bed, in amongst a tangle of grapevine, he’s spotted a pile of dirt and partially dug compost.

"I could dig a hole, miss... I’m a good digger", he says.

We make each other feel like good therapists, Rick and I. United in our enthusiasm and our love for the boys that we have been working with in this group, we don’t want it to end. Teasing out the practicalities of growing up, the feelings beneath the doing... the simpatico, the connectedness, to each other, to the boys, to this little piece of safety we’ve been able to create for all of us. We decide to make a time capsule, fill it with our wisdom, dig out the frozen ground, and bury it for eternity. It’s a freezing cold day but we’re all there, huddled around the hardened earth. We make a ring around the hole we’ve scraped out. Jimmy Lee who draws just like his name suggests; Javied with the long sculpted fingers and beautifully shaped head, Nathaniel, so vulnerable and exposed with the recent death of his mother; and Jack. Jack be nimble Jack be quick, Jack jumped over the overpass.
For the last month I have been more motivated by the tomatoes in the clinic garden than by anything else in my life. Somehow I feel responsible to those tomatoes—to keep them warm, and to facilitate their process of ripening. I love the feel of them—the cold green ones; the sun touched red ones, and the new variety—yellowy orange and tart.

When I arrive each morning I take my coffee into our sunroom—a dilapidated storage room at the side of the building, where I have arranged trays for the not yet quite ripe tomatoes. I move the red out and into baskets, I move the not totally green onto trays on the middle shelf, and I go out and gather a few more hard green ones from the vines and sit them on top. For the last month we have had a big basket full of tomatoes in the waiting room with a sign “FREE—Clinic Garden Tomatoes—Help yourself”. Some take one or a few, others ask if they can take a four-quart basket to make a sauce. I love seeing people leave with their arms full.

When the motivation to combine care for people with plants springs from a commonsensical place from deep within, what that combination looks like when manifested in the real world is as limitless as the imagination of the individual. Unencumbered by notions of what the practice of a horticultural therapist might look like (or even that the kind of activities that we were engaging in could be called horticultural therapy), combining work with plants with work with people felt for Felicity and me like the most natural way to effectively provide care.

Stretching beyond the boundaries of what is done by The practitioner in The nursing home, Felicity stretched three hoses across a parking lot because the sunflowers the residents had planted needed water. Sure she could have set the residents up with small plastic watering cans with long spouts, and yes, it probably would have been tidier, but it wouldn’t have felt the same as having a hose in your hand and actually controlling the spray—from your wheelchair. Understanding the need to touch and
be touched, to feel connected to the real world of dirty hose ends and evenings out where you eat and drink what you know is not good for you, Felicity challenged the norms of care and the general perception of limitations in the institution by actually doing something different. Encouraged by the positive responses of the residents, Felicity let her imagination go to the point where bringing in a live horse seemed like a perfectly normal thing to do. The residents could see it and touch it—so what if they couldn’t ride it—simply beholding it as phenomenon was enough.

Moved by the depth of connection that these activities seemed to facilitate for the residents, Felicity became more and more committed to the notion that programming in the context of care needed to know no bounds. When challenged about the content of her program, because it seemed to the administration to be moving beyond defined boundaries, without missing a beat Felicity renamed it in order to help the administration reframe, and therefore approve of, what she was doing. Blessed with a lightness of touch that made it seem as if these activities appeared out of thin air, (but that also, paradoxically, made them seem as if they always had been there), Felicity made things happen with a kind of magic realism. Extraordinary things—a horse in a parking lot, or twenty little chicks going peep, peep, peep, were magic—but they were also real. Seeing the institutional context as canvas where she could so easily add colour, Felicity moved from one initiative to the next providing shading and depth to the everyday lives around her.

In my experience adding colour to the context of care also involved trusting my instincts and letting my imagination go. The process of opening up the boundaries of the acceptable norms of institutionalized counselling practice began when I invited Katie to take a step outside. While getting a breath of fresh air with someone who is upset hardly seems like a radical thing to do, in an environment where conformity to certain norms of practice prevails, deviation from those norms into even the most simple and natural of activities is seen as curious. Silently sitting side by side with my client, taking in the sun on a spring day, I was aware that staff were actually peering...
out the windows at us. Like the mother in Pleasantville who decides not to put the meatloaf in the oven so that dinner won't be ready at six, my decision not to keep my office door closed, and Katie and me contained within, opened up possibilities, but it also attracted attention.

Once it was clear that the sky wasn't going to fall because I was sitting outdoors with a client, some of my colleagues started to get excited about literally broadening our horizons by incorporating the garden into our work as method. For example, when it came time for Rick and me to begin the ending phase of one of our boys groups, Rick took our discussions about separation, closure and endings, and transported them into the tangible world with the idea of a time capsule. Suddenly not only had we designed an intervention that had the boys involved in expressing their feelings about separation; we also had them outside on a snowy January day scooping the frozen earth out of the ground with shovels. Moving those feelings along with each shovel full of earth loosened our spirits, helping difficult feelings to not get stuck. Making our connection to the earth explicit created a symbolic anchor for the group that paradoxically, helped us to separate.

These first efforts at combining work with plants and the qualities of the natural world with our work with people are resonant with naivete and innocence. So full of enthusiasm and so unstoppable, I feel refreshed every time I think about Felicity and that horse.

In the next chapter I explore these qualities in each of our life history roots. Cultivating childhood I introduce the garden as metaphor as growth.
CHAPTER FIVE

Garden
As
Metaphor
A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over ... all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

(Carson, 1956, p. 23)
I remember bringing home an owl,
I had a bat; I had a red fox.
Anything with a broken wing.
I was dragging a groundhog:
it was dead so I wanted to bury it.
I came home and told my mother:
"It's covered in white rice."
And the white rice was all over my arms.
And finding out: "Well that's maggots".
And this is in suburbia, in Ottawa.

They used to set traps for the groundhogs,
so the horses wouldn't break their legs.
I set the traps off because it was cruel.
My mother was very supportive of that:
"But if ever I got hauled off home..."
So then the R.C.M.P. let me help with the horses.

My mother:
she showed me the lovely furry vests on June bugs,
she goes for walks and hugs trees,
she knows every herbal remedy for this and for that.
She spreads her faux fur coat out in the middle of the front lawn,
and lies there,

the neighbors drive by and: “Oh my God, she’s had a heart attack”.

She’s a big woman.

Here’s this big woman lying watching the clouds,

In winter.

My mother,

she was an English teacher.

My teacher:

she had come up, and again I guess I wasn’t paying attention,

she flipped my desk over and all the June bugs came out.

She started screaming and squashing them,

“You are a sadistic, ignorant person”, I screamed.

My mother:

“That didn’t justify your behavior”,

“she had no business doing that as a teacher.”

My father:

he was a leather tanner in Europe,

he was a construction worker,

always coming home from work exhausted.

He at one point decided that Family should be more self-sufficient.

I was sixteen.

They bought twenty-five acres and moved out to the country.

I didn’t move out with them.

My father:

he was in concentration camps during the war.
My grandmother:
she was of the belief that we all have psychic abilities:
“when you’re a child that’s when you can develop these energies.”
They’d send me to her with homework,
usually it was all of February,
I’d have a break.
(I really didn’t like school.)
I brought my failed tests home to be signed,
and traced my mother’s signature from her chequebook.

My grandmother:
she was large breasted,
(I thought it was her arm)
I bathed her and cut her toenails.
She came to live with us,
she didn’t go into a nursing home
(my father insisted.)

I’d go around and I’d tell people:
“Please sponsor me on the Miles for Millions,
but I’m sending the money to Save the Seals”.
I was junior president of The Ottawa Humane Society:
“We speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.”
“You must bring your dogs some water”.
If I got in trouble it was an innocent...
I’d never steal or hurt anyone.
My mother and her mother,
they didn't get along:
I was the peacemaker.
Two of my friends were kicked out,
they moved in with my family and finished high school.
It’s a dinnertable where whoever speaks the loudest gets heard,
you turn around and the cat is on the dining room table.

I read like crazy.
I quit high school three times.
I had a motorcycle license.
I know I was very independent,
always trying new things.
A free spirit.
Now there are all kinds of labels,
whether they would consider it attention deficit,
school just wasn’t a good mode of learning for me.
I wanted to be a vet,
(but I was afraid of the math).
I don’t have high school.

When I was fifteen I got a job at the front desk:
“I can type and speak French”
(fingers crossed behind my back).
By four months they didn’t want me to quit:
“We’ll sponsor you to take hotel management and stay on,”
“No, I have to go hitchhike out west”,
“We’re giving you a leave of absence”,
I had a lovely summer.

My mother:
she had given me a twenty-dollar bill,
sewed it in a patch to my jean shorts,
if I got stuck all I had to do was...
When I came back I handed her the twenty,
she said: “No, no, you can go out and enjoy yourself.”
“That’s one more adventure”.

I was a sign writer on planes,
in northern B.C. and Fort St. John.
And trucks and stuff,
and the Alaska highway.
I did graphics and design,
calligraphy and photography for a newspaper.
I started to go to school at night,
I did horticulture training,
heat loss calculations and all!
(“My God, I could have been a vet!”)

Without children,
I feel fulfilled as a woman.
I knew it was never right
(four proposals of marriage).
It’s always been for me:

[70]
“Oh well, it’ll work out”.
Whether it was a guardian angel,
or whatever.

You see dew on a cabbage,
you know... that beads.
And you’ve got a spider web on a cedar hedge in the morning.
When the iris are blooming and the lilies,
and then the sweet pea...
And I think: “this really must be it.”

I’ve had a very nice life so far:
people who’ve been very good.
Off the beaten track, but I liked it that way.
I was very fortunate in my name:
Felicity means happiness.

**Maura**

1.

The chosen child of few of the lucky, we chosen people, I am made to feel so special, so loved in the presence of my maternal grandparents. Working class Russian Jewish immigrants who had lost so much and so many, by the time I came along, by the time I was chosen, I could only ever be felt as the most precious of gifts.

I spend endless amounts of time watching my grandfather Zorah work with his hands. He is constantly in motion: fixing the water pump in the kitchen, planing the surface of a table he has built, his large strong hands capable and creative. We do oil paintings (I mix the colors), in a cramped tool shed on the same counter where the
innards of the clock he has taken apart to repair lies strewn out in pieces. I am allowed to do anything and encouraged to do everything: make a fort out of blankets and chairs and sleep in it outside all night long. (To my mother: "Lifshila, its only a little dew, she's strong".) Paint my shoes purple, climb a tree to the top to get a better view of a bee's nest, row the boat in my nightgown. When he says "Maura, don't step on the nail", without missing a beat I stamp my foot down hard. (To my mother on the way to the hospital for my tetanus shot: "Lifshila, it will heal fast, she's strong. Now we know...no man will ever push her around. Of this we can be sure".) He speaks to my mother in English, to my Baba in Russian and in Yiddish; with me he speaks an English filled with stories.

It is the winter that I am twelve and Zorah has cancer. I have a fight with my mother because I don't feel like going to visit him in the hospital.

"It takes forever to get there, Mom... And anyway, once we're there, he's so sick, I don't think it makes a difference to him. Besides...doesn't it matter to you that it's a school night?

My mother seems too distracted for me to get a rise out of her. She sighs and then says in an unusually bland tone,

"Even if you don't know it now, you will eventually be glad you went. And it does make a difference to him. Even if he can't show it, he knows you're there. I know he does." "What do you know?" I mutter under my breath.

On the way to the hospital I sit alone sulking in the back seat, imagining that she is my chauffeur.

By the time we get there it is already dark. At first the well lit, busy environment seems welcoming after the cold silence of the car ride. When we get to my Zaida's floor we pass the nursing station and my mother, greeting each staff person by name, is outgoing and friendly. She gets into a big conversation with a woman, not a
nurse, a cleaner maybe, who doesn’t seem to me to speak any English. Soon they are both waving their arms and laughing and talking about dumplings, or some damn thing. I am getting hotter and hotter standing there in my coat, and more and more irritated that she has dragged me all this way and here she is rattling on to this stranger. I keep walking, and then there she is: click, click, click, beside me (sometimes the keep-on-moving strategy works.)

We make our way down the hall to his room, enter, and stop dead. He’s gone. His entire bed is gone from the place where it should be. My mother and I stand: speechless and paralyzed, two pairs of eyes scanning the room. There are three other patients in the room; none of them are my Zaida. Above the spot where he should be several ceiling tiles have been removed and loose plastic partially covers the opening. Already there is a fine coating of drywall dust in my mouth. I take a further step into the room, and immediately see: there he is, his bed has been wheeled to behind the door. I feel floods of relief moving over me like waves: I am beside him and have his hand in mine and am leaning over the rail of the bed to kiss him. I am so glad I have come.

I look up at my mother, tears of relief overwhelming me, but she has already begun to speak. I see that her face is filled with rage,

“Maura, I need to speak to them about this. Please stay here with Zaida”. Without waiting for an answer she is gone. I hear the click, click, click of her heels moving speedily down the hard linoleum floor toward the nursing station. My Zaida’s blue eyes are looking steadily up at me. I hear my mother’s voice beginning, “Every time anyone opens the door to the room it hits his bed, and jars him, he needs to be moved to a more appropriate space…”, and I can tell by the glint in his eye that he can hear her too. I can hear someone else talking, but not their words and then my mother responding, and it is more muffled, and my Zaida has closed his eyes, so I get into the bed beside him and close my eyes too. We lie together holding hands.

I open my eyes to the sound of another of the patients in the room moaning.
Mesmerized, I watch the slow drip of liquid—drip, drip, drip into the tube that goes into my Zaida’s vein. I can still hear my mother’s voice, muffled now, I can’t make out the words – she must have gone into someone’s office – but I can tell by her tone that she is starting to let her anger show. And then, all of a sudden right outside the door my mother is yelling,

“I will not leave this building, this hospital tonight until my father is moved to a room with a decent bed, where the ceiling is not falling down, where there is no dust. There is something that can be done and it must be done now.”

Still with his eyes closed, I feel my Zaida squeeze my hand.

2.

Teacher is calling the group to the carpet for story. Engrossed at my easel, I continue to work quietly on my painting. All the other children eventually make their way to the carpet and sit cross-legged, waiting patiently for the story to begin.

”Maura, did you hear me? Story is about to begin”.

Not moving from the easel, “Yes Mrs. Gilson, I heard you”.

”Maura, please come and sit on the carpet now so that you can hear the story”.

“I can hear the story from here Mrs. Gilson”.

(With increasing irritation) “Maura, everyone is ready. Come and sit with us right now.”

(Looking up from the easel and making full eye contact) “Mrs. Gilson, I’m ready too. I can hear the story from here while I work quietly finishing my painting. I’ll look at you to show that I am listening. I can do two things at once.”

While I was growing up in the 1960s I remember many meetings in our living room about change in the public school system. I’m sure the adults talked about lots of
important issues; what I remember are the discussions about abolishing the strap.

I had never actually seen the strap but I knew it was there in the office of my elementary school. I knew because kids talked about it, and because my brother’s friend Terry often got the strap. I gave the office a wide berth because I knew the strap was there.

I was always told, and reminded again and again, that if anything happened at school that made me feel uncomfortable, my parents, they wanted to hear about it. I was told that if an adult ever Threatened or Hurt me, I was to Leave the Situation Immediately and Phone. I knew that there was a letter on file at the school saying that corporal punishment should be abolished; that if it was used on my brother or I, my parents would press charges of assault. In my own mind I sometimes rehearsed the moment in Mr. Brown’s office where I told him that he couldn’t give me the strap because my mother, she said so.

In grade 3 I had a wonderful teacher named Mrs. Levere who was warm and funny and challenging, and just terrific in every way imaginable. After March break Mrs. Levere went on maternity leave and was replaced by Mr. Lia. Mr. Lia was a very angry man. He walked up and down between the rows of our desks armed with a wooden yardstick. He yelled and threw chalk. He was terrifying.

I knew that his behavior was wrong and that something needed to be done immediately. At lunch I tried to phone my mother at work, but I couldn’t get through. I talked to my friends and we formed a plan. We would barricade the door, and refuse to go back into class after lunch. I knew that this was called a “sit in”.

Later on, I got into trouble with my grade 5 teacher, Mr. Mormack (who I adored). My friend Lorna and I were asked to come in early from lunch to talk over the situation (I can’t remember the content of the misdemeanor). It was winter, so the first thing we did was to take off our boots and coats in the cloakroom. When we entered the main part of the classroom, Mr. Mormack (as I knew him and trusted him) was gone. In his place was a very cold, very angry man. And even more bizarre, he
was wearing sunglasses. When the bell rang and the other students came in, Lorna and I slipped out of the school. We walked over a mile home to my house in the cold, in the snow, without coats, in our stocking feet.

3.

Many of my friends are not allowed to come.

"Where is it that you go? Where exactly?" Mrs. McNair asks.

Kathy has asked again, and my answer to her mother, "It's near Parry Sound. It's fourteen miles south of Parry Sound, near Georgian Bay, on a little lake. It's just a little past MacTier", has Mrs. McNair's brow screwed up tight. Wiping her hands on her apron, she has turned now to face me.

"Who is it that is part of it? Who goes there exactly? Are those other people families? I understand that there are a lot of...boys."

Even as I answer I know that what I say won't make any difference. Mrs. McNair has heard things. Rumors. I can tell already that there is something troubling her—some idea, some image of what goes on—that she can't put words to. My answer won't be getting Kathy to come.

"Boys? Yes...there are more boys...besides me there's only Michelle, and she's so much younger that she's not really part of things, and Tina's family, they never really come up..."

Interrupting me, her voice is starting to sound shrill, "Yes, but...what happens with...with bathing suits? What is it that you call the place? It's not a cottage...or a camp..."

Lying on my back, floating, drifting, along with the current, my body temperature feels to be perfectly one with the water. Effortlessly gliding along, carried with the
movement of the water, small sculling hands keeping my hips afloat, my mouth and nose full of air. Slipping occasionally below the surface, water washes over my face, over my wide open eyes, and back up again, back and forth, above and below, air and water—I'm never completely sure which I prefer.

Long pink and gray rock warmed by the sun, warmer than the air, than the water, like seaweed my long wet hair strewn across the smooth surface, water flowing in channels from the ends, collecting in tiny pools. Sky such a bright blue I can sense the colour beyond the closed edges of my eyelids. Droplets of water clinging to my eyelashes, to the edges of my earlobes, sounds muffled by water popping, warm water flowing out from inside my ear. Cooler air now dries my skin, surface tightening, pulling the edges in. Rolling over into the warmth of the rock, a vein of rose quartz traces the line of my calf, up my thigh. Touching lips fragrant, shivering hard pink flesh of the earth, I slide soundlessly back into the water.

4.

On September 8th, 1989, two and a half weeks overdue with my second child, I make my way to St. Joseph's Hospital for a routine stress test. It's a beautiful day—more like late summer than fall—warm and sunny, and I feel well and relaxed. Living it up on the borrowed time of an overdue pregnancy, I browse in the antique shops on Ronscesvalles, enjoying a stroll in the sunshine in an unfamiliar part of the city.

By the time I get to the hospital, I am drowsy. I want to get the test over with as quickly as possible so that I can go home and take a nap. When the ultrasound reveals that my baby is lying transverse, I am told that labor must be induced immediately, it is a dangerous situation, and no, I can't even leave the hospital to go home and get my things. In an instant I become a medical emergency.

A few minutes later, having signed a document releasing the hospital from any responsibility for me or for my baby, having run across six lanes of traffic, my eyes
streaming with tears, my panic stricken partner running after me—I scream out: “I’m not having my baby in that hospital when they want me to”.

A few hours later, returning to the hospital in an atmosphere permeated by resignation, I am overcome by an enormous feeling of loss. Hooked up to machines, contained and controlled, I am more manageable; a caged and domesticated woman, not the wild animal of hours earlier. As the night wares on and the labor progresses I complain that there is no where to go, nothing to do, nothing to distract me from the pain of the contractions. Does the hospital kitchen have some prep work that I might do? Peel a 50-lb. bag of potatoes? Julienne some carrots? Knead some bread dough? Without my knowledge, I’m given a tranquilizer.

A few hours later, I am told that my baby is in distress, I must have a Caesarian section immediately. In an instant I become a medical emergency. I am whisked away into an operating room... and left alone. Lying flat on my back, soaked in my own sweat, writhing in pain, ...I am left alone. I call out for help. Whispering women with masked mouths occasionally enter the room to peer at me from a distance. I start to swear, then to scream.

A man dressed in white enters the room and comes and stands over me. In purring tones he tells me that my husband will be coming soon, “He’s juuust putting on a gown. There now, it will be all right soon dear. We just need you dear... there, there, to move yourself over to this table. That’s a good girl, just over here and we’ll be able to give you the anesthetic... oh, yes you can do it dear. Now juuust be a good girl and slide...” And when his hands come down to take hold of me I grab his elbow and sink my teeth into the flesh of his forearm.

5.

I grew up in the heart of downtown Toronto. There were no flowers in our yard and no grass. We kept rabbits under our back porch, had a rope swing, and various
piles of who knows what around the yard. The rabbits were a constant issue with our neighbors, particularly with a rather testy older woman who lived over the back fence. In the spring, when they were restless, the rabbits would dig tunnels—and often they would end up in Mrs. Lipedis' back yard. They only ever nibbled the tops off her tulips, but this led to angry words over the back fence and my brother and I madly chasing and trying to catch the rabbits.

My parents had an open contempt for everything to do with grass—the seed, the fertilizer, people getting sod, the sound of mowers in the neighborhood on a spring weekend. They removed all the grass from our front yard and covered the entire surface of the ground with small stones. Spring chores included picking up and collecting the maple keys from the stones so that they wouldn't sprout and grow.

My mother had a compost long before recycling was a household word. It was not a compost bin like so many urban dwellers have now. It was a compost pile. Periodically she would send one of us out to turn over the pile, which meant pulling all the fresh coffee grounds, egg shells and carrot tops to the side and digging out the "finished" compost from underneath. It was an odorous task. My mother would serve salads, proudly remarking that all the greens were from the garden. Dandelion greens, mint leaves a few wispy bits of lettuce—we called them weed salads. In the late winter, early spring our kitchen table was given over to flats of sprouting seeds soon to be planted.

On the block where I grew up I had the only mother who worked outside the home. Like the other fathers on the street, on weekday mornings my mother drove away in her black car and didn't return until evening. She always took off her suit when she came home and put her bags down in the same place, ready for morning. Lined up on the long radiator cover beside my parents bed were my mothers matching sets of purses and pumps: brown for fall, black for winter, navy for spring and white
for summer. The contents: lipsticks and face powder, cigarettes, balled up wads of Kleenex, wallet and keys, moved from purse to purse as the seasons changed. Her black leather briefcase held files and papers and books, and a day timer stuffed with extra slips of paper held in place with paper clips then bound with an elastic band.

More than work, my mother always had a career that I could name. In school I remember putting up my hand and asking the teacher where to put "mother’s occupation" on the form. My friends didn’t talk about their mothers in those terms, their mothers were simply their mothers; it was their fathers who were something else too. Other Moms worked at home and were there at lunchtime and when we came home from school and watched the Flinstones; other Moms did the grocery shopping and cleaned the house. Maria was paid to clean our house, and my father did the grocery shopping when he remembered. We frequently met for dinner in restaurants or ate instant boxed or frozen meals. Homemade food was occasionally produced to approximately coincide with some culturally prescribed holiday for which my Mom felt obliged to cook or bake.

When we went to our house for lunch Bernadette with the cleavage and beehive ("are-you-sure-it-is-real?") hair taught us how to play poker in her thick French accent. My Baba ("she’s confused") sat on the couch and smoked, and Mrs. Lepidis ("she keeps Baba company") sat beside her. My other grandmother, who seemed normal by comparison (she could be trusted not to put the radishes in the freezer), lived with us when she wasn’t in Ireland. For many years young men and often their girlfriends or wives came to stay at a moment’s notice. They stayed for weeks, months and years, Vietnam draft dodgers who were "getting their lives in order".

My mother defended her doctoral dissertation when I was 18 and she was 48. It took her ten years to complete. Ten years, in which she worked full time, lost both parents, raised two children, separated from and divorced my father. Waiting for what felt
like hours outside the tightly closed door of the room in which she conducted her defense, a huge bouquet of flowers at the ready, I strained to hear the muffled sounds of my mother's voice.

I remembered the countless times that I had seen her sitting at her desk late at night on my way to bed.

I remembered sitting in the kitchen and hearing the sounds of her feet pacing overhead in her study.

I remember hearing her voice, muffled between rooms, speaking into her dictaphone as I fell asleep. When asked why she was speaking, rather than writing her dissertation, my mother explained that, for her generation, if a woman learned how to type she was at risk of being asked to do typing for men, or of becoming a secretary. She had found it prudent not to learn how to type.

Walking down the overly sterile hospital corridor toward her room wishing that I had grabbed the time to have a shower before coming, I feel so grubby, my nails look particularly dirty in this environment. Checking in at the nursing station, the evening nurse, the whites of his eyes look so white in his friendly dark face, he catches me and says the doctor, she's on the floor. She wants to speak to me,

"Wait just a minute, I'll page her", he says, touching my arm.

Almost as fast as I hear his voice over the loudspeaker, there she is, the red headed Dr. Turpie and she's smiling—click, click, click—as she approaches me, and in one motion she is opening a door and saying,

"Why don't we just step into the conference room?"

Too friendly tone, too bright eyed, I know that there is something up... since when do they pursue me? I stand, and then sit on the arm of a dark green leather couch, dark green painted walls, framed floral prints—at least someone was trying to make up for no windows, I think, this is the room where they take the family to talk about the ter-
minal cancer diagnosis, stop smiling at me, why am I here?

And in under five minutes I’m checking my nails again, still dirty, as I approach her room, stomach balled up, my shoes are soft soled, so quiet she doesn’t look up, perched on the edge of her bed, feet dangling down, not quite reaching the floor, engrossed in reading a book propped up in the middle of the tray, dangerously close to the coleslaw, chewing, she hasn’t heard me or felt my presence yet, standing there looping potential sentences through my head.

Looking up she begins to smile, but her expression shifts before it has even fully formed,

“What is it darling?”

She knows something is up before I have even opened my mouth, knows even though I don’t think my face is giving anything away.

“Well, hi”, I say, thinking that I can slow the moment down.

Looking straight at me,

“What do you mean “hi”? “What is it...you look so troubled?”

She puts down the chicken drumstick she has been gnawing—Friday night, Mount Sinai Hospital, chicken. I leave her curious, worried brown eyes looking for relief from the intensity growing in my stomach, from the tightness in my throat. Moving out the window, the bright sunshine seems strange—its dinner time, but then, its late August; it’s the 5:00 dinner that’s early.

“Maura...?”

I take a step closer to the bed and move a pile of files and loose papers lively with yellow stickys and highlighter pen aside. Sitting down, I scan the papers, ‘3216 F Social Policy and...’ I start to read. Course outlines.

“I just saw Dr. Turpie, Mom... she caught me on my way in from the elevator...”, I begin slowly, looking into her anxious face.

“And ?” she says, and immediately I can see the shift from worry to relief to anger flash across her face as she understands that its not me, or the kids, its only to do
with her... and she knows she’s fine.

"Mom, Dr. Turpie has all the tests back. The ECG... the other scan they did last week and the scores from the tests the psychologist did”, I begin. “They’re saying that there’s an impairment, Mom. They think it’s from the coma. They’re saying...” I’m looking straight at her, but now she’s shifting her pile of papers, standing up and moving toward the window ledge, not looking at me.

"Mom they’re saying that they think you shouldn’t teach, at least not this fall, till they know... till they see how you do...it would be a leave, a medical leave...” She interrupts me,

“They are so full of shit. My courses are ready to go, classes start in five days, I’m ready to leave this place”, turning to the bed she gestures with anger at her papers and books. “It’s wasting my time being here...And what do they do, they send you here as their messenger? “Who do they think they are, those bastards, putting this on you?” Her voice is rising, “What do they think I will do? Are they scared of me?” Now her eyes are flashing.

6.

From a very early age I had and did jobs. When I was really little I had an easy-bake-oven. I made tiny little cakes that I “iced” with jam and took door to door in the neighborhood and sold. I held “fairs” in our backyard. I decorated, set up games, and made punch and popcorn. I dressed up in outlandish outfits and charged admission to the local kids and their parents and then charged for a turn on our rope swing (which was free at any other time during the week).

My first formal job was in the local public library shelving books and doing check out. Everyone else who worked there was at least 50 years older than me. I
loved the library atmosphere—the wood paneling on the walls, the clean linoleum floors, all the books on the right shelves; the book trolleys with their well oiled wheels. I spent a lot of time trying to move as quietly and as gracefully as those trolleys.

When I was a teenager I worked as a waitress at a Howard Johnson’s and wore a hideous orange and white uniform. When food was ready from the kitchen it was put under a heat lamp and the cook would ring a bell. We servers then added a carrot curl to each plate and squirted it with orange dye.

I worked in construction in my early twenties, doing an assortment of different jobs: from roofing, to foundation work, to electrical work on upscale renovations. I liked roofing the best. Roofing is straightforward work that becomes very rhythmical after you’ve done it for a while. The shingles form nice patterns, and when the job’s done, the job’s done. It’s clean cut and clear. Often you get a nice view from up on a roof, or at least a different perspective, sometimes you see something that you didn’t know was there.

When I worked in construction I was never in charge of the whole job, and so I didn’t worry too much about it. I also liked being the only woman on the construction crew. Not for any particular attention that I received, but because what I was doing was different. I did enjoy being admired for my strength and stamina. But more than anything I enjoyed being dirty. Wearing the same clothes day after day, my tool pouch, my wool socks, my big boots. I was always the one appointed to go pick up the donuts for our coffee breaks because the woman in the shop would often give me free day olds—I think she felt sorry for so dirty a young woman. The foundation work was the dirtiest; by the end of the day I looked like I had been in a chimney. I enjoyed the rhythm of the day; early morning start, coffee break, lunch, afternoon coffee break,
time to go home.

In my mid twenties I was invited to work as the executive assistant to a city councillor.

"I'm not sure I'm qualified", I said. It seemed to me to be a very grown up job. I'd have to dress up for sure—maybe even where nylons.

"Oh, I think you're qualified, Maura. Any particular skills required, you'll pick up... learn on the job," she said.

"But I don't even know how to type", I confessed. "Let alone use a computer."
She laughs,

"Then we'll get you some training. It's your qualities that I'm more interested in. I want to hire you because of your character."

The café always felt like good luck because it was. I leased the community space and started the business not because I wrote a stellar proposal and the organization, they just couldn't say no, but because the committee, overwhelmed with the responsibility of making a decision, asked we contenders to draw cards, and me, I drew the King of Spades.

That was when I was 21 and I left the business when I was 31. In those ten years I bought and renovated a house, had two children, finished my undergraduate degree and worked at City Hall. But the cafe provided the rhythm that underscored everything else that I did. Everything else fell into place around the cafe.

The work was so concrete and so simple—I made the pie, I sold the pie, and I held the five dollars in my hand. I loved making beautiful tortieres with golden crusts on crisp fall days. I loved buying large quantities of produce: bushel baskets of toma-
toes and basil in season for pesto, flats of strawberries, and a case of asparagus. I loved the smells, the tastes, the texture and the abundance. I loved the feeling that I was connecting with some kind of higher good when I figured out a way to make that case of over ripe mangoes into chutney before they went bad.

As metaphor in the stories of our childhood the garden is growth. Cared for and contained, a garden is not wide-open wild, untended space. A garden has edges, hedges bushes and boundaries. Boundaries create safety within. A garden is a sanctuary, a sacred space filled with light. The cycle of the garden—seed, shoot, root, blossom—flows uninterrupted. Rhythm and movement, earth, air, water and warmth. Texture and colour, smells and sounds, touched and touching.

Gifts given freely and received in childhood create a treasure chest that lasts a lifetime. I sit in awe of Felicity who, at over forty years of age, can look me in the eye and say: “I’ve had a very nice life so far. I was very fortunate in my name...Felicity means happiness.”

Privileged with early experiences of unconditional love, Felicity and I both knew at an early age what it means to be adored. In particular we knew what it feels like to be valued and respected, as girls, as teens, and as young women. Taught by our families to trust our intuition and rely on our own judgement, going out into the world as girls we did not doubt our feelings and responses. Finding our place did not require ‘knowing our place’ in the usual respect meant for women. Instead, family beliefs and active support countered societal messages about the less than status of women. Rooted in a strong sense of ourselves, and a sense of ourselves as strong, finding our place in the world beyond the boundaries of the garden did not necessarily mean trying to fit in, or learning how to conform. It meant retaining our internal integrity and
finding ways to make systems suit us as individuals. This value is particularly apparent in each of our early school experiences. For Felicity, being in school just didn’t work very well. She found the hard, flat surfaces gray and unyielding, the people stale and dry. The routines overwhelmed her and the rules annoyed her. Internally jarred with every hard, cold ringing of the bell, and made queasy by the institutional smells, the sensory experience of being in school literally started to make Felicity sick. When little girl Felicity fills up her desk with June bugs so that she can feel their “lovely furry vests” on her fingers, she is attempting to anchor herself in the natural world. Understanding this and interpreting their daughter’s actions as expressions of need, Felicity’s parents decided to support her learning in other ways in different environments. Filled with curiosity, liveliness and creativity, a voracious reader and an articulate speaker, Felicity’s parents looked at their little girl and chose not to have her tested and assessed. (Remember too that Felicity’s mother was a teacher.) Instead they chose to support her by designing a ‘surviving school strategy’ that included giving her regular breaks from routine. Trusting their daughter first, and the system second, when the teacher dumps the June bugs out of Felicity’s desk and onto the floor, her mother reprimands her for calling the teacher a “cruel sadistic person”, but she also validates Felicity’s response by saying: “she had no business doing that as a teacher”.

When I went off to school for the first time at the back of my mind, in the pores of my unconscious being, was the knowledge that my parents believed that there were serious problems in the school system as a whole. Cute little bud in pigtails, I had been absorbing my parent’s values and politics since I was just a tiny shoot in a little pot. Now sending out shoots into the world, I carried that critical perspective with me. My parents assumed that I would have to protect myself: from adults abusing their power, from flawed systems of knowledge, from sexism, from anti-Semitism, and from the demand to conform. Sending their cute little bud in pigtails out into the world as if to battle, I was encouraged to question, evaluate and challenge authority from a very
early age. They had prepared me and warned me to “be prepared”. Institutional structures required navigation, to be sure, but the purpose of learning how to read the map was not to follow directions, but to discover my own path.

In each of our families of origin, the family constellation was also characterized by varying degrees of openness and role fluidity. For example, friends of Felicity’s moved in to finish high school, and her grandmother lived out the end of her life in their family home. My grandmother also came to our home to live after the death of my Zaida. Consistent with my parents politics, during the Vietnam War our house was home to draft dodgers and their families. Homes that provided safe haven to those beyond the members of the nuclear family, for Felicity and me growing up, our homes did not feel like closed systems.

Felicity and I both grew up with powerful mothers as role models. As daughters, we knew that our mothers were in charge of their own lives. My mother went out every day in the world to claim her place in it, as if she were going to battle: the world was hers, it needed changing and she was going to do it. In my family home women’s work specifically did not include domestic chores, not because my mother was lazy or spoiled, but because non-participation in these activities actualized her politics. Walking the talk, as a child I was aware that my parents social and political activism permeated every aspect of the fabric of our lives. Simply put, in my family home there was no giving over of female power to please men.

Felicity’s mother, an authentically eccentric woman, demonstrates again and again that non-conformity is fun. “Why lead a traditional life?” her actions seem to ask. “Who would that life be for?” Irreverent about societal expectations of women, our mothers found ways to challenge role bound behaviors. Mothers claiming independence and the freedom of self-expression demonstrate female entitlement to their daughters.

Extensions of messages delivered in childhood teetering on the edge of each narrative snapshot include the deep value held in our families about giving back. With
a full treasure chest of gifts given freely it was left up to me to find the best possible way, the fullest, most creative way to give back to a world where few enjoyed my privilege. Bearing the gifts of a sound body and good health, self-survival was assumed. Full fledged being, on the other hand, required service. Invited to imagine the form that that expression of service might take, I was taught that earning a living was only a small part of what it meant to do work. While this message was not delivered to Felicity overtly, she internalized a similar ethic, one having to do with the value of extending herself fully beyond the immediate goal of self-survival.

Encouraged to find satisfaction in our own agency, to this day Felicity and I are both doers. We both like to see, to feel, to touch, to smell or to taste the results of our efforts: a golden crusted tortiere, a well shingled roof, rich black compost, the iris blooming or the lilies spreading their scent. Childhoods coloured with colour; we were each encouraged to live a big life, rich and intense with self-expression. Acknowledged as worthy, as girls and as women, the capacity to recognize that which is authentic and true within the self, remains intact. Finding a place for that expression meant extending the metaphor of the garden. The garden is growth.

The story of the happy childhood is rare. All too often, the hedge has a hole or the bushes are bare. There is too little or too much water. Leaves yellow and sag, and slowly drift off the branches, brittle and dry. Uncared for and uncontained, the cycle of the garden is interrupted.

In the next chapter I revisit the garden as method. Focusing on Felicity, I look at the effects the institutionalization of practice has on the practitioner. Following a storied account of her experience, I offer an overview of definitions and applications of horticultural therapy, its history and development as professional practice, and its roots in recreational therapy.
CHAPTER SIX

Garden
As
Method
As
Institution
But what facts! What fables! To what shall we compare them? We may not have any existing models, metaphors or myths. Has the time perhaps come for new symbols, new myths? (Sacks, 1987, p. ix).

Plate f
Felicity

It's a caregiver's story

There were these row houses, across from the residence, that were like a holding tank. When the police picked up people they were brought to this spot. I thought: "This is crazy. It's summer. They should be outside." You can be depressed outside too but at least you're getting some fresh air. I wanted to get them digging in this plot. You know, some sort of outlet and stuff like that. So I got them to turn the soil, lift the sod, turn the soil. Those houses, they turned out to be a drug and alcohol rehab clinic.

It was hard because I was getting people when they were just coming in. I really didn’t have the background or anyone telling me: "Oh well, this happens, or this is difficult". I'm looking at this big man and he’s got a big shovel and he’s really mad at me and he’s told me he’s gonna smack me. I guess you find out about yourself. How you react to things. I found I was always calm when things were happening. On the exterior I was always really calm. Then after everything was done and taken care of and tidy... then my legs would go like jello. And I'd think, "What's going on?" I guess it was just my body's way of telling me to take a break.

When you're very naive and not very aware in the beginning, you tend to get drawn in a lot. As you get older and wiser...

I was caring for the plants. I was caring for the people. And all the while fighting for money for supplies. Fighting for my job description, for my salary. I was starting to get pulled by every department. I was starting to lose a grip on my own programs. Something had to go. So I said, "I can help you set up the programs and give you ideas." I just found everyone was taking a piece of me and there was less and less left. People easily touch me.

It's a caregiver's story. You end up just not paying attention and you run your-
self ragged. I know that technically you’re supposed to leave it, when you walk out that door. When I go home I’ve shared. I bring my pictures. I have two residents that are writing my parents and they’ve never met. This one gentleman and my father, they exchange recipes. I still feel as though I’m keeping a professional point. But these are special relationships.

*I always went to the funerals.*

*So many of the people I got close to died.*

I went back to my roots. I took time away from Elizabeth Bruyere and worked at the Governor General’s greenhouse. You’d get these big swish parties. A Prime Minister’s wife came in and ordered $4000 worth of flowers for a single event. And then she’d complain about stuff. What’s the saying? I felt sorry for myself because I had no shoes until I met the man with no feet. It’s all relative. She’s complaining because the orchids aren’t quite pink enough to go with the linen. And meanwhile at Elizabeth Bruyere, when I have the camera in my hand a resident is saying, “Here, I’ll make myself look pathetic, it’ll help with the donation,” and she slumps down in the wheelchair and lets a tear slip from an eye. She was hilarious. And she was right: we got armloads of roses donated that day.

I was back at Elizabeth Bruyere in Ottawa and I went to a conference in Hamilton to present. One of the ladies that I met there worked for Baycrest in Toronto and she kept telling me: “You’re gonna come and work for me.” And I thought “Oh, sure”. But she kept me posted. This went on for four years. She followed me when I moved. And I moved a lot. At one point she told me there was an opening. I thanked her very much and referred her to somebody else. Two years later I heard from her again and by then the budget cuts had come full force. I had lost my job at Elizabeth Bruyere. Horticultural therapy was gone and I was living in a log cabin on six acres as a resident gardener.
"What's happening on the roof?"

When I arrived here [at Baycrest] in 1994, the lock system was broken. The wind would pick it up and smash it against the glass, and this isn't tempered glass. A kid had crawled through one of the screens to steal a radio and it had never been repaired. There were broken windows. There were these asbestos benches that were all broken up and all kinds of old pesticides, and metal cabinets with stuff spilled in them. No one would come in to clean.

The hallways on the way into the greenhouse needed painting. There were lights missing, there were no pictures on the walls, the door was jammed open with a rubber stopper, so someone with low vision, they'd have a hell of a time finding their way here. The peak of the greenhouse wouldn't open, so that meant that in summer it got to be about a million degrees in here. Total lack of air circulation. There was Datura everywhere; it's a hallucinogen that can turn you into a drooling idiot permanently. It was growing all around—all over the place. There was no watering system. So it was just people, elderly people, filling jugs of water, and lugging them around.

My predecessor, he wouldn't write letters to document. He was an older gentleman working two hours a day, so it was physically impossible for him to do what was needed. It was very unfair when I came, because from what I understand, he thought he was getting an assistant. Technically I was his supervisor. It was difficult. I was so much younger, and a woman at that. He kept running his programs, and I'd fill out maintenance requisitions and get stuff fixed. He retired after I had been here for about six months. When I joined the Civic Garden Centre, after the first major meeting, these two women came up to me and said: "Oh, so you're the one who took Oscar's job". I feel badly about the circumstances of his retirement, but I think it was a relief to him too.

So I just kept right on going with the maintenance requisitions, saying, "It's a
safety issue”. I did a lot of explaining. We got this fan going on a thermostat that’s boarded up now, and it triggers the vents. The two work together. With the screening we can let insects in to deal with the pests and we don’t have to spray or use any chemicals. Plus we’ve got proper ventilation now.

The rooftop has come along a small bit at a time. Getting cupboards built has made a big difference. Before that all our trowels and bags of soil and gardening gloves, we tried to keep them neat, but they’d end up in a pile. I got a kid’s wading pool, so while we are sitting out we all dip our feet in and cool off. At first they wouldn’t even give me a key to the roof until one resident got locked out by herself and it took half an hour for maintenance to come and open the door back up again. Then I got the Fire Marshall to post a certificate stating the occupancy limit for the rooftop. That’s made it a lot easier to get things going up there. People have stopped asking so often: “Why are you taking them onto the roof?”

We did a slide show and tour for potential donors and volunteers; it was really successful and a lot of people got involved. I invited the landscape design students at Ryerson to participate; though the residents will of course have the final say about what gets built. The students from the Humber landscape program, they’ll do the actual building. We need lattices for wind and sun protection and privacy, wheelchair accessible planters and a watering system. Now its: “What’s happening on the roof?”

There is always fighting over whose budget the money to do various repairs should come out of. For instance, maintenance wanted creative arts therapy to pay $30,000 to repair roof tiles. I said: “No, that’s maintenance.” They said: “Well, it wouldn’t be maintenance if you weren’t up there walking on those tiles. They wouldn’t be cracking like that.” So there’s a bit of bantering.

It’s taken me this long to know who to approach, how to go about things. It’s like learning the ways. So now I know the electrician. I know everybody. I know who’s gonna do the work and who’s gonna create an obstacle. In a big institution learning the process can take a long time. Knowing which forms to use when, and where to
submit them. Everything has to be cleared by my supervisor. For three years we did the signing of every little thing. But a lot of times now with maintenance requisitions I don’t have to get them signed anymore, I’ll just say: “Well, this needs fixing”, and give them a copy for their records. With three different buildings on site where I do programs, and now the rooftop, it can be a complicated process.

The Terrace is the apartment building. Originally it was more of a retirement setting. A very active high functioning group lived there. Now the average age is 87. The Wagman Centre is the low building with the dining room, the library, the swimming pool, and the greenhouse. Then there’s the Home for the Aged and the Hospital. For instance, Bell has a community membership, it’s a Wagman Community Membership, so she comes in every Monday, and brings me lunch. She can join in the exercises, go to the pool, and do creative arts with me. It’s a nice transition. Not everybody wants to move here. Bell doesn’t want to move here. People who are on the waiting list to move in, a lot of them have started out in the greenhouse. They make friends and get to know their way around. So then when they move in, it’s easier.

I have people working on different projects. It’s much more like a drop-in centre than a formal program, though certain things do happen at certain times. We have plant sales three times a year. Wednesday morning we do pressed flower art. A woman who’s studying to be an art therapist comes in. So that’s sort of an organized thing that happens. At the same time I still have one table if people don’t want to do that. It’s not for everybody, and especially if the dexterity... I mean you can’t really please everyone with one thing. So that’s why I try and have a few things to choose from.

I think that’s the thing about horticultural therapy. You’re not giving enemas. Even for assessments people don’t realize you’re assessing them. It’s not this sort of demeaning process. It’s not asking them to do something which they’ve done a million times before and then trying to trip them up or something. I can say: “Okay, do you want to put seeds into the pea pellets?” I can test eye hand coordination or see how many they can remember in a row. Do they need visual or verbal prompting? There’s
ways you can do it without being sort of clinical. And that way you are the fun person. I love wearing bright colours and wild earrings because then there’s always an easy opening. It’s: “Felicity, what are you wearing?”

In the institution, some staff see horticultural therapy as play work. Or they think that a horticultural therapist is someone who does therapy with plants. Plants with problems. Few people here really respect the work I do, they think I have the IQ of an onion. They don’t see the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of what I do. They ask me about problems they’re having in their own gardens. The plants aren’t usually the problem...

For the Credentials

The American Horticultural Therapy Association has three levels: Horticultural Therapy Technician, Horticultural Therapist Registered, and Horticultural Therapist Masters. At first they told me to go for an internship: “That will cover it, and then you’ll be done.” I thought I was accepted: I was planning to move to Chicago for the internship. But then after numerous phone calls back and forth, they said: “No, we’re saving the spot for someone who will learn something. You obviously have too much experience.” I was fuming.

Then they suggested Kansas State University. I wanted to go, but it was too expensive to go down there. So I started going to Ottawa University. I tried to match the courses that were offered at Kansas State for horticultural therapist, like “psych one” or “recreational leadership”. I filled out the registration and they gave me Horticultural Therapy Technician status, the lowest. I was really upset because at that point I had at least six thousand hours. They wouldn’t count the five years of work I did at Elizabeth Bruyere. They said, “You didn’t apply till you’d finished”. So I said, “Look, this is paid. I wasn’t a volunteer there”. Since then I’ve presented at about a dozen conferences. I thought, “I’m just not dealing with this. I don’t need it. I’m doing well enough without it”.

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But in the last year or so, everyone's been saying, "Look, you've got to reapply." I know I have to. Just for the credentials, to say that I have this level. Apparently they've revamped the process. So, I've started it all again. You need seven identical packages for them to review. I mean it's ridiculous. It's like doing your taxes. I have a friend who is good at administrative stuff, and she said: "I'll help you put it together." So that's good. I've been giving talks and upgrading my skills. Taking courses.
Horticultural Therapy—Definitions and Applications

Horticultural Therapy is a process which uses plants, horticultural activities and the natural world to promote awareness and well-being by improving the body, mind and spirit. Horticultural therapy is universal, adaptable and validated by research. Horticultural therapy complements other forms of therapy. It promotes a connectedness with nature and employs hands-on activities with clear therapeutic value. The growing of plants provides a wealth of tasks that stimulate thought, exercise the body, nourish the imagination and soothe the spirit. (Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association, 1997)

Horticultural therapy is a process through which plants, gardening activities, and the innate closeness we all feel toward nature are used as vehicles in professionally conducted programs of therapy and rehabilitation. (Davis, 1998, p.5)

Practitioners from a wide variety of backgrounds working in a wide range of contexts use horticulture as therapy. Variations in approach can be categorized as therapeutic, vocational, and social, “with each reflecting a distinct type of programming with corresponding purpose, goals, and program design” (Haller, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 43). Practitioners with training in horticulture bring their skills in working with plants to their work with people in diverse settings such as: adult residential and day treatment centres (including corrections facilities), nursing homes, and hospices. Practitioners educated in the social sciences such as clinical psychology, social work and youth counselling augment their clinical skills in working with people in contexts that involve plants. The applications of horticultural therapy, therefore, vary widely according to the practitioner, the client group, the particular needs of individual clients, and the context in which the therapy is employed.

In Canada, the Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association (C.H.T.A.) has
members across the country who participate in activities in local chapters; the C.H.T.A. also organizes an annual conference and publishes a newsletter six times a year. In the United States the American Community Gardening Association (A.C.G.A.) is a nationwide organization that promotes many "green" projects, including: food growing with food banks in urban communities and urban renewal and beautification. The A.C.G.A. also organizes an annual conference and publishes a newsletter monthly. Information about the certification process involved in becoming a registered horticultural therapist is available through the C.H.T.A. and A.C.G.A.
The History and Development of Horticultural Therapy as Professional Practice

The first gardens were, in one sense, healing gardens. Native peoples around the globe learned the properties of the plants growing around them and used them in their healing rites. The most recent archeological finds show that this activity is at least 60,000 years old. And when humans began actively to cultivate gardens, as opposed to availing themselves of nature's bounty, one of the first things they grew, other than food, was herbs. (Harris, 1996, p. 33)

The use of horticulture as an activity for therapy and rehabilitation is unique because the medium is living (Olszowy, 1978, p.6)

Horticulture was first applied and recorded in a treatment context in ancient Egypt, "when court physicians prescribed walks in palace gardens for royalty who were mentally disturbed" (Lewis, 1976 in Simson & Strauss, p.4). While the positive effects of horticulture as a treatment modality were recognized this early "it was not until the late 1700's and the early 1800's, in clinical settings in the United States, England, and Spain, that this understanding of a people-plant connection began to evolve into something greater—an accepted approach to treatment" (Davis, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 4).

The first documented use of horticulture as an "active" treatment of mental illness was in 1798 by Dr. Benjamin Rush, a professor and psychiatrist at the Institute of Medicine and Clinical Practice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Tereshkovich, 1975 in Simson & Straus, 1998). Emphasizing agricultural work in a farm setting, Rush went so far as to say that such work had a "curative effect" on the mentally ill. Studies that sought to replicate Rush's findings were sufficiently favorable to lead to the building of mental institutions in rural settings, and to "actively involving patients in the growing and harvesting of field crops" (Davis, 1998 in Simson & Straus, 1998, p.5).
In 1817, the Friends Hospital in Philadelphia designed and built a hospital that included gardens and grounds for patients. While patients at the hospital "were involved in vegetable and fruit growing, this direct pursuit of the calming effects of the natural environment, as a passive form of therapy, was a new and innovative use of horticulture as a treatment tool" (Straus, 1987 in Simson & Straus, 1998 p. 5). Later in the century, in 1879, the Friends Hospital further expanded the therapeutic possibilities of horticulture by adding a greenhouse to the hospital (Davis, 1998 in Simson & Straus, 1998).

Publications extolling the virtues of the emerging field of horticultural therapy included:

1) 1845, the American Journal of Insanity; an article authored by Daniel Trezvant supporting "exercise and diversion" as useful tools in the treatment of the mentally ill;
2) 1846, the American Journal of Insanity; Isaac Ray related Trezvant’s findings to gardening; and,
3) 1880, a publication titled Hospital for the Insane supported the use of outdoor physical agricultural labor as effective a method of "improving the health of the insane, as in maintaining that of the sane". (Lewis, 1976 in Simson & Straus, 1998)

One of the earliest publications citing the use of horticulture with children is a 1896 volume, Darkness and Daylight or Lights and Shadows of New York Life (Campbell, Knox & Byrnes 1896, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p.5). This book discusses the effectiveness of growing flowering plants in uplifting the spirits of tenement children. Finally, in 1899, an article in the Journal of Psycho-Aesthetics supported the positive developmental effects produced by the sensory stimulation of working with plants on mentally handicapped children (Johnston, 1899, in Simson & Straus, 1998 p.6).

In the early part of the twentieth century, veteran’s hospitals used horticulture in the rehabilitation of their patients (Olszowy, 1978). While horticulture was initially
used as a diversion and time passing device for long term patients, by the end of World War II horticulture began to be used specifically as therapy and for rehabilitation (McDonald, 1995, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 6). With large numbers of volunteers supporting the work of occupational therapists, horticulture was used widely and frequently. The work done in veteran’s hospitals demonstrated that the use of horticulture in both physical and mental ailments served to reduce the length of hospital stays (McDonald, 1995, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 7).

In 1917 the first training in horticulture was offered in occupational therapy by the Bloomingdale Hospital in White Plains, New York (Tereshkovitch, 1975, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 6). In 1919 the Menninger Foundation of Topeka, Kansas opened. “From the first day the foundation opened its doors, plants, gardening, and nature study were made integral parts of patients’ daily activities (Lewis, 1976, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 6). In 1942 the Milwaukee Downer College became “the first institution of higher learning to offer a course in horticulture within an occupational therapy program” (Tereshkovitch, 1975, in Simson & Straus 1998, p. 7). The first undergraduate degree program in horticultural therapy in the United States was set up by Kansas State University (Olszowy, 1978).

Alice Burlingame, a psychiatric social worker, is credited with providing the impetus to develop horticultural therapy as a profession. In 1951, she started a horticulture program in the geriatric ward at the Pontiac, Michigan State Hospital. This initiative led to a weeklong workshop in horticultural therapy at Michigan State University, and later to the development of a degree program that offered its first Masters of Science degree in horticultural therapy in 1955 (Lewis, 1976, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 7). The Rusk Institute for Rehabilitative Medicine, part of the New York University Medical Centre, is credited in 1959 as the first medical centre to integrate the horticultural therapist into a treatment team and for “using horticulture both diagnostically and rehabilitatively” (Lewis, 1976, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 8). Further movement toward the development of horticultural therapy as a profession was indi-
cated by the 1960 publication of *Therapy through Horticulture*, the field's first textbook. While horticulture was being used and developed in similar ways in England, the emphasis there centred on the development of particular programs, rather than on the movement toward professionalization (McDonald, 1995, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 9).

In 1973 a professional association for horticultural therapy was formed in the United States:

The National Council for Therapy and Rehabilitation through Horticulture (NCTRH) developed publications, educational programming, national and international networking with health care and horticultural professional and trade associations, and strategic planning and the structured pursuit of goals. As a result of NCTRH’s efforts, the profession became qualified, better understood, and more supported. (Davis, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p.12)

The association was renamed the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) in 1988 (Davis, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 12). The AHTA developed and approved a core curriculum for horticultural therapy training and degree programs that includes courses in horticultural therapy, horticultural science, therapy and human science and management. While there is currently no degree program in horticultural therapy available in Canada, there is training available through the botanical gardens and arboretum of the University of British Columbia (Davis, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998).

In 1990, in the United States, an independent organization, known as the People-Plant Council formed to do research to better understand the people-plant connection. It is expected that “this expanded body of research will substantively validate the anecdotal findings that have for so long served as the primary proving point of horticultural therapy” (Davis, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 14). Looking toward the future development of horticulture as therapy, Davis suggests that “validation and growth of horticultural therapy will occur through (1) clinical practice, (2) education, and (3) research (Davis, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998,p. 13).
Recreational Therapy

the medical model implies that the client is perceived as a “sick patient” who, after being “diagnosed”, is provided with some form of “treatment” or “therapy” for his or her “disease” in a “clinic” or “hospital”, usually by “doctors” or other “paramedical” or “therapeutic” staff working toward a “cure”...

Therapeutic modalities founded on the medical model reinforce the historically prominent role perception of devalued individuals (e.g., handicapped, or elderly) as “sick” persons whether in fact they are sick or not. Similarly, many clients engaged in recreational therapy are not sick, but the demands and expectations we make reinforce their role as “patient” being helped under the “disease model”...

Why must we refer to even the most basic recreational activity as therapy? (Korn, 1977, pp.10-12 in Reynolds and O'Morrow, 1985, p.47)

In institutional settings, such as hospitals and nursing homes, horticultural therapy programs are usually situated in therapeutic recreation departments. As a result, I will briefly outline the origins of recreational therapy practice, the debate within the field about philosophical orientation (reflected in the above quotation), and its development as a profession.

Along with horticultural therapy, therapeutic recreation departments might include programming in music, art or dance therapy. Additionally, within institutions, events and activities such as outings in the community, or the observance of religious holidays are usually planned and organized by recreational therapists. It is the areas of life generally associated with well being—with the social and emotional realms, even with the soul—that are attended to by recreational therapists.

While recreation has been recognized as an important factor in maintaining health and in recovering from illness for centuries, therapeutic recreation has only been recognized as a healing modality and profession for about fifty years (Reynolds & O'Morrow, 1985). Recreational therapy originally developed out of a combination of
commonsense and compassion in the treatment of the mentally ill. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century the growing social consciousness about the treatment of the mentally ill led to the inclusion of activities for patients in institutional settings. Initially seen as valuable for their ability to divert, recreational activities gradually began to be recognized for their therapeutic value (Reynolds & O'Morrow, 1985).

From its beginning as a profession, however, there has existed a debate within therapeutic recreation about its philosophical orientation. Simply put, should the recreational therapist tend toward leisure or toward therapy in the expression of their practice?

The leisure orientation implies that the ultimate outcome or guiding set of beliefs is related to leisure behavior, and the orientation draws on the existing body of knowledge related to leisure as its source and foundation. The therapy orientation, on the other hand, indicates change or improvement of functional behaviors as the desired end and draws from the medical, psychiatric, psychological, and human development body of knowledge. (Peterson, 1989, p. 28, in Compton, 1989)

While this difference does not necessarily effect what practitioners actually do when designing programs or working with clients, it does effect how practitioners talk about or explain their work. This difference in orientation has also inhibited the intellectual development of the profession, that is, the ability of practitioners to explain "what is done, how it is done, and why it matters" (Sylvester, 1989, p.11 in Compton, 1989). Sylvester warns of the risks associated with "conceptual neglect" to a profession: Therapeutic recreation has also been justifiably occupied providing services and attending to organizational business. Consequently, as was once the case with guidance counselling, its theoretical development has suffered. Of course, professions exist to serve people, not ideas! But professional services are ideas in action! Without the benefit of dynamic theory, practice gradually retreats into self-serving habit and convention, the stuff of medieval guilds, not professions.
If professionalism is to become a reality, then philosophical, historical, and scientific study—concertedly aimed at answering questions about therapeutic recreation—is imperative. (p. 7)

That the development of more rigorous theory to support the practice of recreational therapy would serve to advance the status of the field is also implicit in this statement.
Horticultural Therapy or Practice Involving People with Plants

Used programatically, the garden has the capacity to encourage connection; within the self, between individuals, within the natural environment, and in the broader community. There is a "...symbiotic relationship between man [sic] and plants. Plants need man's care to develop best, but man also requires contact with plants to develop and maintain a mental wholeness. Plant life is a link that binds man to his world and to his environment" (Olszowy, 1978, p.6-7). As Olszowy suggests:

with plants as a medium, social interaction is increased because it lends itself to group activity. It may be a small group in a hospital setting or it may be the disadvantaged in a ghetto planting a community garden. Whatever the setting, the activity provides for new experiences in living for many who have been deprived of human growth (p. 7).

The sociological impact of community gardening projects includes a greater sense of responsibility for the environment. Community greening and beautification efforts lead to a sense of pride of place that facilitates positive connections between individuals, and greater community safety. Community gardening activists "maintain that plants are the fastest, most cost-effective agents for changing negative perceptions of an area, enhancing the economic and social conditions, and improving the psychosocial health" (Relf, 1998, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 29).

Social interaction, pride of place, individual well being, and positive interpersonal connections, it is clear that the garden can be used as method in a variety of ways—from a flower pressing program for the elderly, to a community greening effort in a housing project—to produce positive results. When the use of the garden as method becomes horticultural therapy, however, both the activity and the facilitator
are reframed. Further, the participant, by virtue of this reframing, becomes client or patient. Now the subject of therapy, it is inevitable that we regard her differently. The context in which the garden is grown, who does the sowing, and who tends the seeds all have resonant political implications.

Opinions about what therapy is and what is therapeutic vary widely. As Olszowy describes:

Narrowly conceived, therapy is a medication, a surgery, or a treatment for a disease or behavioral difficulty. The present day concept of therapy includes total personality needs. It is concerned first with the individual and second with the disability itself. The universal aim is to help people by improving their physical and mental well being. A situation may be therapeutic if it is structured to insure a predicted outcome. It may be direct or indirect, but the most beneficial results often occur indirectly. (Olszowy, 1978, p. 5)

A horticultural therapist, according to Rhea McCandliss, is:

one who uses the knowledge of plants and gardening, greenhouse and floristry skills as a tool to develop a relationship with a patient for the dual purpose of helping that patient with the problem of adjustment, and encouraging the patient to develop a broader interest in his [sic] surroundings as a result of increased knowledge of the plant world. A horticultural therapist does not have to possess a special kind of understanding or personality. The major goal is to develop effective human relationships. This requires empathy, fairness, humor, honesty, humility, intelligence, self-confidence, and tact. The effective therapist is cheerful, well adjusted, and respectful of other opinions. (Olszowy, 1978, p. 11)

By contrast Relf defines horticulture expansively as:

the art and science of growing flowers, fruits, vegetables, trees, and shrubs resulting in the development of the minds and emotions of individuals, the

Felicity and I, in our process oriented, hands-on but hands-off approach to working with plants and people, resonate most fully with Relf’s definition of horticulture. Interestingly Relf’s definition, which is so suggestive of the positive results of a therapeutic encounter, “the development of ... minds and emotions...the enrichment...of communities...the integration...” makes no mention of a therapist. Instead she suggests that “the development of the minds and emotions of individuals” follow as a natural result of “the art and science of growing”. In other words, the activity of gardening is itself inherently therapeutic. From the improved health of individuals flows the “enrichment and health of communities”. And finally, “the integration of the ‘garden’ in the breadth of modern civilization” is a lovely metaphor to express the ways in which the processes associated with horticulture facilitate the development of our most positive human qualities. Integrating the garden into our modern world means creating a space where patience, nurturing, and creativity can flourish.

I far prefer this way of looking at the people-plant connection. Relf’s definition emphasizes the symbiotic connection between plants and people: when human beings combine art and science in their approach to plants, plants exert their influence over people. When therapeutic means “the art of healing”, the therapist’s role is not to act on the person or the plants, but to present opportunities where the client might be able to experience the art of horticulture (Onions, 1956, p. 2168). By creating the conditions and then facilitating the client’s process, the practitioner need not self define as healer, but as an individual skilled in promoting the emergence of the art making processes of another.

Where then does the horticultural therapist fit in this equation? When the garden is method, the client or patient is gardener, and the therapist is more accurately described as facilitator (or even as a differently seasoned gardener), then the whole scenario, well it just doesn’t sound that impressive. This poses problems for individual
practitioners working in a health care system where what it sounds like we do is often more important than what actually gets done. In other words, in a hierarchical system based on the medical model, it just doesn’t cut it to talk about gardens and gardeners.

Describing the quality and classifying the nature of the results of the uses of the garden as method is an important part of maintaining the health of both the garden and the gardeners. These follow up steps are necessary in order to justify the practice so that programs will enjoy continued support and expansion, so that funding will continue to flow, and so practitioners will be recognized and rewarded for their work. In other words, it is not enough that the practice of augmenting work with people with plants works in different settings with people with diverse needs, for the practice and the practitioner to receive appropriate recognition with respect to effectiveness, an edifice of professionalism needs to be created.

As in other disciplines and pursuits (remember the health care researcher from chapter one who talked about the ‘food-plate juncture’), this is accomplished by using specialized language to describe both the worker and the work. For example, while a text on horticultural therapy states that “simple or complex procedural testing, concentration, [and] method interpretation can be scored” (Hewson, 1994, p.4), Felicity expresses the same thing by saying “I can test eye hand coordination or see how many [seed pellets] they can remember in a row”. While it is essential that the practitioner be able to talk fluently about her work, detailing what works and what doesn’t, the talk I’m referring to here has purposes beyond advancing and sharing practitioner knowledge. By obscuring common sense strategies like watching and counting to assess ability in scientific jargon, these simple human activities take on epic proportions. This is not a shared language intended to offer shortcuts and clarity on the road to meaning making by practitioners. By making the work incomprehensible and the worker inaccessible, this language is intended to elevate both the practice and the practitioner.

The most ironic aspect of this scenario is that learning how to talk this talk is a practical necessity for the practitioner who wishes to keep doing the work, yet it still
doesn't insure recognition or job security. For example, while working at Elizabeth Bruyere, Felicity had to put in proposals for funding to keep her program alive and her contract renewed, yet for her entire five years of service she was still termed 'on call'. Paradoxically, even with the use of terminology and jargon, within a health care system that has its roots in "hard" science, the practice and the practitioner who combines work with plants with work with people is seen as "soft". Relegated to an inferior status within the institution precisely because of the human touch she brings to her work, Felicity describes:

In the institution, some see horticultural therapy as play work. Or they think that a horticultural therapist is someone who does therapy with plants. Plants with problems. Few people here really respect the work I do... they think I have the IQ of an onion.

Even within the professional association of horticultural therapists it is difficult to have the work and the worker recognized. Felicity likens the credentialling process within the association to a bureaucratic nightmare akin to doing her taxes. Why make it so difficult to get work done in a field properly recognized and credentialled? Who is the association serving when a highly skilled and experienced practitioner like Felicity is denied access, first to an internship program, and second to appropriate credentials?

When the garden as method is institutionalized, the politics of practice can overwhelm the practitioner. Without adequate support for her work, within the institution, or from a professional association, the individual practitioner like Felicity is left to face the challenges of her work alone. Overwhelmed by the multifaceted demands of her job, with no community of like minded practitioners to turn to, for Felicity this distancing process sowed the seeds of burnout. She describes:

I was caring for the plants. I was caring for the people. And all the while fighting for money for supplies. Fighting for my job description, for my salary...you end up just not paying attention and you run yourself ragged.
While Felicity was able to take a break by "going back to her roots", and while she was ultimately hired to work in a permanent position where she doesn't have to fundraise for her salary, institutional constraints continue to trouble her. Functioning within an institution and within a profession takes a toll on individual expression. In the final section of this chapter I look at the impact that the institutionalization of concepts about counselling practice has on the practitioner.
The basic problem in both therapy and rehabilitation is a psychiatric-mental health problem. The person engaged in horticultural therapy must realize that his [sic] patients or clients have trouble enjoying life without his help. Learning about the joy of living is essential to all people regardless of their disability. Dr. Karl Menninger sums it up best when he writes about the activity of therapists as “people who teach the art of living to persons who may never have quite learned it, or if so have lost it for a time.” The point here is that too much emphasis on what is therapy and what is therapeutic may destroy the spontaneous joy in helping others that is so important. If a person tries to be a therapist and deals in what he thinks as difficult, esoteric, and intellectual, this person is bound to communicate this feeling to his patients or clients. Doing things we do best and with full enjoyment is the best way to make use of ourselves as therapeutic agents. (Olszowy, 1978, pp. 5-6)

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines a “professional” as someone who is “engaged in one of the learned or skilled professions (1793)...that is skilled in the theoretic or scientific parts of a trade; that raises his trade to the dignity of a learned profession” (1860). The professional “follows an occupation as his (or her) profession, life-work, or means of livelihood; specifically applied to one who follows, by way of profession, what is generally followed as a pastime” (Onions, 1956, p. 1593). In western culture, our sense of “the professional” as elevated extends well beyond dictionary definitions. Doctor, lawyer, teacher; surgeon, judge, professor, the hierarchical order is implicit. We reward professionals monetarily and with recognition and status, in overt and subtle ways.

Concepts of what a profession is emphasize the distinction and separation of their member’s knowledge from more common sense, everyday understandings. According to William Shephard (1948):

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1) A profession must satisfy an indispensable social need and be based upon well-established and socially accepted scientific principles.

2) It must demand adequate preprofessional and cultural training.

3) It must demand the possession of a body of specialized and systematized knowledge.

4) It must give evidence of needed skills which the public does not possess; that is, skills which are partly native and partly acquired.

5) It must have developed a scientific technique, which is the result of tested experience.

6) It must require the exercise of discretion and judgement as to time and manner of the performance of duty. This is in contrast to the kind of work which is subject to immediate direction and supervision.

7) It must be a type of beneficial work, the result of which is not subject to standardization in terms of unit performance or time element.

8) It must have a group consciousness designed to extend scientific knowledge in technical language.

9) It must have sufficient self-impelling power to retain its members throughout life. It must not be used as a mere stepping-stone to other occupations.

10) It must recognize its obligations to society by insisting that its members live up to an established code of ethics. (Shephard, 1948, p.146, in Reynolds & O'Morrow, 1985, p. 10)

Professional development is a pursuit that we encourage and admire. It is suggestive of movement, of ongoing growth and renewal, and of life long learning. Professional development keeps us current with trends and research in our specialized area; it also affords us with the opportunity to reflect on our practice and network with other professionals in our field. The very processes of becoming a professional, howev-
er, and the attendant career long professional development practices, can also lead to a disruptive separation from the personal. The costs to the individual, in the form of relationships and personal identity grounding, can be enormous.

Michael White (1997) in his exploration of the roots of burnout in therapists lives, cites the beginning processes of becoming a professional as the first steps in a series that “contributes significantly to experiences of burden, fatigue, and exhaustion, and to circumstances that establish a vulnerability to despair and burnout” (White, 1997, p. 3). He argues that:

When a person enters the culture of the professional disciplines they are confronted with a shift in what counts as knowledge. The culture of the professional disciplines is a culture that produces particular, highly specialized, and formal knowledges that constitute systems for the analysis of persons’ expressions of life, which are constructed in terms of behaviors. It is claimed that these systems of analysis provide, for professional workers, privileged access to the objective truth of these expressions. In this culture, those ways of knowing the world that relate to the more popular and more local discourses of lay communities are marginalized—often categorized as quaint, folk and naïve—and frequently disqualified. These other ways of knowing, those that have been generated in the immediate contexts and intimate communities of a person’s daily life mostly don’t count in terms of what might be taken for legitimate knowledge in the culture of the professional disciplines. (p. 11)

Developing Barbara Myerhoff’s (1982) notion of people’s lives as “membered”, White suggests that the process of gaining membership in a professional community is accompanied by a “dismemberment...of personal identity and of life generally” (White, 1997, p. 18). When an individual becomes a professional the “membership” of her life—those people who exert influence—alters significantly. The separation and isolation that results from the processes associated with the acquisition of specialized forms of knowledge is compounded by where and by whom this knowledge can then be legiti-
mated. The gap between the personal and the professional widens when there is “a shift in what is considered appropriate as an arena for the knowing performance of knowledge” (White, 1997, p.3). Put another way, the knowledge of the new professional cannot be brought home for recognition and acknowledgement because mother no longer counts as a legitimate witness, and home is not likely one of the “forums of acknowledgement [recognized] through the conventions and regulations of the culture” (White, 1997, p. 18).

Separated from the home grown truths that we have used to make sense of the world, what results is a curtailment of “informal, common and spontaneous expressions of knowledge” (White, 1997, p. 18). Further, “the formalization of practices of acknowledgement renders a broad range of common and everyday versions of these practices irrelevant” (White, 1997, p.18). In its place professional conformity and homogeneity begin to emerge.

The paradox for psychotherapy professionals, as Kathy Weingarten describes, is that the skills that we develop and that distinguish us in our profession (the art of assisting people to story and re-story their lives), fall into disuse around our own stories in our personal lives. She describes that:

If we didn’t love stories, including our own, we wouldn’t be very good at this work. However, in most professional contexts we must check our stories at the door or, short of that engage with them privately. (Weingarten, 1997, p. xi, in White & Hales, 1997)

White suggests that personal identity grounding begins to feel tenuous when: “this reduction in available forums for the expression or performance of knowledge restricts options for persons to experience the authentication of knowledge claims, and for these knowledges to be more richly described” (White, 1997, p. 18). In order for a “rich or thick description” of the individual’s knowledge to occur, it must be embedded in a fuller context that includes his/her personal history (Geertz, 1973). White describes Myerhoff’s account of the processes through which this is achieved:
She propose that it is through engaging with a community of persons in the
telling and the re-telling of the preferred stories of one’s history and of one’s
identity that lives are thickly described. It is in this context that the stories of
persons’ lives become linked to shared values, beliefs, purposes, desires, com-
mitments, and so on. It is in the context of the telling and re-telling of the stories
of one’s life that meta-texts, and texts that are meta to these meta-texts, are gen-
erated. (White, 1997, p. 16)

Lives that are “multiply contextualised”, White suggests, reflect diverse experi-
ences and encourage the individual to explore the full range of his or her being (White,
1997, p. 16). Seen as “narrative resources” multiply contextualized lives contribute sig-
nificantly to the range of possible meanings that persons might give to their experi-
ences of the world, and to the range of options for action in the world” (White, 1997, p. 16).

Kathy Weingarten (1997), in the forward to an edited collection of therapists’
reflections on their lives and work, The Personal is the Professional, discusses the use
of the personal as a grounding agent in clinical theorizing:

A decade ago I began using my own experience, not only clients’, to illustrate
the theoretical points I wished to make. I wanted to challenge the academic dis-
course that separates the personal from the professional...when a paper I wrote
on intimacy appeared in a prestigious and staid North American journal, I
received as many comments about an anecdote about my getting covered with
my daughter’s vomit one lovely summer evening as I did about the theoretical
contribution I was trying to make about the nature of intimacy (Weingarten
1991). My interest in the topic of intimacy itself, something I have gone on to
write about in relation to my children (Weingarten, 1997), reflects my refusal to
accept the dominant cultural discourse that values autonomy over connection
and ranks it highest in the scale of human achievement.
(Weingarten, 1997, p. xii, in White & Hales, 1997)
Within mainstream psychology and even in the therapeutic community, Weingarten's style of writing—accessible prose that blends the personal with the professional—is hard to locate. For example, in the Introduction to her fabulously titled edited volume *Bedtime Stories for Tired Therapists*, Leela Anderson (1995) explains her purpose in inviting therapists to contribute to the book:

The idea of *Bedtime Stories for Tired Therapists* came from my desire to be able to escape at the end of the day and read 'work things' which didn't have to be accompanied by the knitted brows of confusion and a dictionary.

(Anderson, 1995, p. 6)

The stories collected in this volume, from therapists working around the world, emphasize the personal influences on the professional. By writing personal accounts of their work, "the journey of their changing practices" is seen in the context of individual identity development (Anderson, 1995, p. 7). These are not stories that contain formed and fixed notions about professional practice, but personal explorations into understanding "how and why their ideas and ways of working [have] shifted" (Anderson, 1995, p. 7). Anderson describes:

...to make space, to even sanction ...personal experience and self-reflection as an important, different kind of knowing, is to ask writers and readers to travel into new territory. This journey requires us to see with new eyes, calls for our ears to detect and appreciate the foreign sounds of uncertainties, and challenges us to experience the discomfort that comes with the realization that the magic of a particular event cannot automatically be applied to another, nor generalized to become a theory. (Anderson, 1995, p. 7)

As a result, these "different kinds of knowing" often look different to the reader. For example, Vonnie Coopman-Dewis chooses poetry as a representational form to express her feelings about professional development:
After years of professional isolation

I didn’t just come here to learn. I came to become part of the spirit of things and in this I believe I have learned more than clever professional practice


With the acknowledgement of different ways of knowing and the expression of this knowing in new representation forms comes the need for the development of a language that can talk about this work. As Anderson explains while reflecting about the stories she collected:

Words like compassionate, respectful, beautiful, are rarely the words used to describe academic papers. The more familiar route is to express knowing as a theory, to write well referenced by others and with personal detachment. This is also the nucleus of what is often considered professionalism.

(Anderson, 1995, p. 7)

In the next chapter I revisit the garden as metaphor. Exploring the sacred space of the garden as a unique medium for metaphor, I look at a variety of different ways through which the healing potential of the garden has been explored. In the second part of the chapter the garden provides a metaphorical container for relationship. I
explore the ways in which method and metaphor mix, cultivating connection and intimacy in relationship. Using family relationships as a lens through which to view this phenomenon, I provide a series of narrative snapshots of my own experience in order to bring this process into view.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Garden

As

Metaphor

As

Method
Does an animal need anything more than a place to live? Are they pets? (Dillard)
The spiritual aspects of interaction with nature are explored and clarified by Schroeder (1991). To understand what he is writing, it is useful to consider first his point that the human psyche functions in two different modes: the rational, analytical mode associated with science and technology, and the intuitive mode manifested in the "ambiguous language of nonverbal imagery and symbolism," which is more the realm of art, music and poetry and the source of spiritual phenomena. He further emphasizes that spiritual phenomena can be conceptualized in psychological terms rather than in supernatural terms and, as such, are a legitimate topic for scientific inquiry. He uses the following statement to sum up the use of the term “spiritual” in relation to nature: “Spiritual refers to the experience of being related to or in touch with an ‘other’ that transcends one’s individual sense of self and gives meaning to one’s life at a deeper than intellectual level.” (Schroeder, 1991, in Simson & Straus, 1998, p. 36)

While most of us forget, on a moment to moment, day to day basis, about our essential connection to plants, intuitively we know that the garden is inspiring and healing. We step out for a "breath of fresh air", we bring flowers to the sick, and we pot plants in order to bring the garden indoors. Flowers are perhaps our most potent connection to nature:

Flowers enable us to speak a language of the soul, one that we share with all people around the world. The blossoms of the plant seem especially to evoke soul and spiritual awareness. We know this intuitively because we are more likely to reach for flowers, rather than roots, seeds or leaves, when using plants for ceremony and celebration. (Kaminski, 1998, pp. 12-13)

We use flowers as a metaphor for our experience in the most significant of life events. For example, on a frigid January day, after suffering a loss, I received an anonymous gift of a box overflowing with spring bulbs and blossoms. My friend later explained that she hadn’t included a card, because: "There was nothing I could say that those buds, that new life, couldn’t say better". As Kaminski describes:

we reach for flowers to speak our deepest soul emotions when ordinary words cannot...to rejoice when a child is born, to express ecstatic feelings of love, pas-
sion and commitment...to show gratitude, to convey congratulations, to bestow beauty, to instill grace. (Kaminski, 1998, p.12)

Method and metaphor mix and blend in the garden, as evocation leads to action, action to evocation. Method or metaphor, who decides? Extending the garden in a variety of ways as an intentional aid in healing reminds us of our essential connection to nature.

Flower essence therapy, for example, is a treatment modality that seeks to harness our intuition about the healing power of flowers. This system of healing, founded by Edward Bach, an English medical doctor who practiced in the late nineteenth century, “correlates exact pictures of the human soul with specific flowers” (Kaminski, 1998, p. 20). Working during the industrialization of the late nineteenth century, Bach saw potential in flower essences as an antidote to a world where people were becoming more and more distanced from nature.

Flower essence therapy works from the inside out, that is, by addressing internal emotional states it frees the body to work on physical healing. Founded on the belief that emotions play a critical role in human health, “one of the major purposes of flower essence therapy is to rekindle a vital connection between the soul of nature and the human soul” (Kaminski, 1998, p. 20). In flower essence therapy the unique qualities or “signature” of each plant indicates its healing potential. For example:

Violet flowers bloom in early spring flourishing in damp, moist and shady woodland habitats. Their deep purple colour and sweet fragrance suggest a refined spirituality, which holds back from the full sun and warmth of daylight. We have in our language the idea of a person who is a ‘shrinking violet’, and in fact, the Violet flower essence is used for intensely shy individuals who need to develop more social warmth. (Kaminski, 1998, p. 44)

Based on the assumption that flowers, in their essence, have the capacity to heal,
it may take a leap of faith for modern skeptics to accept the ancient alchemical healing beliefs on which the system is based:

The ultimate goal of alchemy is that both nature and the human soul continue to evolve by coming into active dialogue. This dynamic process also means that the therapeutic aims for the human soul are not defined in purely inward or personal terms—the healthy human soul must expand to include compassion and sensitivity for the larger world, both in the cultivation of social consciousness and in regard for the earth and other life forms. (Kaminiski, 1998, p. 68)

When we open our senses to the garden we appreciate the diversity of its healing potential. While the garden activates all of our senses, our sense of scent is perhaps most evocative. We know that we respond to fragrance both physically and emotionally. Fragrance triggers feelings and associations, thoughts and memories. From the smell of the ocean in winter, to the damp earth in spring, we know, viscerally, how deeply these senses affect our being.

While our understanding about the power of fragrance is not new, it is only in about the last ten years that its use as a form of therapy has become popular. Essential oils are made by crushing the soft petals of flowers, soaking them, and then distilling the liquid (Harris, 1996). Aromatherapy uses essential oils to aid in healing. They are rubbed into the skin, added to the bath, or inhaled. Specific scents are associated with particular qualities of healing; for example: vanilla has a calming effect, while lemon and lavender act as stimulants (Harris, 1996).

Method and metaphor mix and blend in the garden, as evocation leads to action, action to evocation. Method or metaphor, who decides? When we open our senses to the garden we appreciate the diversity of its healing potential.
In his novel *Being There* (1970), Jerzy Kosinski uses the garden as metaphor and allegory. In the first few lines of the story Kosinski introduces us to Chance and the safe, predictable world of his garden:

Chance was in the garden. He moved slowly, dragging the green hose from one path to the next, carefully watching the flow of water. Very gently he let the stream touch every plant, every flower, every branch of the garden. Plants were like people; they needed care to live, to survive their diseases, and to die peacefully.

Yet plants were different from people. No plant is able to think about itself or able to know itself; there is no mirror in which the plant can recognize its face; no plant can do anything intentionally: it cannot help growing, and its growth has no meaning, since a plant cannot reason or dream. (p. 4)

Like the plants he cares for, Chance’s existence seems to be entirely unintentional. Appearing as if by chance, Chance is an innocent who has no past. He has never ventured outside the walls of the house or garden. Chance is ‘simple’; he appears to crave nothing beyond this isolated, minimalist existence.

When the ‘Old Man’ who lives in the house dies, Chance is forced to leave the garden. Venturing forth into the world he quickly encounters a society woman when her chauffeur accidentally backs her car into him. Chance is taken back to the woman EE’s home to recover. Speaking only in the language of the garden, EE and her husband Mr. Rand, a fabulously wealthy businessman, find Chance’s presence riveting. Believing his references to his work as a gardener to be metaphorical, EE’s husband hears Chance’s statements to be profound truths:

A gardener! Isn’t that the perfect description of what a businessman is? A person who makes a flinty soil productive with the labor of his own hands, who waters it with the sweat of his own brow, and who creates a place of value for his family and for the community. Yes, Chauncey, what an excellent metaphor! A productive businessman is indeed a laborer in his own vineyard! (Kosinski, 1970, p. 40)
Chance, like the garden, functions like a blank slate: people see in him what they wish to see. When the president consults Mr. Rand about the country’s finances, Chance is invited to participate in the conversation, and even though he “understood almost nothing of what they were saying” the president turns and asks Chance: “And you, Mr. Gardener? What do you think about the bad season on The Street?” Answering with what is for Chance a literal truth, but which is for all others a metaphor that seems to suit every situation, when the president hears him talk about the garden, he too is impressed by Chance’s wisdom:

Chance shrank. He felt that the roots of his thoughts had been suddenly yanked out of their wet earth and thrust, tangled, into the unfriendly air. He stared at the carpet. Finally he spoke: “In a garden,” he said, “growth has its season. There are spring and summer, but there are also fall and winter. And then spring and summer again. As long as the roots are not severed, all is well and all will be well.” He raised his eyes. Rand was looking at him, nodding. The president seemed quite pleased. (Kosinski, 1970, p. 54)

While Chance’s life seems to be without purpose or meaning, he is perceived by those around him to contain wisdom and depth. The power brokers of Washington society feel a greater reason for being while in his presence. Even though he leaves the simplicity of the garden at the beginning of the novel, metaphorically he carries the garden with him, inadvertently spreading its innocence. A source of inspiration in his simplicity, Chance jolts even the most jaded politicians out of their assumptions with his grounded presence. As Norman Lavers (1982) suggests in his discussion of the novel, “the world of Chance is an existential world where man [sic] makes his own meaning, or else lives his life pointlessly and dies...a person can reason or dream, but may not; may fail of this activity and live meaninglessly and die, not having lived as a human being” (pp.78-9).

The garden, like Chance, offers a refreshing contrast to modern living: it is simple, it is real, and it is honest.
Method and metaphor mix and blend in the garden, as evocation leads to action, action to evocation. Method or metaphor, who decides?

The ascending life cycle of a garden: seed, root, shoot, blossom, has "close parallels to the basic concepts of human development.... Common gardening tasks such as watering, fertilizing and protecting plants from bad weather also have human connotations"(Olszowy, 1978, p. 7). The elemental requirements of the garden: earth, air, water and warmth, also parallel the elemental needs human beings have for survival. As Olszowy points out:

most humans react to plants in various ways. For some, growing and caring for plants presents a challenge...working with plants teaches patience; this delayed gratification is reflected in the slow but continuous and stable process of a plant producing a flower of beauty. Indeed, the discovery that new life can spring from a "dead" seed can stimulate determination and motivation to alter one's lifestyle. There is a quiet mystery to plant growth. (p.7)

Milton Erikson, in working with a patient dying of cancer and in extreme pain, who was alienated from all medical personnel and their methods, found a point of connection with the man in talking about a tomato plant. Erikson talked about the life cycle of the plant, its health and requirements, and potential obstacles in the path of its development. While never directly referring to the disease consuming the patient, "Erikson changed the man's thinking about his pain and illness"(Bandler & Grinder, 1975 in Patton, 1997, p. 83). Particularly in very delicate situations, metaphor can be used as a powerful tool for "communicating with both the conscious and the unconscious mind"(Patton, 1997, p. 84).

In Tuesdays with Morrie, a slowly withering pink hibiscus plant "listens" to the weekly conversations Mitch Albom has with his "old professor", paralleling Morrie's decline:
“That’s what we’re all looking for. A certain peace with the idea of dying. If we know, in the end, that we can ultimately have that peace with dying, then we can finally do the really hard thing.”

Which is?

“Make peace with living.”

He asked to see the hibiscus plant on the ledge behind him. I cupped it in my hand and held it up near his eyes. He smiled.

“It’s natural to die,” he said again. “The fact that we make such a hulla-balloo over it is all because we don’t see ourselves as part of nature.”

He smiled at the plant.

We’re not. Everything that gets born, dies.” He looked at me.

“Do you accept that?”

“Yes”.

“All right,” he whispered, “now here’s the payoff. Here is how we are different from these wonderful plants and animals. As long as we can love each other, and remember the feeling of love we had, we can die without ever really going away. All the love you created is still there. You live on—in the hearts of everyone you have touched and nurtured while you were here...Death ends a life, not a relationship”. (Albom, 1997, p.173)
Even before she reaches down to pick it up, her choice made, I know that she won't choose the squash—shiny thick leaves, solid squat stem—or the nasturtiums, finely formed and delicate, with new shoots moving like lacework in all directions. Not the grapefruit mint, such a hardy, reliable plant, the leaves gritty with texture, a telltale sign of resilience. She rubs a leaf between her index finger and thumb, then lifts her fingers to her nose, lingers, the pot still in her hand, but no—she moves on. Standing by, one foot up on the picnic table bench, I watch as she picks up each pot, reading the label carefully, turning it slowly so that she can see the specimen fully, from all sides. Rapt attention, I don't want to intrude on a process that has become a kind of meditation. Turning slightly away I sit fully down on the picnic table seat, leaning back, silently indicating, "Take your time, take all the time you need. Get to know each plant".

Letting my thoughts wander away, I'm imagining a photo spread of this client of mine, in *Garden's Illustrated* or *Canadian Gardening*. Sling-backed four inch black suede platform sandals, peeling lime green nail polish, skin tight silver Capri pants, topped off with a Marge Simpson belly top, I smile as I imagine her sitting beside Martha Stewart—khaki clad, stiff canvas apron, garden clogs—this seen-it, done-it, in-recovery-from-everything-you-can-imagine, girl-woman client of mine.

Lemon thyme, oregano, bee balm, when she examines the pot of wispy lettuce almost gone to seed, she holds it up at eye level, peering through the almost transparent leaves at the late afternoon sun. Tenderly she moves her finger down the papery thin surface following the contours of the vein. Next she has the lavender in her hands; spiky gray leaves bristling with aroma, pungent and fresh. Turning to face me I notice
that her features have softened, dark smudged mascara, eyes brimming with tears, "It makes me think of my grandmother. It makes me think of my grandmother giving me a bath". Turning away before I can do little more than smile in reply, she indicates that she is not finished, the lavender is important, but it is not her choice.

Finally, when it seems as if there are no more choices left, when it seems like she is going to go back to the beginning and examine each pot again, she straightens up, and, stiff legged now, after crouching for so long, takes a step toward me. Cupped in her hand is a bedraggled snapdragon. Yellowish flaccid leaves curled over, dry unwatered soil; there is no sign of a bud, let alone a flower.

"This is it. This is the one that I want to care for", she says, face aglow.

2.

As I walk into the room he immediately looks up, alert,

"Ah, Maura... I could use a woman about now".

Coat still on, freezing rain clinging to my hair, I am conscious that my face is cold when I bend down to kiss him, as we always have, on the lips, full mouths connecting. Gravelly sounding laughter,

"Here, lets do a three way, where's Pete?"

And then he is there too splayed across the bed and we are laughing and kissing. The others circle away as they always do when our cups spill over. Eventually we two well ones sit on either side of the bed on the carpeted floor. My eyes scan the room—I long for fragrant flowers, beautiful objects, paintings—the room feels austere, the January day so gray and overcast.

We stand outside smoking cigarettes while the others talk about his decision not to have morphine. His mother is annoyed when he asks if we can have the morphine instead,

"It's a joke Mom", he says shaking his head and smiling.

[130]
Hours later toward dawn I spend my final time alone with him. The room is
dark; his breathing labored, but steady, steady, steady. I listen so attentively I start to
hear sounds in my own head move through the room that can’t really be there. His
head turns too slowly on the pillow and the brown eyes (the lashes aren’t as curled as
the others—why not?) look me full in the face in the dark. His lips are cracked and
gray.

“I want carrot juice”.
My heart soars with the knowledge that I can oblige this request.

“Simple. That I can do”.
I adjust the straw in the cup so that he can sip without sitting up. The juice climbs half
way up in the straw, falters, and slides back down again.

“Did you get any?” I know full well that he hasn’t. “Do you want to try again?”
Silence. A stiff breath. Then,

“Its okay”.

“Oh, no, you’re so dry, I have an idea. Here, this will be a little gross, but fun.”
His chuckle escapes. I take a sit of the carrot juice straight from the cup and mouth to
mouth trickle it from my mouth into his.

“Shall I moisten your lips with the cloth?”
He chuckles. I take this as a yes and moisten the cloth in the bowl and dab his lips. His
tongue extends out of his mouth and too slowly feels around on his lips. His eyes
close. The thin blue veins on his eyelid quivers.

“You’ll have a child soon Maura.”
Laughingly, I respond,

“You, figure? What makes you say that?”
But he has drifted away again and I am left listening to his breathing, to my own
thoughts, and long lasting breath.
They were circumstances that were impossible to foresee. Even the most planful among us couldn’t have projected our thoughts in that direction,

“How will we get the body out of the house after he dies?”

The undertakers must be twins, or caricatures of each other, they can’t be real: way too tight pants, polyester shirts undone to expose matted chest hair and countless gold chains. They maneuver a stretcher to the top of the house to bring him down, eyeing the route they will descend with the body, conscious already that the house is tall and thin, the banisters high, the halls narrow. Eyeing the place, I can tell that they have done this over and over, this move-the-body dance. We don’t follow, but sit paralyzed, dull witted now, with shock and fatigue, in the kitchen.

And then we hear them coming down the stairs,

“Yeah okay, Ed, slide it this way, yeah a real tall one, what did they say...6’7’’?”

“No, we can’t there, now at the turn we’ll have to extend the head over the rail and tip down to make the corner. That’s right.”

(Sounds of hard breathing).

“Oh... Well it’s just water. There are some cloths in the truck.”

At the sound of dripping we come around the corner and look up the stairs. The stretcher is moving down at a precarious angle, the head and shoulders stiff, extending beyond the board (is it plastic?), and liquid is dripping, pouring on the floor. The scene is so unimaginable we don’t know what we’re looking at. We have no words, and only watch as the body stops moving.

“I’m stuck. Ed, we’re stuck here!” The beginning of panic.

Peter moves to help as he would to men moving a sofa, a piano.

“Here, I’ll take this edge”.

Suddenly I understand what I am seeing. It is his water, flowing now the wrong way, out of the nose, the eye sockets, the mouth, and onto the floor. Suddenly I have dish-towels in my hand and I’m mopping it up, and then the body is straight again, such relief, it is horizontal again and Peter,
"Let's just straighten that up a bit, that's right... tall bugger... always annoyed me that he got taller than me, but not as handsome—don't you think?" The undertakers are staring at Peter. But we have caught each other's eye: I ineffectively mopping up, he taking his hand away after leveling the stretcher. And then we are laughing...

"Peter, please".

But we are laughing so hard now that we are uncontrollable, shaking. He gestures and we slide out the back door and stand in the snow in our sockfeet laughing till the tears roll down our cheeks.

3.

Dancing in the elevator
we practice steps just learned:
Cha cha cha
salsa
merengue.
I love the way the words sound
and look on the page,
Almost,
but not quite as much
as I love the glint in those velvet eyes,
the firm hold on my shoulder.

I love that he can lead,
that I can follow.

"We can put up with anything all week
as long as we can do this",
he says
"Let's go get that crazy mother of yours."

Hurrying when the elevator doors open
we need to:
get the doctor's letter,
talk to the nurse,
find Mom,
pack her stuff,
and make the 9:30 boat:
so that Bella can go home,
because
tonight is a schoolnight
and Bella is our babysitter.
Moving toward her room,
I see him see her.
Loving his laughter
as always,
my reaction to the tragedy
of my mother shuffling along,
a sign taped to her back,
"Please return to 17 north"
is mitigated,
by the hilarity
in those velvet eyes.

Poised to make our exit,
bags packed
medication reviewed
Mom clutching the usual assortment of things:
sheets of newspaper,
pen,
hospital gown,
notes,
kleenex, kleenex, kleenex.

She agrees to leave the hospital gown behind,
and just as we leave,
in our hurry
(for the boat, for Bella)
She gratefully thanks the nurse
"for everything".

Driving down University Avenue,
he catches her eye in the rear view mirror,
he tells her that he is humbled before her:
that she remembered what is most important of all:
to take the time to be courteous.
He tells her
that it is a pleasure,
to have her back in the van.

Waiting for the ferry,
she makes her point with greater and greater emphasis.
Unable to untangle her words,
she can see that there is no recognition in the eyes of the person
to whom she speaks.
Agitated by the connection she can't make.
He puts his arm around her shoulder and says:
"sometimes its just hard for us to understand what you're trying
to tell us".
"I'm sure", she says.

Calmed,
it makes sense to her,
that she doesn't make sense.

Regarding relationship as a sacred space where the individual can find sanctuary and growth is a notion deeply rooted from seeds sown in childhood. When the garden provides a metaphorical container for relationship, texture and colour can flourish through connection. Cultivating creativity, relationship becomes a forum and mechanism for self expression. Cultivating connection, the sense of authority that emerges with the authentic expression of self in relationship is grounding and true.
Moving from the personal to the professional, and maintaining a continuity of connection to the authentic expression of the self, allows what we do to be an expression of who we are. Cultivating congruence method and metaphor mix and blend in the garden, as evocation leads to action, action to evocation.

While the site of all counselling practice is relationship, the ideological underpinnings of different counselling modalities inform the way in which those relationships form. Some therapies, such as rational-emotive or cognitive-behavioral approaches, require that a professional distance be maintained between client and counsellor. Other approaches (with which I align my own practice), for example client centred and feminist therapies, support the notion that the conditions where healing and change can occur are created through the intimate relationship between client and counsellor. Based on principles of equality and mutuality, recultivating connection is at the heart of this work:
My overall task as a therapist, as I see it, is to develop a relationship with each client that is characterized by safety, trust and mutual respect. I accomplish this by being consistently reliable and authentic, and by negotiating boundaries in each relationship. I try to help my clients feel connected: emotionally and physically within themselves, within their relationships, their communities, and in the natural environment.

Once we are meaningfully connected, a relational space emerges between us that allows the client to begin to explore. Feeling empowered in the relationship, she begins to challenge previously held personal boundaries. She takes risks. Using symbols and metaphors to explore the terrain of her experience, she looks for new meaning. Feelings begin to shift and new understandings and insights are gained. Change can occur. (McIntyre, 1998, p. 218)

In my work as a counselling practitioner, I encourage my clients to express themselves metaphorically, through words and images, and in concrete actions in the garden. Metaphor immediately has a favorable impact on a problem or situation because it transforms what is, into something else. The individual in charge of the metaphor usually feels better because they have expended some creative energy in relation to their situation. Although nothing may have actually changed, the metaphor maker is thinking and talking about his or her situation differently. A feeling of fluidity emerges that often leads to a positive change in how the person is feeling. "Metaphors, similes, and analogies help us to make connections between seemingly unconnected things, thereby opening up new possibilities by unveiling what had been undetected" (Patton, 1990, p. 83).

Used symbolically and as a metaphorical bridge to self expression, the garden plays host to limitless potential meanings. Functioning like a blank slate offering possibility, the reciprocal play between garden and gardener makes meaning anew. For example, the client who took her time selecting just the right bedding plant—the withered snapdragon—inscribed what could have been a quick decision with meaning and
significance. Slowing herself down, and taking the time to feel her senses respond to each plant initiated an evocative process. More spontaneous and resonant than many a clinical intervention, having provided the space for her metaphor, I was able to sit back and watch it unfold.

Another client, Anna, choosing to plant flowers to represent her father’s life threatening illness, moved even more slowly and deliberately in her garden. For Anna, the experience of selecting the seeds and plants, of fashioning the lattice out of grapevine, and then physically engaging with the materials in the garden, helped her to feel more connected with herself, and with the world around her. Low-lying myrtle clustered at the base of a lattice that supported morning glories, while forget-me-knots marked the four corners of the bed. The sense of isolation that accompanied her depression lifted when she was outside the physical confines of the office. In her garden, Anna was more able to access her feelings and to express both anger and sadness. After her father died she planted a commemorative rose bush in his memory. Anna’s garden served as an ongoing living metaphor of her experience of illness and loss, and allowed her to physically and spiritually participate in her own healing.

The complexity of intimate relationships, in research, clinical practice, and everyday life is navigated using similar tools. Safety, trust, rapport, and empathy form the cornerstone qualities of intimate relationships. While therapists have long recognized that the existence of these qualities in relationship have a healing quality, it is also true that “insights and generative knowledge ...emerge during empathic encounters” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p. 147). While the ultimate goal and purpose of therapy and research are qualitatively different, (a point that I discuss in more detail in chapter 8) the relationship paths are similar. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis point out that: “therapists, like researchers conducting interviews, hope for shifts in perspective, revelations and new insights” (p. 147).
When self understanding occurs through relationship and when relationship is the essence of our work, reflecting on our experience of, and beliefs about connection is a necessary part of good practice, as researchers and as clinicians. I begin my exploration of methodological issues with a discussion about meaning making in research relationships.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Methodological Musing
Analysis and Interpretation

In research, the dual processes of analysis and interpretation are determined by the way in which a study is conceptualized. Beliefs about interpretation are inextricably linked to beliefs about meaning making. As a result, it is necessary to revisit both my epistemological assumptions and the theoretical underpinnings of this research project, in the process of explaining the approach I take in the analysis and interpretation of data.

As I have outlined, when meaning is believed to be made intersubjectively, the relationship is seen as the meaning-making site. When it is assumed that there is no external truth to appeal to outside of the relationship, negotiated meanings themselves constitute truth. Participants in the social construction of meaning bring their point of view, or their interpretation, to the meaning making forum. The process of negotiating meanings is in itself an interpretive act. As a result, when relationships are negotiated, interpretation is an essential currency in relationship exchange.

In this theoretical framework the interpretive process is expected and understood to permeate every stage of the research process: from negotiation of the research proposal and collection of data, through to the representation and presentation of the final report. In life history research, meaning making is a process that is engaged in with both the people associated with the project (researcher and participants), and with the project's material (documents and relevant literature). While I see myself as having ultimate responsibility for the project as a whole, I do not see myself as having complete interpretive ownership. When knowledge is regarded as multiperspectival, there is no one, correct interpretation. Moreover, no interpretation is final; interpretation is an infinite process that is bound only by the constraints imposed by the interpreters. As Van Manen (1990) suggests, “the meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never
simple or one-dimensional. Meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered” (p. 78).

In research relationships, the individual researcher’s beliefs about, and experience in relationship, combine with the methodological framework guiding her inquiry to influence the nature and quality of relationships formed with all those associated with the research. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) explain:

Just as there is some controversy among qualitative researchers about the goals and purposes of relationships in research design, so too is there debate about the optimal depth, quality, and intensity of research relationships. Should researchers seek distance or closeness, objectivity or subjectivity, scrutiny or alliance, asymmetry or symmetry in their connections with subjects? (p. 137)

At one end of the continuum is the disinterested observer born of the traditional scientific method. At the other end, (where I situate myself):

researchers believe that the formalized distance prescribed by traditionalists may not only be disrespectful and diminishing of research subjects (minimizing their authority and potentially masking their knowledge) but also may undermine productive inquiry. They claim that relationships that are complex, fluid, symmetric, and reciprocal—that are shaped by both researchers and actors—reflect a more responsible ethical stance and are likely to yield deeper data and better social science. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, pp. 137-138)

That self understanding is generated through the intersubjective process of being in relationship, identifies relationship as the central meaning making site for “deep inquiry and the construction of knowledge” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p. 136). Cultivating connection and sharing this space with another in relationship, interpersonally, in counselling, or in research, is a creative process. It is a process that is also guided by moral commitment. Informed by the life giving forces of the garden, by texture and colour, the values and principles that characterize my counselling practice also underpin my work as a researcher.

Cole and Knowles (forthcoming, 2000) place “central the notions of self, rela-
tionship and artfulness” in life history research. In their discussion about the defining elements of arts informed life history research, they state:

All research has one or more purposes but not all research is driven by a moral commitment. ‘Good’ life history research has both a clear intellectual purpose and moral purpose. Intentions of life history researchers are twofold: to advance understanding about the complex interaction between individuals’ lives and the institutional and societal contexts within which they are lived; and through consciousness raising associated action, to contribute to the creation of more just and dignified explorations of the human condition which, in turn, lead to the enhancement of qualities and conditions under which lives are lived.

(Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000)

My attentiveness to process, is in my estimation, an essential part of the craft of arts informed inquiry. Ardra Cole and I describe the quality of involvement arts informed research invites in our exploration of relationship in research:

Arts-based inquiry invites a different quality of engagement on the part of those involved. As researchers continue to explore alternative forms of research and representation greater attention is focused on research relationships—relationship to self, relationships with participants, relationship with the arts, and relationship with broader cultural and societal contexts.

(Cole & McIntyre, 1998, p. 2)

In the self reflective process pieces that comprise this chapter, I have chosen to explore a variety of methodological issues, including the role of the imagination in interpretation, and the relationship between information, knowledge and wisdom in research, from the vantage point of self study. In other words, I make my own position as researcher and participant in the inquiry explicit, and then consider, from a number of different perspectives, what it meant to do research work with Felicity. How did my experience of Felicity, her disposition, her personality, and her way of being in the world affect and direct my self study and the research process as a whole? What imag-
ined possibilities, what feelings, what forms, what worlds did I conjure up through
time spent together? How did the context in which our relationship developed impact
the direction of the research? Where is the unique knowledge produced through our
connection located, and how can I best communicate it to you, the research audience?

In keeping with the principle of balance that has guided the research process,
and that is reflected in the structure of the presentational form of this work, I have cho-
sen to strive for a “harmony” of voices in this endeavor (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming,
2000). In so doing I continue the interplay between Felicity and me that I have used
throughout to explore and illuminate the substantive focus of the research. Given my
position in relation to the work, and the broad purpose of an exploration of method-
ological issues (how the researcher (I), made meaning of method), it stands to reason
that at this stage, my voice should sound loud and clear. Cole and Knowles (forthcom-
ing, 2000) explain this point:

Of course there is no one way to conceptualize life history research but there
may be instances when a researcher chooses to harmonize a life history explo-
ration with a (self) reflexive examination based on life history processes. In such
a case the researcher’s voice may have equal ‘weight’ with one or several partic-
ipants. It may even be that the researcher’s reflexive voice speaks the loudest!
The weight given to each voice is a decision that rests in and reflects the purpos-
es of the inquiry and the representation itself.
(Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000)

While I want to draw attention to, and invite you to consider a variety of issues
relating to process, I also want my voice to carry the integrity of the creative process of
which it speaks. Cultivating connection and sharing this space with another in rela-
tionship, is a creative process. The space that is created in relationship between self
and other, the meaning making space as it were, has enormous creative potential. In
the methodological process pieces that follow, I begin to explore that potential.
Transforming meanings into knowledge while continuing to expand their creative pos-
sibilities is a challenge of form. What meanings evolved through the intersubjective process of being in relationship? How did these meanings challenge my assumptions and advance my understandings about methodology and form? In beginning to address these questions, (and it is only a beginning, reflections on process can only ever be partial accounts), I use a variety of voices and forms. The range presented here reflects my efforts to remain true to the creative space created by continuing the creative process.
Re-Reading Anne: Using Images Artfully

In this section I invite you to engage in an experiential investigation of researcher subjectivity. Using my clinical skills as a therapist in working with counter-transference I operationalize a mental image that I formed during an interview with Felicity. In order to develop the image artfully, I postponed transcribing my field impressions and interview tapes into words. Instead, I begin by utilizing silence and other non-discursive expressive modalities as sense making tools in the research relationship. I encourage you to participate in the image in order to explore how non-verbal subtexts can be used artfully as data. In the discussion, I explore and explain how the countertransference process works for me in therapy and in research in order to foreground issues of researcher neutrality and research subjectivity.

She reminds me so much of Anne.

Once the image has formed itself—(in my mind, with my senses, in my body) the sense of Anne in the room is so full and immediate, it is so, so complete, her spirit is so powerful, that I almost laugh out loud in recognition.

Anne.

And when I tell you this—that the room is filled with my sense of Anne—what are you imagining? What images are coming forward?

-Pause-

Are you able to get past me—past my face, my body, my voice, to conjure up Anne?

-Pause-

Do you have an Anne that you are thinking of? Your mother, your sister, your teacher, your girlfriend from high school? Is your name Anne?

-Pause-

[145]
But maybe you don’t know an Anne. Maybe you grew up in a place, in a language without Anne.

What if I tell you about the Anne I’m imagining? If I tell you about her then you will know more about me. If you recognize her I will know more about you. We can compare notes about Anne, and use your/my image of her as a starting place in talking about my research.

“A child of about eleven, garbed in a very short, very tight, very ugly dress of yellowish gray wincey. She wore a faded brown sailor hat and beneath the hat, extending down her back, were braids of very thick, decidedly red hair. Her face was small, white and thin, also much freckled; her mouth was large and so were her eyes, that looked green in some lights and moods and gray in others.”

But I still won’t know if you would have imagined Anne when I did. Would you have said: “AHA! Anne!”?

-Pause-

“So far the ordinary observer; the extraordinary observer might have seen that the chin was very pointed and pronounced; that the big eyes were full of spirit and vivacity; that the mouth was sweet lipped and expressive; that the forehead was broad and full; in short our discerning extraordinary observer might have concluded that no common place soul inhabited the body of this stray woman-child…”

My image is of an Anne who has an incredible intellect and an imagination to match.

Who has a big heart.

Who challenges authority.

Who makes mistakes and has a temper.

My image of Anne is distinctly Canadian.

-Pause-

She is not a singer.

She is a fictional character.

She “should” have been a boy.

My image is of an Anne who definitely (defiantly) spells her name with an “e”.

[146]
My image is of Lucy Maude Montgomery's "Anne", specifically from her first book, *Anne of Green Gables*, that I read at age nine as a paper back volume given to me and inscribed in the front cover by my grandfather. The image of Anne that I formed then was later fleshed out by reading other books in the series, and by rereading the original, as I grew older. Then when I was in my twenties I saw the movie and another image of Anne was cast in my minds eye.

But when I finally meet Anne, when I feel her presence in the room so palpably I almost laugh out loud in recognition, I am a researcher engaged in an in depth life history interview. In connecting my image of Anne to the context in which it has formed (with my research participant in a long term geriatric care facility), I begin to tease out what the image of Anne has to do with me, with Felicity, and with the inquiry as a whole.

Reflecting on myself first, I understand more fully what has occurred to me previously only as irony and coincidence. This is the facility where my grandfather died twenty-five years ago. It is the facility where I now bring my mother to see the doctor who is treating her for Alzheimer's. It is where my dear friend Ruth works, who I call when I need help figuring out the next steps in caring for my mother. It is "The Institution", the end point of my capacity to creatively caregive, where my mother's name sits on the waiting list. It is through my image of Anne that I can begin to understand this interconnectedness; that is, how my inquiry (which originally had specifically not targeted individuals working in geriatric chronic care facilities), has landed me right here right now. So far, (and I know there is more to come!), the image of Anne has served as a powerful elicitive device that has caused me to reconsider what to foreground in the self-study section of my inquiry.

When I shift my attention back to my research participant I consider the same image and why it is so illuminated in her presence. In working with my image of Anne, by following the associations it evokes and allowing it to take shape, I not only acknowledge my place as co-researcher, I use my subjective responses in the research relationship as an ally to generate understanding of the research phenomenon.

In psychotherapy, this practice is called countertransference. Broadly defined,
countertransference refers to the “feelings and thoughts that are stirred up in the psychotherapist by the patients verbal and non-verbal communications” (Richards, 1990, p. 234). Originally countertransference was conceptualized by Freud as a hindrance and an “obstacle to the psychoanalytic work” to be overcome because it muddies the waters of the psychotherapist’s neutrality (Richards, 1990, p. 234).

Countertransference reframed can be used as a valuable tool in psychotherapy. Underpinning a postmodern understanding of countertransference is the assumption that my responses to the client may be used as a valid tool in the intersubjective sense making process in which we are engaged. As Bolas (1987) suggests, “by cultivating a freely-roused emotional sensibility, the analyst welcomes news from within himself [sic] that is reported through his own intuitions, feelings, passing images, fantasies and imagined interpretive interventions” (Bolas, 1987, p. 201). Even if I don’t grasp what my responses mean, I “have a sense of a meaning that is present and which requires support in order to find its way toward articulation” (Bolas, 1987, p. 209).

In a countertransference reaction, I may be responding to aspects of the client that are non-verbal or pre-verbal, to parts of him/herself that were previously lost, but that may need to be externalized, shared and legitimized, and possibly integrated into the clients current state of being (Bolas, 1987). The therapist who works with countertransference believes in a non-essentialized self; that is, she does not regard herself or her client as possessing of a formed and fixed identity. The fluidity of both the client’s and the therapist’s subjectivity is precisely what can give rise to insight and positive change in each individual.

When I pay attention to my countertransference I acknowledge my subjective responses; when I operationalize these responses I find a way to make them available, and potentially useful to both myself and to the client (Bolas, 1987, p. 200-201). In sharing my countertransference, I must be “judicious and clinically responsible”, that is, I must be clear that what I am bringing forward is in the service of the client (Bolas, 1987, p. 210). Further, in order to remain faithful to the emergent nature of my own
intuitions, feelings and images, I need to remain creative. As a result, I might not express my countertransference verbally to the client; instead I might sketch out an image, rearrange figurines in the sandbox, or play a fragment of music on the tape recorder. Together with the client I can then test the usefulness of my responses: as “subjective objects” they can be brought forward and put on the coffee table between us as “interpretations...meant to be played with-kicked around, mulled over, torn to pieces- rather than regarded as the official version of the truth” (Bollas, 1987, p. 206).

In my role as researcher, I believe that I am equally prone to subjective responses. When I employ my clinical skills in working with countertransference as a therapist to better fulfill my research agenda, I adhere to similar processes, while keeping in mind the different purpose of my work. As Kvale (1999) is careful to point out in his comparison between the therapeutic and research interview, “in therapy the main goal is the change of the patient, in research it is the obtaining of knowledge” (Kvale, 1999, p.105). When I open myself and embrace my varied responses to my research participant as a source of potentially useful material, I am engaging with the complexity of a fuller range of knowledge producing processes. I allow the image of Anne to materialize.

To facilitate this process, I resisted the temptation to immediately translate my impressions into words. This resistance began in the very first in-depth interview, where I allowed and even encouraged silence. In keeping with the work of Pederson and Poland, I believe that to access new ontological and epistemological frontiers in research, we need to reconceptualize our relationship to silence (Pederson and Poland, 1998). In looking for meaning in silence, in allowing ourselves to conjure up images in periods of silence rather than filling them with words, we regard silence as a friend rather than an enemy in research. Once the relational field of the research relationship has been broadened to include nuanced silence as a significant data collection site, I actively listen to the silence and my own feelings during these moments, as potential data about the phenomenon under investigation. If I see my subjectivity as a “doing
rather than a being”, then what might initially appear to be a passive state of contemplation, is in fact a very active process of internal “production and transformation” (Robinson, 1991, p. 11 in Bloom 1996, p. 2).

After leaving our first interview, I metaphorically attempted to maintain the silence. Carefully tucking my interview tapes away, I did not rush to transcribe them. In order to move our projects along, we often transcribe interviews and record field impressions as near to the interview or observation situation as possible. As a new qualitative researcher, keen on “doing it right” and thereby “getting it right”, I knew these “right” steps and the order in which to take them. Straying from this traditional linear path felt necessary but risky: I needed to allow the images to wash over me, but would such alternative process lead to a good research product?

In our rush to capture research experiences in words, motivated in part by the high currency of written text in academe, I believe we often prematurely transform data and compromise our capacity to explore non-discursive modalities in interpreting and representing research material. That is not to say that alternative forms of text based representation that use interview transcripts and field notes as a starting point lack creativity, to the contrary, the work of Glesne (1997), Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) and Richardson (1992), to name just a few, is evidence of the outstanding work that can be done within text based structures.

As Kvale (1999) suggests, however, “current interview research is often subject to the tyranny of verbatim transcripts and formalized methods of analysis”(Kvale, 1999, p.105). In the therapeutic interview, on the other hand, “body language”, facial expressions and other non-verbal indicators are expected to be factored in to the interpretive process. To highlight the lessons that current social science researchers might learn from the therapeutic interview Kvale speculates... “that if the tape recorders had been available in Vienna at Freud’s time, there might not have existed any powerful psychoanalytic theory or practice today; a small sect of psychoanalytic researchers might still be reading and categorizing their transcripts, and discussing their reliability
rather than emphatically listening to the many layers of meaning revealed in the embodied therapeutic interrelations” (Kvale, 1999, p.105).

As Poland and Pederson suggest:
what transcription and qualitative research based on transcripts cannot adequately capture are a broad range of methods of expression that are primarily nonverbal or that do not rely on written text (academic or popular prose or poetry). (Pederson & Poland, 1998, p.7)

If we are to explore the multifaceted value of our research images, I believe that we need to do more with our images before we put them into words. When we regard "texts generated through the transcription of interview recordings, even so-called verbatim transcripts [as] only partial accounts of the original interactions, then our job as researchers includes attending to the imagistic subtext (Poland & Pederson, 1998, p.6).

Instead of transcribing and recording my field impressions in words, I tried to alternatively represent my impressions. In my experience the words won’t go away (after all they are on tape!); precisely for that reason the images became my priority. I looked to a variety of media and materials to draw out my images and capture my associations including: colour, texture, landscape, trees and flowers, fiction and poetry. In keeping with the work of Poland and Pederson, I believe that:

self expression through non-discursive modalities, such as music, dance, photography, and visual art...require different approaches to capturing meaning and communication that, although often silent in a verbal sense, are nonetheless pregnant with meaning. (p. 7)

The image, or images that emerge are not “The Truth” about the research participant any more than they are “The Truth” about me, instead they can be used as a touchstone in the ongoing meaning making process. Paralleling the process of sharing a countertransference response with a client, when negotiating the meaning of such images with my research participant, I was clear that the images are mine, as are the feelings and associations that triggered them. She may or may not resonate with the
image or how I have associated it with her.

I "fed back" some of my images to Felicity in a variety of indirect and direct ways. I did not choose to tell her how much I admire Anne, or about how much she reminds me of her and why. I did tell her that when I think of her I see fall colours: yellows and oranges, rust and burgundy brown; I feel the warmth of the sunshine in which she is bathed; I feel my throat catch at the fierceness of her goodness and I hear her laughing—uncontrolled, at her latest escapade. I positioned a copy of *Anne of Green Gables* on top of my pile of papers at our final interview, and then waited to see if it was noticed. Felicity did not have an "Aha Anne!" reaction, that is, Anne did not serve as a point of connection; however, our mutual understanding was nevertheless increased through sharing the resonance of the image. When an "interview is literally an inter-view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest", then I have the freedom to share my image while not becoming overly invested in a particular interpretation (Kvale, 1999, p. 101). When knowledge is "interrelational and structural", how the image "makes sense" in the relationship is its potential in the production of knowledge (Kvale, 1999, p. 105).

My image of Anne gave me new clues about the focus of the inquiry. In exploring these clues alone (what does the image of Anne mean to me?), and with Felicity (does she resonate with the image of Anne?), I found a new point of entry into the inquiry.

I have invited you to engage with my image of Anne in an attempt to lend an experiential quality to the way in which we form images in research relationships. While you are imagining me imagining Anne imagining my research context, we are exploring a variety of activities not usually associated with more conventional life history research. We are acknowledging the role of emotion and imagination in research. We are acknowledging that communication occurs in silence and in images, that in
these wordless spaces I have responses to you and you have responses to me. We might even have shared a laugh or a tear in the eye (which I hope you’ll tell me about sometime). When these nuanced activities are made explicit and are incorporated into research as legitimate processes, when we chose to work together to find ways to operationalize silence and integrate our image repertoires into our work, then we are making our inquiry artful. In approaching life history research as artful inquiry we need to reconsider both our research processes and products. As new representational forms in research gain epistemological value, so too must alternative research processes. As researchers we need to make ourselves available to these new possibilities. We need to be willing to work with Anne.
Themes

Merriam (1988) suggests that ongoing analysis of the data is one way of refining the focus and setting boundaries on the scope of the inquiry. In fact she cautions that “without ongoing analysis one runs the risk of ending up with data that are unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (Merriam, 1988, p. 124). I employed many of the streamlining techniques that she recommends, including continually returning to my thesis question and asking myself what type of study I wanted to conduct (Merriam, 1988, p. 124). I thereby “force” myself to “make decisions that narrow the study”, while it is still in the process of expanding” (Merriam, 1988, p. 124).

I also conducted a theme analysis of the empirical data. The process of “theme analysis” is described well by Van Manen as “the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 78). In the thematic analysis of lived experience, however, it is important to avoid the reductionist approach of seeing themes as “conceptual formulations or categorical statements” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Thinking of “phenomenological themes ...as the structures of experience”, helps in this regard (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Thematic analysis means that we are trying to understand “the experiential structures that make up that experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79).

Following the data analysis advice offered by Bogdan and Bilken (1982), in listening to Felicity’s stories I fully allowed myself to “ask the question, ‘What does this remind me of?’ ” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982, p.153 in Merriam, 1998, p. 125) . In exploring my responses to Felicity metaphorically, I move the literal (interview data, field notes) into the figurative (images and associations). As Bogdan and Bilken (1982) suggest, this is “another way to expand analytic horizons...to raise concrete relations and happenings observed in a particular setting to a higher level of abstraction” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982, p.154 in Merriam, 125). At this level of knowing my responses and associations
are free to roam. I hear patterns, feel themes, and see sources of illumination (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997).

Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seed</th>
<th>love</th>
<th>inspiration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shoot</td>
<td>vitality</td>
<td>independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Root</td>
<td>support</td>
<td>understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossom</td>
<td>splendor</td>
<td>risk taking</td>
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<tr>
<th>Hope</th>
<th>potential</th>
<th>passion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>doing</td>
<td>excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>renewal</td>
<td>acceptance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mistakes</td>
<td>manifesting</td>
<td>courage</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sensual</th>
<th>making</th>
<th>sowing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Humorous</td>
<td>trusting</td>
<td>growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gritty</td>
<td>tending</td>
<td>spreading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous</td>
<td>imagining</td>
<td>blooming</td>
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Illumination

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Irreverence</th>
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<th>California poppy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>zinnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entitlement</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>sunflower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[155]
Filled with movement, the ongoing reciprocity that is embodied sense making finds fertile ground. Sowing the still mobile images of spontaneous perception, sensory patterns begin to emerge. “Sources of illumination” focus impressions into forms (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997). Maintaining meaning as “multi-dimensional and multi-layered”, qualities and colours form the “structures of experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Anticipating the one dimensional finality of a text based structure, the animate shifts shape. No longer free ranging, scattered themes form rows.
The Search for Goodness

Felicity is one of the sunniest human beings I have ever encountered. Like a sunflower in full bloom, she radiates light and warmth to everyone equally: food service personnel, cleaners, clients, volunteers, psychiatrists and cats. With a character like a California poppy, her energy spreads and blooms like wildflowers. She is constantly brimming over and bubbling with enthusiasm. Her effervescence, however, is not Pollyanna or inauthentic; Felicity is also capable of strong feelings, deep passion and anger. Once, when describing a situation where a resident had been unfairly treated, Felicity’s anger flared forth until her voice was raised and her hands were clenched. I have also witnessed her vulnerability and seen her disappointment. On a moment to moment, day to day basis, however, Felicity, like a hardy zinnia, is a straightforward, happy person. She is not given to self-doubt or self-criticism; she appears to be genuinely free of internal contradictions and conflict.

While spending time interacting with Felicity, while reading my notes (there is scarcely a page that goes by where I don’t marvel at this sunny quality), while observing her with others, at the back of my mind was always the question: Can this be real? Is this woman really sunshine through and through? Does golden light flow through her veins?

In retrospect, more interesting perhaps than these questions, was my unwillingness to let them go. Why did I keep thinking that I was missing something (“This woman, Maura, she’s too good to be true.”) Why did I assume that Felicity has a shadow? Why did I keep expecting to find parts of her where the sun doesn’t shine?

I believe that my conditioning as a counselling practitioner partly explains my continued questioning of Felicity’s sunny disposition. The reality of therapists’ lives is
that we spend a remarkable amount of time with unhappy people. While we do sometimes work with otherwise contented people who come to us for assistance with very localized issues (making a difficult decision, for example), in general, a therapist’s client group is not made up of sunny people. Broadly speaking therapists assist people to identify and work with the life experiences that have blocked their place in the sun. We work with shadows and murkiness and darkness. Or, with another sort of client, I am on the lookout for the subtext lurking behind an otherwise sunny life story, thinking, “why else would this person be in my office?”

Keenly attuned as I am to locating points of disjuncture in the narratives of clients, I continued to expect to hear such notes in my encounters with Felicity. Or, if I did not locate them in person, I imagined that they would present themselves in my follow up processes of reflection and interpretation. When I finally came to accept the fact that I was not going to find Felicity’s shadow (because there simply is not one there), I experienced a very useful shift in my posture as a researcher. Allowing myself to feel the full warmth of her sun, I used this experience to reconsider my approach to self-study. I started to see potential in “the search for goodness” as a methodological orientation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p. 141). In describing the qualities of this stance, they explain:

By goodness, then, we do not mean an idealized portrayal of human experience or organizational culture, nor do we suggest that the portraitist focus only on good things, look only on the bright side, or give a positive spin to every experience. Rather we mean an approach to inquiry that resists the more typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies. Rather than focusing on the identification of weakness, we begin by asking, “What is happening here, what is working, and why?” (p. 141)

While I wasn’t quite at the point with Felicity where I was seeking out pathology, I had become quite entrenched in a “search for badness”. In turning this approach toward “a search for goodness”, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis assure the portraitist
that “even in focusing on what works, on underscoring what is healthy and strong, we inevitably see the dark shadows of compromise, inhibition, and imperfection that distort the success and weaken the achievements” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p.142).

Interestingly, this was not my experience with Felicity, even when I was firmly routed along a “search for badness”. While I did see compromise, imperfection and vulnerability in her, in no way did they, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis suggest, cast “dark shadows, distort [her] successes or weaken [her] achievements”. Instead they confirmed that she is human, and that “strength, health, and productivity— will always be imbued with flaws, weaknesses, and inconsistencies” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p.142). In thinking about my own history, I began to imagine what it would look like if I began with a “search for goodness” that focused on health and strength. What if I resisted my usual tendency to look first at the patterns in shadows? What if I chose not to focus on the spots blocked by the sun? What would this difference in approach look like in self-study research practice? How would it change my self-portrait?

The frame of reference “the search for goodness” offered also appealed to me in light of several personal history research accounts (Ellis, 1996; Ronai, 1996) that I had recently read, and that I found quite disturbing. These researchers, it seemed to me, had become overly focused on the most negative of their formative experiences. In “My Mother Is Mentally Retarded”, for example, Ronai’s focus on the details of the personal trauma she suffered as a child are so explicit and so relentless that, after reading a couple of pages, my stomach turned and I started feeling unwilling to finish the article. Confused by her intention and somewhat angered by her methods, I found myself thinking, “Why has she told us that too? Haven’t we heard enough? Must I continue to endure this assault to learn more about “the lived experience of children of mentally retarded parents”” (Ronai, 1996, p.110)? Or more specifically, how does this quality and quantity of information (that in effect forces the reader to vicariously experience the
author’s trauma) contribute to her/our understanding of Ronai’s experience of her mother?”

Perplexed by what appears to be, in Ronai’s case, a compulsion to expose the most gruesome details of her personal history, I wonder how such writing serves the author, and why researchers engaging in personal history accounts appear to be exposing more and more intimate, and often troubling details about their lives. In “My Mother is Mentally Retarded”, Ronai explains that she has been “asked by readers to dig even deeper”, but then accuses those readers of being “fucking vampires”, for “draining the emotional life out of [her]” (Ronai, 1996, p. 126). Seemingly bent on both shocking and alienating her audience, I cannot tell if she is referring to readers of earlier drafts of this article, or to readers of her earlier work. Could she be calling me, the reader, a “fucking vampire” because she imagines that I want her to “dig deeper”? To the contrary I want her to explain why she is both digging at herself and digging at me. In the absence of any explanation, I take a step away and begin to disengage from her drama in order to protect myself.

Midway through the article, however, after much disclosure and after drawing several needlessly shocking, (and, I might venture, flawed) analogies, for example: “Crying was not allowed at home. When it occurred, it was handled much like masturbation—you do it in private and hope you don’t get caught,” the author warns us, “I look at what I just wrote. All of it is true, yet I haven’t told you the worst of it” (Ronai, 1996, pp. 116-117).

At this point, as a reader I have a choice: I brace myself for more of the same, or worse, (and yes it does get worse), or I stop reading and take the chance that even more information is not going to further my knowledge of either the author’s situation or the area of inquiry. Forging ahead it is no surprise when on the second to last page Ronai tells us that:

There is no answer, no final truth to this conundrum [the mixture of love and hate she feels toward her mother]—only ambivalence. I feel as if I live in the
margins, waiting for this feeling to settle into something else, to transform, or to transcend. But there is no resolution, at least not yet. Try as I may, I cannot work it all out. I cannot label everything neatly and explain it to you, the reader, wrapped up in a neat, bundled conclusion. (p. 129)

"Neat bundled conclusion?" I ask. What reader expects "neat bundles" to emerge out of the telling of trauma? Does anyone really expect that the author will ever "work it all out"? But by now I can't discern whether Ronai is serious or whether her tone is patronizing and her words edged with sarcasm.

As a reader I do expect some reward (in the form of new understanding or knowledge) for wading through this type of material. Not "neat bundles" surely, but some sense of why this information is important and why it needed to be told in the context of a personal history narrative as social science research. As Neil Postman, a contemporary cultural anthropologist points out..."there is no more fundamental requirement of a knowledge medium than that it make clear why we are being given information. If we do not know that, we know nothing worth knowing"(Postman, 1999, p. 94).

While Ronai tells us about the personal toll the process of this telling has taken, the purpose of going through such horror, and of sharing the information itself remains unclear. In conclusion she writes:

I am being forced to unravel an emotional knot in my gut to finish this. My heart is racing, my hand trembling, my limbs limp. I can feel my center dissipate, bleeding outward, as if entropy will catch me up in its flow and I will fail to be. I despise feeling like this—vulnerable, scared, a little out of control...(Ronai, 1996 p. 126)

Reading this I am left with conflicting feelings. While I am annoyed that Ronai does not seem to care that I, too, am left feeling exhausted and disturbed by her story, I also feel pity for this miserable person. Listening to Ronai's story, I am reminded of my training as a therapist. Perhaps, I think, I should offer her my card.
In fact, were I to listen to Ronai’s story in a therapeutic context I would likely experience her telling as overdisclosure, that is, a telling of too much too fast, without congruent emotion or contextual grounding. The overdisclosing client is often testing the therapist (can she hear my worst and stand it? Will she be able to stay with me in my pain?) In my experience overdisclosure is not only non-productive, it can often make a person feel worse.

As a clinician I would try and slow the process down, way down, so that the storyteller could feel her feelings and begin the slow process of digesting them. (I would also be hoping to spare her the attendant feelings of shame overdisclosure often precipitates.) Hopefully over time, a lot of time, she might experience some shift, some self-acceptance, as a result of her adult perspective on childhood trauma. In this way difficult experiences can be transformed, information about the self can become personal knowledge, and healing can begin to occur.

But in my current role as reader, in my position as a member of the research community, what am I left with after I turn the last page? Moreover, what is Ronai left with? What personal or professional purpose has this telling served for her? While self study or personal history research methods often have a cathartic or even therapeutic value for the author, in my understanding the primary purpose of writing and then publishing a personal history research account is not therapeutic. It has more to do with the pursuit of understanding the self in order to further knowledge in the particular area in which the inquiry is situated.

So when is it useful to ask a research audience to bear witness to trauma? Can the academic reader be expected to know how to process this information? Or is it necessary or appropriate to ask he or she to develop these skills?

My resistance to this type of disclosure of personal experience does not come from fear or prudishness, or from a set of rules about properness (for example: four letter words should not find their way into academic discourse). To the contrary I seek out personal history research accounts that explore difficult issues and that push previ-
ously established boundaries about academic discourse and representational forms (Finley & Knowles, 1995; Richardson, 1996; Sacks, 1999). Further, in my work as a therapist, I have considerable experience and expertise in witnessing and working with trauma. I also know trauma personally. It is more that this type of writing reminds me of my own commitment to remain self-conscious about my life and work and how they might intertwine as research.

Perhaps it is also a matter of personal taste, or style in personal history storytelling. I like metaphor and mystery: I know that given the choice I would prefer to look at a loosely clothed body in candlelight than at a nude one under fluorescent lighting. Accordingly, I have chosen to keep my own stories clothed, not in order to hide from, or to protect the reader, but to offer you a choice. You can look for the shadow of the picture not taken, the words left unsaid, or you can turn the page and move on. After all, it is in the light of the sun that contrast-producing shadows, not immediately apparent, become visible (Kathy Mantas, Feb. 10, 2000, personal communication).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) agrees that disclosure in research storytelling should be a delicate process not a jarring striptease. In her experience storytelling is motivating to research participants when memories are transformed through the telling. Other memories are most enlivening and empowering simply by not being told:

Part of what makes it possible for people to keep pushing forward is the selection of what gets remembered and revealed, the smoothing over of rough edges, the denial of pain, the making of coherence out of chaos, the humor that masks the trauma. In reconstructing life stories there are always things left unsaid, secrets untold or repressed, skeletons kept closeted. There is in good storytelling, then, the critical element of restraint and the discipline of disclosure.

Even in the most textured stories, mysteries will always remain.

(Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994, p.612-613)

When personal experience methods push previously held boundaries of disclosure and exposure, it is also particularly important, in my opinion, to remain mindful of our
own potential vulnerability as research participants.

While I want to cause my research audience to sit up straight and feel stimulated and challenged by my work, I need, at all times to remain respectful of my reader. I believe that we researchers need to be aware of how strong our words and images can be. If we choose to present highly charged or potent prose we need to be self conscious and responsible about our motivation and intention. In telling my stories I need to be mindful of their purpose in the research context. In other words, can I answer the question: “why have I included this detail and what does it illustrate?”

In returning to my own approach to self-study, my commitment to treat both myself and my reader with care and to remain aware of the purpose of my work is strengthened. I begin to see an inquiry where “the search for goodness” will encourage my reader to turn the next page and look harder, not for weaknesses or flaws, but for shading and depth.
Excited by the possibilities “the search for goodness” holds for my self-study, I began to map out a form that will incorporate and reflect my new learning. Since my experience of Felicity had led me to the realization that I could use “the search for goodness” as an approach to the study of my own life, I decided to use themes that I had heard in her stories, and that I could see in Felicity’s portrait, as a starting place instorying my own life. In choosing to write my narrative snapshots in “response” to Felicity, I made a significant interpretive choice. The points of connection and difference I heard led me to render a series of narrative snapshots framed around particular themes.

Turning the focus toward myself, I find it quite an educative challenge to keep the focus on goodness steady. How much easier it is to see the goodness in another! Looking at myself through Felicity’s eyes helps: using the “patterns, themes and sources of illumination” that I located in her life as a starting place literally sheds light on my own (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997). The work of sifting through my stories is qualitatively different when done from Felicity’s vantage point: frequently the light catches my eye and bright spots appear. As new images of my life begin to develop from this perspective or point of view, another aspect of my self-study methodology takes shape and my next steps become clear. With Felicity’s “patterns, themes and sources of illumination” in one hand, and Mitchell and Weber’s (1998) list “Memory Work with Photographs” in the other, I dust off and open my enormous box of photos.

While Mitchell and Weber assure the image based researcher that “a single photograph can serve as a basic tool, the “raw material” of “self study”, I decided to look at myself in a whole variety of poses through this new lens (Mitchell & Weber, 1998,
p.179). Drawing on a list of exercises and questions suggested by Mitchell and Weber (1998), I began the work of infusing the images with new life. As a starting point they suggest:

Consider the human subject(s) in the photograph. Start with a simple description and then write an account in which you can take up the position of the subject. In this part of the exercise, it is helpful to use the third person (‘she’, rather than ‘I’, for instance). To bring out the feelings associated with the photograph, you may visualize yourself as the subject you were at the moment the picture was taken: this can be done in turn with all of the photograph’s human subjects, if there is more than one, and even with the inanimate objects in the picture. (p. 179)

In order to bring the imagistic sense of myself further to life, I picked up and arranged many, many photographs. Examining them systematically in light of the identified “patterns, themes and sources of illumination”, I made several piles of images to re-examine, and dumped many more photos back into the box. For example, in the re-examine pile I put an old black and white photo showing the front of the house where I grew up. A less than average quality shot, I am nevertheless struck by the way in which the gray gravel of our front yard is proudly featured in the picture. Gazing into the photo I remember the feel of the maple keys as I tugged them out from between those stones, a Saturday-in-spring chore particular to my family. I am suddenly reminded that those stones were embedded in a whole political perspective my parents had about grass, about lawnmowers, about noise, about pollution. “Seed, shoot, root”, I see myself both from and in the “patterns”.

I also used Barbara Pamphilon’s (1999) “zoom model” as an interpretive framework while considering the photos I have selected to interpret. Drawing on the metaphor of photography her model offers a systematic method for considering perspective in life history methodology. While her use of the zoom model pertains to the interpretation of narrative data and does not involve actual pictures, I found her framework useful as a ‘way of seeing’ in the analysis of photos. She describes that:
The macro-zoom focuses on the sociohistorical dimension, exploring collective meanings as they relate to individual experience...the meso-zoom reveals the personal level of values, interpretations and positioning...the micro-zoom focuses on the subtleties of the telling, examining emotions and voice, whereas the interactional-zoom recognizes life histories as a product of a relationship between narrator and researcher. (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 393)

Applied to self-study, when "narrator and researcher" are one, the micro-zoom level asks "who took the picture and how did those captured in the image feel about the story being told?" The interactional-zoom, on the other hand, asks how temporal positionality effects interpretation. Using the zoom model as an aid in meaning construction I begin to imagine fashioning a linguistic text that will connote perspective. Feeling the intensity of the photos, I am moved to capture their resonance in words. Seen from a variety of perspectives, photographs can therefore be "texts which both ask and tell...rather than having them construct us in a certain way, we can use them to ask questions and tell new stories" (Mitchell & Weber, 1998, p. 180). Pamphilon describes that:

The visual metaphor of the ...zoom model highlights the active agency of the researcher photographer. As Chaplin (1994) has noted, photographs are not taken, rather they are made. The photographer selects the subject taken, chooses the type of shot (e.g., angle and light), and constructs the image for a particular purpose. This overtly recognizes the researcher/photographer’s active involvement in the generation and selection of data. The visual metaphor reminds us, as researchers, of the difference between looking and seeing, in that "looking’ preserves the ontological separation of being into viewer and viewed [whilst] ‘seeing’ on the other hand begins the project of traversing the gap...preparing for the possibility that the subject’s action arises out of the ground of meaning (Deveraux, 1995, pp.70-71). We are thus invited to become cocreators of meaning. (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 395)
I also take artistic license with the photos in whatever way serves my purpose. As Mitchell and Weber assure us: "We ... don't have to accept our photographs just as they are. By trimming excess baggage and non-essential elements, we can get rid of images we don't want (Mitchell & Weber, 1998, p. 178). Further, we can create images where no actual pictures exist. Putting material from the mind's eye to paper, a series of narrative snapshots begins to emerge.

I refer to my self-study sections (see pp. 65-79) as "narrative snapshots" for a variety of reasons. First, in combining the word "snapshot" with narrative, I hope to set up a different sort of "reading" experience. The metaphor of the snapshot, also of course drawn from the field of photography, is intended to serve this purpose. Snapshots are candid moments; fragments framed by a lens turned swiftly on a particular moment in time. The hurried quality of the picture (snapshots are rarely carefully composed), means that the focus might not be clear. It might be necessary to squint your eye, or turn the picture to a different angle, or look at it in a different light in order to begin to see what's there. Details might show up in the finished frame that you didn't expect to be there (the back of someone's head; part of an unknown dog's tail), or conversely, the images that emerge in the background might overshadow the intentional focus of the picture. Further, through "snapshots" or pictures, it is perhaps easier to recognize to "see" who was left out of the frame or sliced with a scissors out of the picture after it was developed. ("That must have been her father that she cut out of that group... I doubt if he took the picture... because, look there in the corner is part of a grown man's shoe... I bet that was him, and that shoe—it got left behind"). The frequency and choice of images captured in the foreground, ("Her mother keeps appearing in so many shots, at different ages, in so many different outfits, with different shoes, sometimes with makeup, sometimes without; with so many different people and so many different expressions..."), resonates with significance.

When we like a snapshot we usually affix it to the front of our fridge with a
magnet or tack it to a bulletin board. Months later, the edges worn, the corners turned and the colour faded, we remove it from its temporary spot and put it into a shoe box labeled “photo album”. It’s likely though that when the album actually gets put together the worn snapshot will return to the shoebox, discarded in favor of framed and finished, more “complete” pictures that contribute to the narrative thread of the photo album. My self study is intended to read like the snapshots in the shoebox: viewed together they form a composite of who I am. Using this series of images, a narrative containing themes of experience begins to emerge.

Perhaps though with all this talk of images, of snapshots, you have become confused and want to flip back to the sections I am discussing, looking for actual pictures. I assure you that they are (still) not here. Let me clarify. My discussion refers to both the literal and figurative use of images, to actual snapshots and to words read metaphorically as snapshots. In other words, speaking epistemologically, I have used images as phenomenon. Leafing through my actual shoebox, I asked myself real questions (listed above) about real snapshots. I have also used images as method. Interpreting the images by making choices about inclusion and exclusion or foreground and background, I remake them in the construction of new knowledge. Finally, I use images metaphorically as a mode of storytelling; that is I ask you to “read” my words, as “narrative snapshots”.

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There is a paradox in this work. The more we hear life’s resonances, the more we recognize the silences. The more we reveal the life portraits, the more we appreciate the empty spaces on the canvas. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994, p. 612-13)

I am well aware that my narrative snapshots are short of facts, of information or content in the traditional sense. To the reader, who finds frustration in the type of sense making I am inviting, I apologize, (I hope you will be interested enough to try a "re-reading"). To the reader, who is overwhelmingly curious about details about my life I fail to include, I apologize, (I hope you will use your imagination to fill in the blanks yourself). To the reader who wants those facts, in order, I apologize—(I hope you will develop your own chronology).

In making choices about which snapshots to frame on the page, I remained mindful of the question that I began to consider in my examination of Ronai’s work: “What is information and how much of it do people need?” (Postman, 1999, p. 91). Neil Postman, argues that we as a society are inundated by massive quantities of meaningless information. Postman believes that information needs to be put “in its place, to give it a useful epistemological frame”(Postman, 1999, p.90). “Information,” he suggests:

- consists of statements about the facts of the world. There are, of course, an uncountable number of facts in the world. Facts are transformed into information only when we take note of them and speak of them...or write about them. By this definition, facts cannot be wrong. They are what they are. Statements about facts—that is information, can be wrong, and often are. (p. 91)

Turning this reasoning toward the facts of my life, (particularly the “uncountable number of facts” about my life that I have chosen to leave out), you can begin to see the risks inherent in transforming facts into information by making statements
about them. (I learned to swim before I could walk; I am the younger of two adopted children; I am the child of a "mixed" marriage). What means do you have at your disposal to assess these as statements about the facts of my life? Compared to the presentational style of the majority of my narrative snapshots, these statements certainly "read" more like information, but does that make them easier to decipher as true or false, useful or erroneous? How much do we accept information for information's sake simply because we are conditioned to expect it, lots of it, delivered in predictable forms? Does information alone really contribute to our understanding, or knowledge about things?

Postman (1999) suggests that information that refers only to itself, or, put another way, information that is shared only for the sake of the telling, fails to facilitate understanding or contribute to the production of knowledge. He defines knowledge as:

Organized information—information that is embedded in some context; information that has a purpose, that leads one to seek further information in order to understand something about the world. Without organized information, we may know something of the world, but very little about it. When one has knowledge, one knows how to relate information to one's life, and especially, knows when information is irrelevant. (p.93)

Knowledge, Postman argues, concerns the "because"s of things. We used to be able to rely on social institutions: churches, schools and families for example, to help us get at the knowledge producing "because"s through background, opinion and historical context. All too frequently, he laments, in our information-addicted world, we stop at "and": this happened, and then that happened, and then that happened, and never get to "because".

In avoiding this information laden approach to the study of my own life, in looking for experiences that might suggest the "because"s, I am required to think deeply and differently about my experience. In order to avoid the meaningless flow of:
this happened and then that happened, and then he, and then she, I interrupt the information chronology and begin to look at the "facts" from a different perspective. Leaving the local and specialized knowledge of my own experience, I see myself far more clearly from another point of view. Looking through the rose coloured glasses of Felicity's experience, my horizons are expanded. From this vantage point, my self-knowledge can be transformed. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994), in discussing the goals of life history research explains, "our search is not for a rendering of objective truth or replicable evidence, but for the reconstruction and reinterpretation of experience, which can include perspective taking, projection, distortion and fantasy" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p. 612).

Perspective, Postman suggests, is where wisdom begins. He defines wisdom as "the capacity to know what body of knowledge is relevant to the solution of significant problems" (Postman, 1999, p. 95). Wisdom is not knowing the answers, it is "knowing what questions to ask about knowledge" (Postman, 1999, p. 95). To be useful, for wisdom to be serviceable and practical, those questions must "come from a world other than the world from which the knowledge comes" (Postman, 1999, p. 96). As an example Postman cites the discussion in the media about the gulf war. What is the purpose, he asks, in asking people involved in war (military personnel like generals), to talk about war? Why is it that "no artists were interviewed—no historians, no novelists, no theologians, no schoolteachers, no doctors?" (Postman, 1999, p. 97) He aptly points out that: "One can have a great deal of knowledge about the world but entirely lack wisdom" (Postman, 1999, p. 97). For wisdom to develop, other points of view, other perspectives are required:

Knowledge...is only organized information. It is self-contained, confined to a single system of information about the world....Knowledge cannot judge itself. Knowledge must be judged by other knowledge, and therein lies the essence of wisdom. (Postman, 1999, p. 95).
In Postman’s opinion:

we live now in a world of too much information, confusing specialized knowledge, and too little wisdom....The problem to be solved in the twenty-first century is not how to move information, not the engineering of information. We solved that problem long ago. The problem is how to transform information into knowledge, and how to transform knowledge into wisdom (Postman, 1999, p. 98).

Drawing on Postman’s (1999) distinction between information, knowledge and wisdom to explain the paucity of information contained in my narrative snapshots, I hope you can begin to see my attempts to “transform information into knowledge...[and to] transform knowledge into wisdom”(Postman, 1999, p. 98).

In the following section, which is also about methodology, I take a step back toward the beginning of my research process and revisit the methodological framework that I outlined in my research proposal. In taking a critical perspective on my methodology I use my own research experience to demonstrate how information becomes knowledge through practice. I outline the understandings that I have come to about arts informed life history methodology and discuss my own identity development as a researcher. As evidenced in changes in my language and tone, with experience and perspective methodological wisdom can begin to emerge.
CHAPTER NINE

Methodology
To write vulnerably is to open a Pandora's box. Who can say what will come flying out? (Behar, 1996, p. 19)

Plate i
Remember “Pleasantville”? One of the significant events that precipitates the unraveling of the neat and tidy, black and white world of Pleasantville, occurs when Bud brings Bill (the soda jerk who is discovering himself as an artist), a book on art. Flipping through the large hard bound book filled with colour illustrations of paintings by Renoir, Monet, and Picasso, Bill asks Bud “Where am I going to see colours like that? They must be awful lucky to see colours like that. I bet they don’t know how lucky they are”.

What Bill discovers is that the ability to see technicolour is stirred by a passion that comes from within. When he and Bud stay up all night painting a mural of a technicolour Pleasantville on the walls of the police station, the images they depict, such as lover’s lane and winged books, reflect the diversity of the passions beginning to capture the hearts of the people of Pleasantville. When they are arrested and charged with “the intentional use of prohibited paint colours, in violation of the Pleasantville code of conduct and the laws of common decency”, they are asked to admit to “willfully and consciously using the forbidden paint colours”. “Red, pink, vermilion, puce, chartreuse, umber, blue, aqua, oxblood, green, peach, crimson, yellow, olive, and magenta”, as the town mayor lists off the offending colours, we, the film’s audience, join with the people of Pleasantville in marveling at the absurd lengths people in positions of power will go to in order to preserve the status quo.

Toward the end of the film, the town mayor, in consultation with some of ‘the old boys’ (including Bud’s father), presents the people of Pleasantville with a code of conduct. Looking beyond the benign “first principles” of behaving in a “courteous and Pleasant” manner, the code of conduct is a recipe of rules intended to curtail passion, self expression, relationship and change of any kind.

In the following section I present the methodological framework that I outlined in my thesis proposal, as written, precisely in order to critique it. While I feel fortunate to have been subjected to other influences (I was shown that hard bound book on art,
as it were), that helped me to move beyond it, looking at what I wrote (even though parts make me wince), is a useful starting place in coming to understand the methodological constraints I moved beyond. I quote and counterpoint my own methodological ‘recipe’ with the Pleasantville code of conduct in order to highlight the absurdity of proceeding with a “study of human lives” as if I were baking a cake in black and white (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000).
Data Collection Methods

The Interviews

The particular tools that I will be using to collect data will be participant observation, document analysis and in-depth interviewing. These methods are typically associated with life history research (Cole, 1991; Measor & Sikes, 1992). In this section I will detail the mechanics of accessing and apprehending knowledge about the phenomenon using each of these methods. Further, I will explore some of the issues associated with their use in my project.

"...The only permissible paint colours shall be black, white or gray despite the recent availability of certain alternatives..."

Central to most life history research is the life history interview. The life history interview is a collaborative process characterized by an in-depth conversation between the research participant and the researcher (Cole, 1991, 1994). Usually each participant will engage in several such interviews spaced over the course of a few weeks. As Cole (1991) explains, this spacing is crucial in order to accommodate the interpretive process that is the cornerstone of life history research. After the first interview, the taped material must be transcribed and delivered to the participant for review. The second interview picks up the threads of the first, but also occurs in the interpretive light of that first interview. As Cole describes, "life-history interviews are cumulative, each one filling in a larger section of the puzzle" (Cole, 1991, p.203).

"...All elementary and high school curriculum shall teach the non changes view of his - tory, emphasizing continuity over alteration..."
In the life history interview, pre-formulated questions are not of central importance. Instead, a series of open-ended questions is used as a guide, but they are intended only as a spring board into the area of inquiry. (see the appendix for my interview guide). Life history questions are questions without definitive answers that usually lead to more questions. They are “intended to elicit information that will assist in developing a contextualized understanding of human phenomena and experience, that is, understanding of phenomena influenced by a complex array of historical, political, societal, institutional, and personal circumstances (Cole, 1994, p.3).

While life history interviewing may appear similar to life story work, the quality of the life history interview differs from life story in significant ways. In life story, the researcher acts more as a collector of information that pre-exists the interview, and needs only to be recorded (Cole, 1991). In life history work the “story” does not exist a priori to the interview situation, but is generated through the interactive process of listening and telling. For these reasons, in life history the researcher’s person plays a particularly important role in the interview process, and continued awareness of his/her subjectivity is essential.

In the qualitative research methodology literature there is agreement that the most important factor in the interview is the quality of the relationship between researcher and research participant (Cole, 1991, 1994; Edwards, 1993; Measor, 1985; Yow, 1994). When meaning is believed to be made intersubjectively, the quality of the intersubjective experience directly impacts the meanings produced. Simply put, a good relationship is likely to get good results—as measured by the quantity and quality of material generated in the interview. A research participant who is uncomfortable or unclear about the research project, or the researcher’s intentions, is unlikely to have much to say that is meaningful.

“...All citizens of Pleasantville are to treat each other in a courteous and Pleasant man-ner...”
It is my intention to strive for relationships with my research participants that are based on mutual respect and trust. In my opinion, developing these qualities in the research relationship is a process more similar to other relationships than the literature on the subject suggests (Cole, 1991; Edwards, 1993; Measor, 1985; Yow, 1994). While it is a very particular type of social construction, research is still, after all, life. As in all human exchange, it is necessary in the research relationship to be self aware, honest, considerate, caring and straightforward. If the researcher’s “real life” relationships are not characterized by these qualities, it is likely to be more difficult for him or her to develop them with research participants.

"...The only permissible recorded music shall be the following: Johnny Mathis, Perry Como, Jack Jones, the marches of John Philip Souza, or the Star Spangled Banner. In no event shall any music be tolerated that is not of a temperate or pleasant nature..."

The research relationship finds its primary difference from other relationship forms in the degree of responsibility the researcher takes for the relationship. Since the researcher’s person effects the course of the inquiry to such a great degree, the researcher’s self responsibility for the functioning of themselves as a kind of “research instrument” is critical. Paradoxically, the researcher must remember that while he/she is striving for mutuality, the research role makes the researcher in some way more responsible for insuring relationship well being. After all, it is through our research that we are inviting participants to be in relationship with us.

Another distinguishing feature of the research relationship has to do with time and expectations. The research relationship is not casual; it is a relationship with a purpose, which is of course different from many other types of interpersonal connection. When successful, the research relationship is likely to follow a kind of fast-tracked evolutionary path: it will go deeper faster, and finish more quickly than most relationships that have attained that level of intimacy. If the
researcher and participant are up front and mindful of their expectations, and are comfortable with this notion of purposeful relationship, then it is less likely that feelings will be hurt.

"...No bedframe or mattress may be sold measuring more than thirty-eight inches wide..."

While much has been written on the risks associated with developing too close a relationship with research participants, I believe that the risks associated with not developing a close enough relationship are far greater. Further, my experience as a counsellor tells me that it is quite possible to go in deep with a person, and still remain mindful of boundaries.

Finally, I will also give consideration to the location of the interviews. For a horticultural therapist in particular, the choice of indoors or outside, out in the greenhouse, or in the office, is likely to make a very real difference to the interview. If my experience is at all shared by other participants, I suspect that, for people who are involved with plants, the time of year will also affect the quality (and perhaps the content) of responses. An interview conducted indoors on a snowy January day, will, I imagine, be very different from one that is carried out in the participant’s garden on the day in May when her irises are blooming.

"...There shall be no public sale of umbrellas or preparation for inclement weather of any kind...

I intend to remain mindful of these factors when I schedule the interviews. I hope that scheduling requirements will allow for some variation in both locale and season.
Participant Observation

Participant observation will give me the experiential opportunity to get in touch with the phenomenon of my inquiry. By actually "getting out there" into the real world of my participant’s experience, I will gain a sense of both the context of his/her professional practice, and the interaction patterns within that system. Further, participant observation will allow access to the non-verbal text of my participant’s experience. To actually be with a participant in his or her workplace garden will provide me with ontological knowledge of who they are. Data collection in this instance will involve a sensual and emotional knowing of the phenomenon. For these reasons it seems to me that participant observation, if handled carefully, has the potential to add another layer of breadth to my understanding of the phenomenon.

In my opinion, "proceeding carefully" means being clear with myself and with my participants about my reasons for wanting to engage in participant observation. I need to assure participants that I will not be coming to their workplace in order to judge them or their work; but rather to bring their work to life in my own mind. It is essential that I remain mindful of this intention and actually follow through with it both when I am in the situation, and afterwards. This includes my handling of the data in the interpretive phase of the project, and in its final presentational form. By doing my best to remove the evaluative overtones that participant observation sometimes contains, I hope to put my participants at ease with this process.

"...The area commonly known as lover's lane as well as the Pleasantville Public Library shall be closed until further notice..."

For these reasons, I intend to carefully negotiate issues associated with
participant observation *with* the actual participants. I need to ask them if they are comfortable with me coming to their workplace, and if so, when do they want me there, and when do they *not* want me there? For instance, a participant might be able to imagine me observing a group that they lead, but see my observation of an individual session as out of the question. In asking participants to consider this issue I intend to acknowledge that I *will* impact on situations, and in many ways *be* a participant *through my very presence*. I will take the lead from participants in my study about how active or passive to be in these situations. If they want me to help out and it seems appropriate to do so, I will be obliging. It would seem ridiculous (and dishonest) for me to hide the fact that I love gardening and that I love being active. Further, working alongside a participant will literally bring the phenomenon that is the focus of this inquiry to life. It could also be fun—particularly if it involved working in the garden with a participant and his/her clients.

In this enterprise, as in all others associated with the project, I will remain aware of who I am, what impressions I might give, what I am doing in the situation, and what my boundaries are. I will try to "be myself", while managing the impressions that I give (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 58). To me the warning that Glesne and Peshkin offer about the researcher’s degree of participation makes common sense. They recommend that the researcher “participate, but in a way that does not get you inextricably incorporated in a setting’s ongoing affairs” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 57).

“*...All citizens of Pleasantville are to treat each other in a courteous and Pleasant man -ner...*”

When I enter a situation as a participant observer, I will introduce myself and briefly explain why I am there. I will then ask if anyone minds if I take notes. Ideally, in documenting my experience as a participant observer, I will follow Woods (1986) technique of recording "field notes", and "reflections and
extra information" on either side of a large notebook (p. 45). I hope to provide sufficient detail so that when I go back over my notes I will be able to paint a full picture of what I saw, and how I felt, when I was actually at the research site.

Documents

It is particularly important to remain mindful of the epistemological underpinnings of the research project when using documents. Consistent with my epistemology is the belief that documents should be used as a knowledge enhancing agent, to assist the researcher in developing his/her understanding of the phenomena from a different perspective. While the term "document" has an unfortunate association with the word evidence, in my opinion documents should not be used to prove or disprove, but to add another layer of understanding to the inquiry. Further, it is always important to explain why you are interested in, or using a document. As Peter Woods (1996) suggests, in qualitative research documents have no intrinsic value: "while they might in themselves convey useful information, they always have to be contextualized within the circumstances of their construction" (p. 90). Since the research for this project will be conducted under the assumption that knowledge is multiperspectival, it follows that I will be actively seeking different sources of information about the phenomena.

Woods categorizes documents into the three main areas of "official documents, personal documents and questionnaires". While I expect not to be using questionnaires (in that they tend to be a more closed information gathering method), I do hope to use both official and personal documents. Drawing from a list made by Woods (1986), these might include: "timetables, minutes of meetings, planning papers, newspapers or journals, files and statistics, notice boards, exhibitions, official letters, and photographs" (Woods, 1986, p. 90). If I am suc-
cessful in gaining access to them, I will also consider documents (such as leaflets, program descriptions or evaluations), that were produced by others associated with the program.

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Further, with the help of my research participants it is my intention to establish a working definition of the term "documents" that constitutes its meaning more broadly. I hope that this process will result in the inclusion of documents that are more particular to the work of horticultural therapists. For instance: seed catalogues, garden journals, planting schedules, garden plans, watering rosters, gardening magazines, drawings and sketches, and cloud charts could all be constituted as documents for the purposes of this inquiry. To take it a step further, the research participants may want to use particular plants as documents. I see it as quite plausible that in this forum plants could provide "useful ways in to more detailed qualitative work" (Woods, 1986, p. 92).

Understanding from the perspective of a horticultural therapist where a plant came from, and how it was constructed (socially rather than organically), could provide valuable insight. In my opinion, collections of plants, like "collections of documents can hold the key to analysis of whole areas of social interaction" (Woods, 1986, p. 94). For this reason a participant's garden in of itself might become a document.

Documents can also be used for their evocative quality. As Woods suggests, "in the construction of life histories, official documents relating to certain episodes can be a useful spur to memory" (Woods, 1986, p. 94). Used in this way, documents can facilitate a more sensuous knowing of a phenomena. For the horticultural therapist, a particular smell, a particular texture, a dried flower pressed in a book, or a dead plant might all have resonance meaningful to the
inquiry. I will invite my participants to first choose, and then guide me through documents that they select as significant. Together we will explore their meaning as it pertains to the area of investigation.

**Researching Myself**

As I mentioned earlier, it is my intention to take part in the research in the capacity of a participant. In fulfilling the dual role of researcher and participant there are a number of issues to consider. I will explore some of these issues and explain why I have chosen to situate myself as a participant, and will outline my approach to the mechanics of self study.

"...The only permissible paint colours shall be black, white or gray despite the recently avail - ability of certain alternatives..."

I have already discussed the importance of situating the self in qualitative research, and the researchers need to remain vigilant about his/her subjectivity at every stage as the inquiry progresses. Situating myself as a participant in the study takes this commitment a step further; it will enable me to be reflective in both roles—researcher and participant. I am not, however, interested in using my own experience as the only referent in the inquiry. Instead, I am interested in where my own experience beginning a horticultural therapy program in an agency setting fits with those who are doing similar work. While my research will have a heuristic quality, methodologically it is not a heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). For the purposes of this inquiry, life history is a more appropriate methodological fit.

I hope that my professional practice experience viewed from a life history perspective will be useful to me and to others engaged in professional development. For myself, participation in the study will extend the personal / profes-

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sional development work I already do. Like Cole and Knowles, I “see this kind of work—the interpretation of practice within the context of one’s life—as an ongoing autobiographical project” (Cole & Knowles, 1994, p. 141).

The placement of my self study with reference to the other participant interviews will have a number of ramifications, the most important of which I believe has to do with my experience as a participant. While I have not resolved the issue of where to fit myself in to the interview schedule, it is my inclination at this point to do my self study first. This will allow me to draw on my experience as a participant when I approach the other interviews. I can’t help but think that the experience will make me a more sensitive interviewer; further, it will likely alert me to issues concerning mechanics, procedure and content. As Hunt (1987) suggests, becoming a participant in your own research project is a very valuable source of feedback for tuning in to whatever methods are used (p. 118). Cole’s (1994) experience confirms that doing life history is different in theory than in practice.

I am looking forward to the experience of being the research “other” for a number of reasons (Cole, 1994). First and foremost I believe that it will lend an authenticity to my work throughout the project, particularly with the participants, that I don’t believe can be achieved any other way (Cole, 1994). Second, I expect that engaging in the research at an experiential level will be humbling: through the process of self study I will be on the ground with the other participants. And finally, having read so much about research in theory, I too want to put myself into practice and actually see what it feels like to “be the researched” (Cole, 1994, p.5).

I am not naive to the complex ethical and political issues associated with self study. Cole and Knowles (1995) ask a very useful series of questions that pertain to these issues that I intend to remain mindful of throughout the process. In particular, I must ask myself “how will participation in this kind of
inquiry be viewed by others in the university community?" (Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 146). After all, I will be submitting my self study as part of my doctoral dissertation to an institution that I hope will at some point, be granting me a degree. Further, what about myself do I feel comfortable about sharing, and with whom? This list must include my supervisor and committee, and the academic community in general. (McIntyre, 1996, pp. 18-27)

"...the only permissible paint colours shall be black, white or gray despite the recent availability of certain alternatives..."

I can hear the foreword and backward movement characteristic of most identity development processes in this text. For example, in one moment I am referring to the "mechanics of accessing and apprehending knowledge", and in the next I am talking about "the sensuous knowing of phenomenon". I seem at once to be doing one thing, while reaching for another.

While aspects of my original methodological framework are still useful and good, and reflect the work that I actually did, the underlying metaphor guiding the methodology altered fundamentally during the research process. Angela Packwood and Pat Sikes (1996) point out that "the ideologies that shape and frame the research are reflected in the metaphors we use to conceptualize the process" (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 336). That these "underlying metaphors are not always evident in the final product", or that we fail to abandon them when they are no longer serving our research process, Packwood and Sikes attribute to the vulnerability of the researcher Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 336).

Approaching my methodological framework as a postmodern text allows me to deconstruct it. My identity development as a researcher is apparent in my ability to satirize myself. Simply put, it shows that I have learned something. I have gained experience and perspective. From my new vantage point I can look back and laugh.
While I see this capacity and the growth it reflects as a fundamentally good thing, there are risks associated with laying it bare. Taught to put our best foot foreword:

It takes a lot of courage to decide that we do want to change the accepted metaphor of *Research as Recipe* to one that is personally as well as professionally meaningful. This is because there is considerable pressure to engage in positive presentation of self to the potential audience as a proper, scientific researcher. The desire to change does depend, of course, on there being an alternative (or alternatives) to the dominant positivistic research ideology. But adopting an alternative can leave us in a very vulnerable position—both personally and professionally. The underlying question we have to answer through our texts is: what do we most trust as the arbiter of what is right and what is self-reflective knowledge, practical reasoning, or traditional authority? (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 336)

Alternatives to the traditional life history methodological framework I had mapped out made themselves available to me in a variety of ways. The most significant of these, as I describe in chapter one, were relational. Through colourful connections with particular people, I started to explore creative alternatives. The process of finding Felicity led me to the first fork in the road.
Participant Selection:
Finding Felicity

Originally my research was focused on the development of innovative practice, in particular horticultural therapy, within institutional or agency settings. Intending to focus on program development from the vantage point of the innovative practitioner, I looked for participants whose horticultural therapy work was carried out within one such setting. For purposes of this study I did not turn my attention to counselling practitioners who use horticultural therapy as part of their private practice. Further, since part of my interest centred on the practitioner’s experience of developing innovative practice within the setting, I did not pursue potential participants who were hired to work in already established, recognized programs. I found leads about practitioners who might fit these criteria through connections I had already established in each of the counselling and community gardening networks.

Initially I intended to have either two or three practitioners participate in the study, myself included. I expected that my participants would have been trained or educated in counselling, and would have worked in a variety of recognized treatment modalities including horticultural therapy. I imagined that my participants would think of themselves, or call themselves experienced counselling practitioners. In other words, they might say: “I’m a therapist. I currently work in the area of horticultural therapy”; or, “I describe my practice as horticultural therapy”. I did not intend to pursue potential participants practicing horticultural therapy who were originally trained as horticulturalists.

At the conceptual stage of the inquiry, I saw this distinction in practitioner orientation as a key issue. I was aware of several practitioners with backgrounds in horti-
culture, but because they didn’t have any formal training or education in counselling psychology, I didn’t think that they were suitable for my study. I had made one such contact that I was eager to engage as a participant, but I saw her background in horticulture as a stumbling block. As a counselling student doing my dissertation, it seemed critical to locate participants who came to the practice of horticultural therapy with a background similar to my own. Other experienced counselling practitioners, I thought, could best broaden my own understanding about the development of innovative practice.

But I couldn’t seem to let go of that one potential participant and move on. I started to question myself more carefully. I was dying to work with her, so what was stopping me from inviting her to participate in the inquiry? Why exactly was I not considering participants with different educational backgrounds? Was it simply because at the time of proposal writing I thought that that was the right thing to do?

In the unspoken spaces of time spent with this potential participant I eventually came to see that I was limiting myself with my own perspective, and unnecessarily constraining the scope of the inquiry. In retrospect I see the set of assumptions that was guiding my thinking as rather arrogant. I seemed blinded by academic blinkers, unable to honor the legitimacy of a different educational path. I so admired this person’s work as a horticultural therapist, and I found her to be a fascinating and engaging human being, but I had become all caught up in a concern that her “profession” wasn’t counselling. In my emphasis on considering “the professional in context” I had become unnecessarily narrow, and even biased, in my way of thinking about what it means to be a professional. Paradoxically my inquiry was getting stuck because this practitioner had done exactly what I was studying: by innovating a new practice she had reinvented her professional identity. Initially I had trouble seeing this individual’s current practice as a manifestation of personal and professional development. When I did, the scope of the inquiry both opened up and focused. Emerging from my participant selection process, I started to feel excited by the compare and contrast potential of working
with a participant from a different background.

Looking at Felicity, beginning to actually see who she is, and wanting to see more, piqued my curiosity as a researcher in new ways. Inspired by the creativity Felicity seemed able to infuse in the most everyday of actions, I began imagining possibilities. Seeing her creativity in context, and actually experiencing her institutional non-conformity in action, encouraged me to deviate from the straight methodological path I had mapped out. Engaging with Felicity and simply being myself, instead of being my idea of who a researcher is, helped me to relax. Infusing the process with authenticity and enlivening my research with the everyday aesthetic I bring to my relationships, seemed like a good place to start.
Portraiture and Process

Development of an artful representation is dependent on the soundness and complexity, perhaps even the ‘messiness’, of all the preceding phases of the inquiry and relies as much upon the imagination of the researcher as it does on the formal and obvious connections between contexts and lives. Artful representations often emerge from intuitive responses to complex and messy interpretations. In actions leading up to such representations we make analytical decisions which most strongly resonate with the data—and, therefore, the life or lives—give the intersection of the life or lives with our own. Being the ‘instrument of understanding’ our interpretations and eventual representations of lives will reveal some of the ‘essential truths’ of a participant’s life and some of the impermeable elements of our own life. Life history researching is, at its most fundamental, a complex interaction between the lives of the researched and the researcher. (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000)

Doing research with Felicity was a pleasure. I found myself looking forward to spending time together: to seeing what project she was up to next, to hearing about her latest run in with the Baycrest administration, to admiring her latest pair of earrings. The majority of our meetings took place in the bright, moist environment of the greenhouse at Baycrest Centre, surrounded by lush plants and flowers, with the audible accompaniment of the greenhouse birds in the background. (At times the sound of the birds actually overwhelmed the sound of our voices on the tape). One of Felicity’s cats would lie sprawled across the table between us, amidst my tape recorder and papers.

Felicity always hosted me during those meetings: she offered me coffee or tea, she set out water, she saved me some fruit from her lunch, or some cookies leftover from the morning program, or mid sentence, she would leap up from her chair to pull out a chocolate bar that a client had brought in. Whenever I arrived (and we met more than ten times over two years in all of the four seasons), Felicity had something she couldn’t wait to show me and tell me about. I could easily imagine being a client in the Baycrest community planning my day around a visit to Felicity. I would not write,
"flower pressing program—2:00 p.m. Baycrest greenhouse", on my calendar, I would write, “Felicity—2:00 p.m.”. Felicity is a highly trained, experienced professional. Ultimately, however, I believe that it is the person in context that makes the program.

Felicity chose to read the "portrait" I rendered with me sitting there beside her. Arriving for that meeting I was nervous. The sense of rightness I felt about the various representational forms I had chosen had evaporated. Suddenly I felt worried: about the points of emphasis I had selected, about the poetic text, about the aspects of Felicity’s story I had fictionalized. I expected to engage in a process of reinterpretation with her that would lead to modifications of the text that I was presenting, but what if she did not like the form or feeling of what I had produced? Simply put, what if she did not like my art?

In my research proposal I had made a methodological commitment to an interpretive process that involved intersubjective meaning making at every stage of the research process. At the same time, I was clear from the outset that I had ultimate responsibility for the project. It was up to me to transform the materials Felicity and I had produced together into a form that would fit into the final report. In other words, while we set the scene collaboratively, the act of rendering, or painting the portrait was a process that I engaged in alone. Further, while Felicity had already seen sketches, the life sized, full colour portrait that I pulled out of my bag that day was a far cry from the black and white line drawings she had seen along the way.

I also thought the portrait might come as a surprise to Felicity because of the changes that I had gone through as a researcher over the course of the project. While we had discussed my growing interest in arts informed research, my research proposal, which I had provided to Felicity as a guide to our work together, only hinted at the possibility of alternative representational forms.

Regardless, Felicity did not seem at all phased or even surprised, by the alternative representational forms I had elected to explore. Perhaps she was able to read me better than I could read myself, or maybe her own expectations from the outset were of
a different type of research “product”.

In retrospect, I am surprised that I did not in some way anticipate the size of Felicity’s response. (As I have described she has a broad emotional range and is a highly expressive person). I realize now that I was too wrapped up in my own anxiety about the forms that I had created to fully take into account who she is and how she might respond.

Felicity laughed and cried all the way through that reading. Really laughed: holding her stomach and leaning back in her chair and roaring: “This is hilarious! I’m hilarious!” Followed by full-fledged tears requiring Kleenex: “I had sort of forgotten. You picked up all the neat stuff. This is my life? Somehow this [the “portrait”] brings out the emotional parts”. Felicity continued to express how moved she felt by the text. She experienced both the “Aha!” of self-recognition, and the curiosity of seeing herself through my eyes. Further, in seeing her life experiences storied in poetry and prose, there seemed to Felicity to be more to her life than she imagined. Not only did she experience the resonance of the text ringing true; she felt that it provided “thought provoking” openings for herself and for others; about her own life history, about the way she is in the world today, “about people and power and plants and why things are the way they are”. I felt moved and flattered by her response. She did not want to change one word. Instead she said: “I can keep this? I’m going to send it to my mother. She’ll just love it. I’m going to send it to my mother right now”.

Felicity received her portrait like she would a surprise gift: she was touched and excited and flattered. Her positive response meant a lot to me for a couple of reasons: first and foremost, I saw my relationship with Felicity as a very important meaning making site, so that her ability to “read” the portrait I had rendered and experience resonance with it made me feel like my creative experiment had “worked”. I had not gone off on a tangent and left her behind. For Felicity, the representational forms that I had chosen brought life to the material she and I had negotiated. Instead of obscuring Felicity’s self reflection, I had provided her with a special sort of mirror in which she could see a deeper vision of herself. I felt reassured about the integrity of my craftsmanship.
Secondly, at that stage of the research process I was experiencing some epistemological uncertainty. I *did* feel a little ungrounded, or out on a limb, (feelings that of course often accompany risk taking). In order to reaffirm my belief in the process, I needed some confirmation that I was at least on the right track with the portrait I had drafted. Felicity, being of course the best possible touchstone, was where I went for a reality check first. Later I would look for external feedback; at that point I felt reassured that the intersubjective meaning making process in which we had so successfully been engaged, had not been derailed by my representational efforts.

My experience of presenting Felicity with my research product emphasized once again that doing arts informed research is a risky business. I like to think that what I produced resonated for Felicity because it is grounded in data that were gathered through time spent in a meaningful relationship. I was able to “capture” Felicity and her resonance because I was not taking a series of candid snapshots out of context. I was sufficiently grounded in her context and her way of being in the world that I could presume to engage in the “art of portraiture”, and “get it right” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997).

Felicity treated what I had produced as art: tampering with a word here, or a phrase there, was as out of the question as it would have been to adjust the shading in an oil portrait. We had already negotiated plenty through dialogue during the “data collection” processes of our time spent together. When I “fed back” transcribed material after an interview, Felicity corrected me, filled in blanks that were missing, or changed the emphasis in a particular story.

Measor and Sikes regard this process, which they call “respondent validation”, as “the best ethical safeguard” (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p. 219). Cole (1994) also underlines the importance of the participant engaging with the printed account of the interview so that he/she can “check accuracy of the data” (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p. 219). Moreover, Cole advises that the researcher take pains to ensure that the research relationship is developed in such a way that the participant feels that there is a place to
take issue with a printed account (Cole, 1994). Cole's (1994) experience in this area is useful. As “the researched”, “she found it important ... to be reminded of [her] authority over the text” (Cole, 1994, p. 15). While Felicity exercised her authority in the research process, she stepped back from the research product, in order to fully acknowledge my work. This was not a case of the researcher is always right, but rather of respect in relationship.

But is it possible in arts informed research to get a portrait really wrong? What if Felicity had read through the material and said: “No, this is not it. This is not me at all.” Or further, “I don’t like the way that you have portrayed me and my life”. The painter doesn’t usually ask the model what she might like to change on the canvas; as an arts informed life history researcher, on the other hand, I had to ask that question both to remain true to the collaborative nature of the research process and to validate my craftsmanship.
Trustworthiness, Usefulness and Communicability

In his (1995) paper entitled “The social construction of validity”, Steiner Kvale deconstructs the positivist conception of validity and sets in its place a postmodern approach to this issue where craftsmanship, communicability and pragmatic value are used to evaluate validity in research (Kvale, 1995, p. 19). I have found Kvale’s to be a very well thought out and useful analysis and will therefore draw on his ideas. While I believe that the research process and its product are inextricably linked and overlapping, like Lincoln and Guba (1990), I have attempted, for purposes of presentation, to distinguish between criteria that can be used in judging research process (which I see as trustworthiness), and criteria that can be used to assess its product (which I see as usefulness, communicability and trustworthiness).

As Kvale suggests, “the issue of what is valid knowledge of the social world involves the philosophical question of what is truth”(Kvale, 1995, p. 23). Where we believe truth to be located is also a relevant part of this question. In the modernist or positivist framework, claims about knowledge are based on the assumption that there is an objectively identifiable world where truth exists and can be located. The concept of validity extends from this assumption as the correspondence of knowledge with truth. “In postmodern philosophy”, on the other hand, “the concept of an objective reality to validate knowledge against has been discarded”(Kvale, 1995, p. 19). “In a postmodern conception, the understanding of knowledge as a map of an objective reality, and validity as the correspondence of the map with the reality mapped, is replaced by the social and linguistic construction of a perspectival reality where knowledge is validated through practice”(Kvale, 1995, p. 19). When knowledge is socially constructed, so too is validity (Kvale, 1995). There is no one identifiable, locatable truth, but ever
many more points of view about any phenomenon.

What emerges through this comparison between modernist and post modernist epistemology is “the pervasive dichotomy of objectivism and relativism in Western thought” (Kvale, 1995, p 23). My own views accord with Kvale’s “moderate postmodernism”, where “the possibility of specific local, personal, and community forms of truth, with a focus on daily life and local narrative”, are emphasized (Kvale, 1995, p. 21). In this epistemology seeking absolute conclusions or universal truths is redundant.

Further, when knowledge is validated through practice, the practitioner must be accorded a new status as a container of knowledge. The “experienced knowledge” of practitioners should then become the relevant truth that social science researchers seek. As a researcher/practitioner my way of accessing this knowledge flows from my epistemology: I believe that new knowledge about the phenomenon that is the focus of my inquiry is generated through my encounter with other experienced practitioners. I ascribe to a "dialogue conception of truth" where meaning is made intersubjectively by those who have experience with the phenomenon (Kvale, 1995, p. 23).

**Trustworthiness**

The criteria that I use to evaluate the trustworthiness of my research are based on epistemological foundations. How we constitute something as trustworthy must flow from our conceptions about truth. When meaning is made intersubjectively, and truth is tied to context through individuals and communities, trustworthiness in research must first and foremost be evaluated with the help of the individuals and communities that it is about.

With respect to the final product, I use what Lincoln and Guba call “resonance criteria” to examine my work (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). This requires an assessment of the “degree of fit, overlap, or reinforcement between the case study report as written, and the basic belief system undergirding that alternative paradigm which the inquirer
has chosen to follow” (Lincoln & Guba, 1990; p, 54). Since much of the research data was generated or produced with Felicity, she played a particularly important role in the ongoing evaluation of the trustworthiness of the data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe this process as “member checking”, and “indicate that it contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the report” (Seidman, 1991, p. 75).

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest a number of other factors that contribute to research trustworthiness. First, the level of commitment of the researcher as measured by time spent on the job should be considered. I agree that:

Time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data. Time at your research site, time spent interviewing, time to build sound relationships with respondents—all contribute to trustworthy data. When a large amount of time is spent with your others, they less readily feign or feel the need to do so, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell.

(Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 146)

Measor (1985) also considers time spent as an indicator of research trustworthiness. She justifies her intuition that data are valid by explaining that “I felt that after spending eighteen months with a group of pupils, I did have a sense of what was accurate” (Measor, 1985, p. 74).

Acknowledging the fact that the researcher has intuitions about trustworthiness, and that these feelings have legitimacy, is also an important point that is related to valuing the researcher’s subjectivity. Continued mindfulness and reflexivity of my own subjectivity also contributes to the trustworthiness of my research. I remained self-reflexive throughout the research process in using my own reactions, and the reactions of those associated with my work, as opportunities for meaning making. As Measor suggests, “it may be that we have to come to terms with the intuitive, subjective elements in our work, because the work is with people” (Measor, 1985, p. 74).

Another aspect of trustworthiness that Glesne and Peshkin raise concerns the issue of research limitations. Outlining and acknowledging from the outset the area
that the research intends to consider, and what it will leave out is consistent with post-modern epistemology. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest, "limitations are consistent with the always partial state of your knowing in social research, and elucidating them helps readers to know how they should read and interpret your work" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 147). The researcher, therefore, must continually check in with his/her purpose in order to remain responsible and accountable for the direction the research takes. If vigilance to purpose and theoretical orientation is maintained throughout, the work should be internally consistent. It will then be trustworthy in both its breadth, and in its limitations. As Kvale (1995) suggests, "validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (Kvale, 1995, p. 27).

In post modern epistemology attention to the details of craftsmanship in research "becomes pivotal with a dismissal of an objective reality against which knowledge is to be measured" (Kvale, 1995, p. 27).

**Usefulness**

It is my hope that practitioners working in institutional contexts, particularly health care practitioners and students of counselling might read my research project and make connections with their own lives and work. I am not suggesting that the research findings should be "generalizable" or "transferable" in the traditional sense, instead I believe that "research can only function as a heuristic; it can suggest possibilities but never dictate action" (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 182). As Eisner (1991) suggests, "what may be said to occur in conducting research is the creation of resources that others can use to think about the situations in which they are interested" (p. 210). More particularly, I hope that the stories of practitioners who have done new and different things will say something to those working in the field about the possibilities that exist in the area of applied practice. Like Gergen (1992), I see "the construction of new worlds as one
potential of a postmodern psychology" (Kvale, 1995, p. 35). By providing a view into the world of those whom have themselves created new worlds, I hope to make accessible the concept of change within practice. Even grander is the possibility that institutional change will be glimpsed by the reader (and imagined in your own working environment).

Further, to me those involved in innovative practice are particularly suited (and entitled) to produce "generative" theory (Kvale, 1995, p. 35). As Kvale explains, "a "generative" theory is designed to unseat conventional thought and thereby to open new alternatives for thought and action. Rather than only to map what is, or to predict future cultural trends, research becomes a means of transforming culture" (Kvale, 1995, p. 35). To extend Kvale's metaphor, my research report could ideally serve as a guide, not only of what is, but also of what may be.

For the general reader resonance could be experienced in any of these areas. In an article about generalizability in social science research, Robert Donmoyer raises the issue of "the context of research utilization" (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 186). He suggests that the general reader can benefit from social science research that on the surface has nothing to do with the reader's experience, because "stories can often serve as a half-way house between tacit personal knowledge and formal propositional thought" (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 186). Research that is inspiring and motivating, are in my estimation, useful to all those involved: reader, participants, and participant/researcher.

**Communicability: Representation and Presentation**

Issues surrounding representation have interested and concerned me in my work as a counsellor since I began working in the field. It was the conviction that people cannot, and should not always be asked to represent their experience with words that initially motivated me to lead my clients outdoors and into the garden. I also feel
strongly that it is unnatural (and even at times unhealthy) to ask counsellors to contain the words, and the emotions of clients within the confines of verbal exchange in an office. As Elliot Eisner articulated in his 1993 AERA Annual Meeting Presidential Address, I ascribe to "the notion that humans have the capacity to formulate different kinds of understanding and that these understandings are intimately related to the forms of representation they encounter or employ and the way in which these forms are treated" (Eisner, 1993, p. 9). I feel challenged by the question: "what would an entirely new array of presentational forms for research look like?" (Eisner, 1993, p. 10).

The garden encourages clients to use something concrete and real (dirt, plants, and stones) to represent their experience. My work combining horticulture with therapy suggests that when both the form and the forum of representation is changed, a different range of possibilities of what might be communicated emerges. Clients begin to see and use the garden as text; like language the garden can be representational yet it is also real. As a result, not only is the quality of communication changed, but the very nature of the exchange between counsellor and client is fundamentally altered. Like Eisner, for me "questions about how such forms of understanding are secured and the kinds of meanings they make possible is a core theoretical as well as practical problem" (Eisner, 1993, p. 9).

Since the very limitations of the representational power of words motivated me to explore different forms of representation in counselling, it is complementary to the purpose of the research project to explore non-traditional methods of representing the data collected. In remaining true to the epistemological underpinnings of my counselling practice, it is consistent that the final form of my report would look different. In other words, the presentational form of my research reflects the principles that motivated the practice that led to the research.

While spending time together collecting data I encouraged Felicity to represent her experience in non-traditional ways. Since she regularly invites her clients to use non-traditional modes of expression (plants and earth), I hoped that my invitations to
follow suit with different forms of representation in the research process would be well-
come. This worked well with respect to metaphor, plants and the common ground of
our love for the natural world. During the data collection phase of the research Felicity
and I spent a lot of productive tactile time together. This promoted dialogue that was
textured and multidimensional.

It did not work well with respect to other forms of communication and repre-
sentation, mostly because I didn’t have the skills or experience to provide Felicity with
direction. For example, if I were a painter I would have been comfortable engaging in
that form of art making together, thereby providing an opening for Felicity to represent
some aspect of her experience through a painting. But I’m not a painter, and I felt shy.
As Eisner suggests: “representation requires the skills needed to treat a material so that
it functions as a medium, something that mediates content.”(Eisner, 1993, p. 9). Lincoln
and Guba (1990) on the other hand, cite courage as an aspect of good craftsmanship.
They suggest that “the construction [of the research project] should be extended
beyond safe limits. It should display a certain element of risk taking...of invitation to
criticism”(Lincoln & Guba, 1990, p. 56).

While I believe that it is important that the multidimensional nature of human
experience be reflected in my work, and that my work demonstrate courage, I also
want it to be accessible and comprehensible (Kvale, 1995). Paradoxical as it may sound;
representational risk taking needs to occur within reasonable limits. Because I would-
’t know how or where to begin to mediate content through painting, the attempt to
represent my research using this medium would extend risk taking into the realm of
foolishness. While I am glad, as Eisner says, that “the climate for exploring new forms
of research is more generous today”, it is still not appropriate to be complacent about
how and what people might understand (Eisner, 1993, p. 9). As Eisner describes, “if
students do not possess the skills they need...the content they wish to represent is sim-
ply not likely to emerge. (Eisner, 1993, p. 9). I hope that my skills with the alternative
media that I have chosen are sufficiently developed such that meaning can emerge.
Researcher Identity and Arts Informed Research

I worry very much about defining qualitative research as art because I don't want access [to the research] to become more elitist, classist. If aesthetic literacy or advanced aesthetic sensibility were prerequisite to practice within the paradigm, entrée could become even more elite [than it is now]. Exclusivity creates boundaries that I am opposed to establishing or crossing... It seems to me that research should have something in common with furniture making—[that which is produced] should be highly useful. Shouldn't its value come more from its usefulness rather than from its "artfulness"? Can its artfulness increase its usefulness? (Finley & Knowles, 1995, p.139)

Discussions likening qualitative research practices to art making have encouraged explorations into alternative methods of research and representation (Eisner, 1991; Finley & Knowles, 1995; Richardson, 1992). Researchers exploring alternative methodologies and forms of representation are also beginning to locate themselves with respect to genre, and further, with respect to discipline. The requirement that we engage in "self-conscious method" has led to discussions where researchers attempt to name or identify themselves with respect to their work (Kilbourn, 1999). These types of locatedness are rooted in the past accomplishments and associations of the researcher.

Finley and Knowles, for example, in their (1995) article "Researcher as Artist/Artist as Researcher" discuss their identities as artists. Self-defining as artists they each look for ways to bring those ways of knowing and of being to their work as researchers. That they are artists first, and have always thought of themselves as such is clear. When they do research that has an artful quality, making the shift to calling themselves artist-researchers feels comfortable. In fact it feels more natural than doing more conventional research because it allows them to express more completely who they are. Research that has an artful quality allows artists to utilize and re-integrate parts of themselves usually set aside while doing more traditional forms of research. Variations in medium or mode of expression will differ from project to project, who
they are as artists stays the same:

In discourse about art, both the sculptor and the painter are given the title "artist", and no one has any real difficulty allowing that sometimes a sculptor paints rather than sculpts, choosing to work in a different medium. One does not anticipate hearing the sculptor say that their painterly self, rather than their sculptor self, created that piece of artwork. The description of artist as researcher is a function of medium; functionally, what artist-researchers do is analogous to what artists do. (Finley & Knowles, 1995, p.135)

The issue of researcher identity is different for those of us who, before engaging in arts informed inquiry, did not identify ourselves as artists. Perhaps we did artful things: we grew gardens, we made pastries, or we wrote stories—but we didn’t call ourselves artists. Inspired to put form to feeling, artful actions, for example the discussion Felicity facilitated about the feeling of a pussywillow, spring from the colour that comes from within. Actions or processes such as these that ring true with self expression (and encourage self expression in others), resonate with an artful quality. They do not, however, usually cause us to label who we are and what we do as artist and art. While artful ways of being in the world that have to do with the commonplace, with everyday relationships and pussywillows, is who we are, it is not necessarily how we self define.

What happens then, when we bring these ways of being in the world to bear on our ways of being as researchers? If our attention to methodological process is carried out in an artful fashion, how should we self define? Do we ourselves become artists by virtue of our engagement with the methods of arts informed research? Or do we need to produce research representations that are ‘artistic’ to call ourselves artists? Is it a matter of quality, do these alternative representations need to display talent to be considered "good"? Or, will we turn to other measures such as trustworthiness and craftsmanship in a consideration of their rigor? Moreover, why is this discussion about who we are, and what we are doing, important?
For me a consideration of these questions is important and useful because they are tied to issues of accessibility. Artists and art can be intimidating to those of us who do not self define as artists. Most of us, when we think about artists and art think about great artists and great pieces of art. Inspiring and daunting, they are larger than life. Like Bill in Pleasantville, we see Renoir, Monet and Picasso, and think “Where am I going to see colours like that?”

But if we, like Bill, allow ourselves to think about art as something that is in here, rather than something that is out there, if we allow ourselves to connect with our passion, that colour, it will express itself in artful ways. The choice of medium, for example a discussion about the feeling of a pussywillow, may be non-traditional. It might not be considered, like painting or sculpting, to be one of ‘the arts’. I would argue, however, that the eye that sees the potential in that pussywillow is artful.

Now you might be feeling concerned about where I am going with this. A discussion about the feel of a pussywillow—and art? What next? Is she going to make the claim that we are all artists? In her postmodern fascination with deconstruction and identity, is she getting lost in “what can be described as a cycle of eternal relativity”, where, “it just goes on and on until it means anything and everything” (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 335) (Hoban, 1976, p. 68 in Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 336)?

Let me put you at ease. I’m not asking you to start calling yourself an artist. I am suggesting, though, that as researchers we are all, each and every one of us, regardless of our relationship to the arts, capable of infusing our work with artful qualities. Utilizing parts of ourselves that were perhaps previously unexplored or unnamed, connecting with our passion, and imagining possibilities—we can all do it. This belief, that we all have the potential to be artist-researchers, is tied to my belief that art exists in the everyday, in ways of being, and processes and relationships between people. Like Gary Knowles suggests in the quotation cited above, I do not believe that an “aesthetic literacy or advanced aesthetic sensibility...[is] prerequisite to practice within the paradigm” (Finley & Knowles, 1995, p. 139).
In my way of thinking it is not useful to distinguish between the secular and the sacred with respect to the everyday and art, because the purpose of bringing the two together is fundamentally good. It is done in the service of usefulness. In my opinion, the world is a better place when artful ways of being, like facilitating a discussion about the feel of pussywillow, are acknowledged as valuable in the context of care. So too in research, seeing the artful potential in the everyday, such as a seed packet that arrives with a fundraising letter in the mail, or a popular culture film like "Pleasantville", extends our ways of being researchers and of doing research. Making ourselves available to the artful qualities of the ordinary is an important first step in making our research accessible.

But messing around with boundaries is an ideological undertaking. While I believe that extending our individual boundaries, and the boundaries of our undertakings brings greater perspective to our lives and work, and is therefore a useful endeavor, there will be those who will disagree with this way of thinking. They will work to maintain the boundaries between art and life (or the dichotomy between art and science, or objectivity and subjectivity).

In my opinion, keeping the art out of research, or the artfulness out of the researcher, is politically motivated. In a world where research is done by scientists and art is done by artists, we keep the research clean and the researcher neat and tidy. While I believe cross disciplinary work has enormous potential in its ability to bring the perspective of other points of view to bear on issues of mutual concern, such as health and education, there will be those who will say research is meant to inform, and art is meant to entertain.

That artists incorporate various forms of research into their art is not news. The investigation of place that informed E. Annie Proulx's writing of *The Shipping News*, the perspective that research of archival material at the Royal Geographical Society in London brought to Michael Ondaatje's writing of *The English Patient*, or Shyam Selvadurai's research into early feminism in Sri Lanka, portrayed through the character
of Annalukshmi in his novel *Cinnamon Gardens*, these are all examples of research informing art. Fiction based on fact helps it to ring true. It speaks of the power of art as a medium in the production of knowledge.

Examples of research in education using arts informed methodologies, on the other hand, are only more recently making themselves known (see p. 20 for citations and a discussion of the varied purposes of this work). That arts informed processes have always been an implicit part of some researcher’s practice is arguable, however, talking about, and naming research as a creative endeavor is relatively new (Banks & Banks, 1998). Bored by “researcher neutrality”, and fed up with the distance required to construct “author-evacuated” texts, researchers are making explicit the need to infuse both their research processes and products with feeling and creativity (Behar, 1996, p. 7). Turning to the fine arts—to music, dance, literature and painting, and to more artful ways of constructing and carrying out research relationships and processes, researchers are increasingly putting form to feeling.

Seen from another point of view, some researchers in the social sciences who have begun to incorporate artistry into their work have concerns about science appropriating art. For example Ross Gray, a health science researcher who sees “drama as a pathway to representing research that makes a difference”, also cautions researchers against making an “imperialist expansion” into the arts (Gray, May 1, 2000). He suggests that researchers in the social sciences interested in arts informed representations consult with “experts” in the expressive arts (Gray, May 1, 2000).

In my opinion, researchers should look to the artfulness in their own lives and work before turning to “the experts” in any given field, the arts included. I agree that consultation is a good idea when it is intended to add depth and breadth to the representation, and honor the efforts of those with more experience working with the medium or form. I do not, however, believe that it is necessary or productive to keep the knowledge (or turf) between social science and the arts separate. But we must be respectful when we walk on grass that has been carefully fertilized and maintained by
a different community. As Packwood and Sikes point out “social science research is an ideological undertaking. That is, it reflects a particular world-view, opinions, and attitudes” (Packwood & Sikes, 1996, p. 336).

For myself, not having previously thought of myself as an artist frees me up, not only to explore new forms of research and representation, but also to make mistakes. For example, while I have tried very hard to write portraits that are fluid and full of feeling, and while I have tried very hard to make my process pieces engaging and interesting—artful even, I have not approached these tasks as a poet or short story writer. I am a researcher. I never expected my portraits to stand alone as art. Portraits yes, but they don’t stand alone as art, any more than I stand before you as artist. They are written as representations of research and they are embedded in a larger document in which I make the method of their creation self-conscious (Kilbourn, 1999).

I believe self-conscious method to be one of the hallmarks of rigor in qualitative research. Choosing to render my research artfully does not free me from the responsibility of fulfilling that task. To the contrary, I believe that I am obligated to explain why I am committed to incorporating artistry into my work as a scholar. Further, since it is the intentional quality of the portraits that distinguishes them as different from poetry or literature, I am also required to explicate the ways in which they were crafted as representations of research.

Now if someone says: “Oh what powerful images, what a moving story”, it will be pleasant. But I don’t hang my hat on a personal/professional identity as a story-writer. In fact if I identified myself as an artist I might be more willing to allow my stories, images or poetry, to stand-alone. But as things stand today, I identify myself as a researcher, and self-conscious method is part of my commitment to my craft.

Within the arts informed research community there are those who believe that self-conscious method hinders artistic expression. Sara Lawrence Lightfoot discusses
this way of thinking while considering why two artists, a sculptor and a printmaker, chose not to participate in her study:

so I do not take the two artists’ reluctance as an expression as a lack of facility with "the word". But I suspect that in some way they fear the incisiveness and specificity of language. The visual images they create allow for much more diffusion and interpretation. I also suspect that these artists may be afraid that too much talk, too much inquiry may steal away the magic and mystery of their work. In the creative act there is a passion that is irrational and inchoate. It emerges organically, mysteriously. In describing it in words, in tracing the connections between the work and the artist, an artist may risk distorting the creative process. In refusing to expose their life stories, these artists may have been trying to protect not only their privacy but their creativity.

(Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994, p. 609)

Others, as Lawrence-Lightfoot describes, "...the protagonists in this book [her research participants], have just the opposite reaction; they see storytelling as a creative medium. It helps them trace the connections between past and present and allows them to shape a new future of their own design (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1994, p. 609).

Like the protagonists Lawrence-Lightfoot describes, I experience self-conscious method as a creative process akin to storytelling. Honing the craft of research, my work is that of a craftswoman or artisan. An artisan is “one who practices or cultivates an art” (Onions, 1956, p. 103). As a research craftswoman I am pursuing a “calling requiring special skill and knowing; strength, power, force... intellectual power [and] ability in planning or constructing; ingenuity [and] dexterity” (Onions, 1956, p. 415). My work is not artless, it is not “devoid of art or skill, unpracticed, ignorant; devoid of the fine or liberal arts [or] uncultured” (Onions, 1956, p. 103). In cultivating a craft with conscious artistry, my work can be: skilled, practical, informed, influenced by [the] liberal arts, cultured [and] graceful (Onions, 1956, p.103).

Further, it has the potential to be aesthetic, that is, to be “received by the sens-
es" (Onions, 1956, p. 30). By promoting the conditions of sensuous perception in research I attempt to bring beauty, that is "that quality or combination of qualities which affords keen pleasure to the senses...or which charms the intellectual or moral faculties" to my work (Onions, 1956, p. 160). As an artisan or craftswoman, when I cultivate an art (in this instance research), "I bestow labour and attention"...in order to promote growth; that is, "I devote [my] attention to practice" (Onions, 1956, p. 436)."

Cole and Knowles describe the process of arts informed research:

To craft a life is to engage in artmaking. The powers of imagination and metaphor are crucial ingredients for the process of sensitively crafting elements of a life—and the crucial meanings of it—for others to discover. How we do this is at once a beautiful mystery and a relational, rational act. To conceptualize representational possibilities is to be thoroughly alert to the various alternatives which resonate deep within our creative and epistemological frameworks. It is to be vigilant and responsive to the metaphorical cues that lives offer onlookers. It is to be informed by that life or lives and to be open to the most ‘sensible’ and resonant alternative (of many) with which to communicate about it. To embrace the potential of art to inform scholarship is to be open to the ways in which the literary, visual, or performing arts—and the inherent methods and processes of these various artists—can inform processes of scholarly inquiry.

(Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000)

In the task at hand, self-conscious method involves an exploration of how my two particular crafts, research and counselling practice, intertwine. Grounded in the art of the everyday, my work explores this common ground. Cultivating creativity, cultivating connection, while practicing my crafts, as an artisan or craftswoman, I am cultivating an art. This process definition is meant to illuminate what we (me the researcher and counselling artisan), and you, the research audience or research companions, are engaging in. I hope that it is useful.
Ethics and Politics

Ethical and political issues permeate qualitative research studies from the formulating of the area of inquiry, to the processes of interpretation and presentation. In conducting this research project, I have moral obligations to my participants, my school, my profession, and myself. In this final section of this chapter, I outline what I perceive these obligations to be, and will begin to explore some of the ethical and political issues with which I am concerned.

My decision to consider issues relating to ethics and politics together is based on Sieber’s (1993) discussion of the ethics and politics of sensitive research. I agree with Sieber that “being ethical and being political go hand in hand” (Sieber, 1993, p. 15). Ethics and politics are both about “the manifold of interests and feelings—one’s own and those of others—that must be recognized, understood, and taken into consideration to achieve optimally good results” (Sieber, 1993, p. 14). In constructivist approaches to research the formative quality of the process makes certainty of destination, and its attendant security, an impossibility.

As a result, while I have been thorough about the formal procedures pertaining to ethics such as informed consent, I believe that an overall sense of moral responsibility for the research is ultimately more important. With open-ended research, informed consent can only be of limited value, because, as I have already mentioned, it is impossible to predict all situations that might occur during the course of the project. As Merriam suggests, “the emergent design of a case study makes it difficult to assess, for example, potential harm to participants” (Merriam, 1988, p. 179).

Nevertheless, it is still important to try to anticipate possible risks to participants. A frank discussion in which the researcher shares his/her fears, and elicits the concerns of participants, is in my opinion, the best way of addressing ethical issues. I
organized this type of meeting, and from it, suggested that Felicity and I produce a contract about issues of mutual concern. I made clear the fact that I couldn’t anticipate everything, and would need her help in drawing attention to issues as they emerged. I expected to revisit the contract as the research process unfolded. I imagined that this process would allow for, and even perhaps encourage, the negotiation of issues during the research process. This approach, where solutions are generated through dialogue, is consistent with the epistemological underpinnings of the project.

The best laid theoretical plans; however, even plans that contain built in flexibility, are subject to change when they encounter the human beings involved in order to be put into practice. As I have described, Felicity is an informal, comfortable, casual person. She dismissed the ethical issues I raised with the wave of a hand. Laughingly, she told me that I would be the first to know if she had issue with any aspect of the research process. She found the idea of formal contracting, of writing down an agreement, even a flexible agreement that would be adapted in process, absurd. I admit that I felt a little absurd, given the level of rapport and fluidity in our relationship, even suggesting it. I’m glad I did though: with potentially sensitive ethical issues I would rather err on the side of earnestness than be accused of being too casual.

Confidentiality is another issue that I intended to carefully discuss with Felicity that she summed up in a quick moment. I raised the issue before the research began. “Confidentiality must be considered throughout the project”, I said, “from the data collection process, right through to representation and presentation of the data. Will you feel comfortable having others, such as colleagues and clients in your workplace know that you are engaging in research? Are there research protocols within the institution that I will need to observe? Or, does the administration really need to know that I am there? If they do, what effect will my presence have on how you, and how your program is perceived?”

In response to these questions Felicity told me that she would “take care of the administration”, which she felt involved having an informal conversation with her
director about the research project. (Later she told me that this conversation had taken place, and that as she had expected, her director was totally supportive). Felicity felt that we should “spread the news” about the research as much as possible; she felt that Baycrest clients would “get a kick” out of it, and that her colleagues should know that someone was taking notice of her work.

During my time at Baycrest, Felicity was always careful to introduce me to clients and to obtain consent about my observation and participation in programs. She carried these tasks out in such a way that clients felt thrilled to have me participate. Without being at all patronizing, she turned the client consent process into a kind of therapeutic intervention. As I have illustrated, Felicity always makes her clients feel important; what she conveyed with me there was that by being invited to engage in research, they were doubly special. For elderly people grappling with issues about meaning and purpose, these types of moments are not insignificant.

Research participants vary in their wishes about anonymity or visibility in final research reports. As Shulman (1990) found, some participants may request visibility for personal and political reasons. Others may request anonymity. I agree with Shulman that it is impossible to apply “general principles” to these situations because “these circumstances represent a serious tangle of competing ethical obligations complicated by political realities” (Shulman, 1990, pp. 14-15).

In taking my lead from Shulman, I intended to negotiate this issue carefully, remaining mindful of the need to maintain consistency with each stage of the process. For instance, if Felicity wanted me to use a pseudonym in the final report, then we would have to give careful consideration to other features of the data that might be identifying. This would include material from the interviews and descriptions of the context where she works. Finally, I intended to be up front and realistic with her about my ability to “hide” her; in the small, relatively new field of horticultural therapy, I am not sure how invisible Felicity could be.

Again, Felicity immediately knew her wishes, conveyed them to me directly,
and wrapped up the conversation in a few minutes. She felt that visibility is important in that it could draw attention to the work she has done in the field, specifically at Baycrest. As she put it, “I have nothing to hide” and “visibility... it could lead to bigger and better things!”

Another important ethical issue has to do with the personal/professional politics of disclosure. Since this research project is in part concerned with the experience of the creation of new forms of practice within existing structures, it seemed possible that Felicity’s story might contain controversial or sensitive material. Based on my own experience, I assumed that the changes that Felicity initiated at the institution where she works were met with varying degrees of resistance: both within the institution, and in her professional community. As a result, I expected that the project would involve an exploration of experiences concerning resistance to change, and how the acceptance of new practice developed within the working environment. The area of inquiry itself therefore seemed to have the potential to be highly sensitive, since Felicity is still employed in the same workplace. Further, her struggle for acceptance and recognition of the methods of practice and for program funding is ongoing.

While I assumed at the outset that Felicity is a risk taker to some degree (because of the type of work she is engaged in), I certainly didn’t want her participation in this research project to threaten her job security. It was my hope that by being completely up front in sharing these concerns with her that we would be able to address these issues to our mutual satisfaction. I thought that it would be particularly important for me to encourage her to set her own boundaries about what she chose, and chose not to say. I saw myself reiterating this point throughout the various stages of the research process.

Another ethical issue has to do with the purposes and ownership of the research. From the outset, I tried to be realistic and honest with Felicity about what I thought she might get out of the project. While I was clear that ultimate ownership of, and responsibility for the project rested with me, I saw a number of opportunities for
me to “give back” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In his (1995) discussion of the politics of research in education, Ivor Goodson suggests that with life history research “a ... viable trading point [between the researcher and the researched] can be established” (Goodson, 1995, p. 97). This trading point he describes as the “collaboration” that is engendered through the joint investigation of a life in context (Goodson, 1995). Goodson explains that when “collaboration takes place between parties that are differentially located in social structure”, “new understandings” can be born (Goodson, 1995, p. 97). The researcher’s “external” status helps the practitioner to better understand both his/her context and profession.

Another related benefit is what has been called research “reciprocity” (Edwards, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In considering this issue, Glesne and Peshkin wisely suggest that as researchers we not use “equivalency...in judging the adequacy of ... reciprocity” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). What we have to give our participants, and what they have to give to us, are inevitably different. Glesne and Peshkin suggest that “good listening with its attendant reinforcement, catharsis, and self-enlightenment are the major returns researchers can readily give to interviewees” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 123).
CHAPTER TEN

Method and Meaning
The psychology of practices body of knowledge consists of the aggregate of the professional community’s experiences of what has been beneficial to clients. The criterion for acceptability of a knowledge claim is the fruitfulness of its implementation. The critical terminology of the epistemology of practice has shifted from metaphors of correctness to those of utility (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 162).

Counselling as Renewal

In moments of clinical doubt I reach to my bookcase for my paperback volume of Oliver Sacks’ (1987) The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat and Other Clinical Tales. Smiling again at the title I turn the book over to look at the two inch by two-inch photo of the world famous clinical neurologist. As jolly as Santa Claus, his eyes are almost lost in the huge smile and unkempt gray beard that overwhelm his face. Glasses slightly askew and pushed up onto his forehead, he looks comfortable and friendly. Settling myself down into the well-worn overstuffed easy chair in his office I am thinking about where to begin. I flip through my files, giving my notes a cursory glance. Usually I start with the cases I find most difficult, the clients that I cannot seem to connect with, the situations that do not seem to make any sense. As if reading my mind, he settles down further into his chair, smiles again, and, fully attentive says, “Tell me a story”.

Disarmed by the gentleness of his tone, and by the childlike simplicity of the invitation, I suddenly feel grounded in a deeper sense of who I am. Reminded of the humanity of the individuals about whom I was about to speak, I recall his words:

Studies, yes; why stories, or cases? Hippocrates introduced the historical conception of disease, the idea that diseases have a course, from their first intimations to their climax or crisis, and thence to their happy or fatal resolution. Hippocrates thus introduced the case history, a description, or depiction, of the natural history of disease—precisely expressed

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by the old word “pathology”. Such histories are a form of natural history—but they tell us nothing about the individual and his history; they convey nothing of the person, and the experience of the person, as he faces, and struggles to survive, his disease. There is no “subject” in a narrow case history; modern case histories allude to the subject in a cursory phrase (‘a trisomic albino female of 21’), which could as well apply to a rat as a human being. To restore the human subject at the centre—the suffering, afflicted, fighting human subject—we must deepen a case history to a narrative or tale; only then do we have a ‘who’ as well as a ‘what’, a real person, a patient, in relation to disease—in relation to the physical. (Sacks, 1987, p. viii)

Reconsidering my approach my imagination soars with possibilities: instead of suffering, I see potential in the breadth offered by the idea of story.

I look forward to this hour and a half of clinical supervision like no other time in my workweek, so I want to make every moment count. I know that I will leave his office brimming with more questions than when I arrived. Hearing myself reframe each client’s “presenting problem” and “functioning” as aspects of a narrative embedded in a life story, I begin again to look forward to the next chapter of each “traveler’s” story (Sacks, 1987, p. ix). Imagining my clients to be travelers on a journey; a mysterious journey where I might help with directions or with revisions to the map, reframes clinical practice as adventure. Of his neurological patients Sacks describes:

We may say they are travelers to unimaginable lands—lands of which otherwise we should have no idea or conception. This is why their lives and journeys seem to me to have the quality of the fabulous...and why I feel compelled to speak of tales and fables as well as cases. The scientific and the romantic in such realms cry out to come together...they come together at the intersection of fact and fable. (Sacks, 1987, p. ix)
In *Paths of Life* (1998) Alice Miller, the Swiss psychoanalyst, chooses to convey what she refers to as her later life learnings in the form of fictionalized clinical tales. In explaining her choice of form she describes:

Why have I chosen the form of stories? It wasn't planned; it simply turned out that way, presumably because of my old yearning for a genuine form of communication. At first I wanted to describe simple encounters, encounters between people who are starting from similar experiences and have a desire to communicate with one another directly, openly, without taboos or ideological barrier. Over time, my inner world became populated with imaginary people who were likewise convinced of the significance of childhood experience and through whom I could develop my thoughts without having to prove something already self evident to me. This also meant that I didn’t have to overexert myself. It gradually became more and more fun to write this way. I could let people speak, respect their feelings. And give them a space in which they felt protected. (Miller, 1998, p. vii)

How we think about being in relationship, with family and friends, and with clients and colleagues, affects and directs the course that those relationships take. How we story our relationships gives them focus and shape, imbuing them with significance and meaning over time. Fact or fiction, feeling or fancy, what happens to us in relationship, and how we make meaning of that experience, is who we are.

The philosopher Martin Buber describes the centrality of connection to self-understanding through the "I-thou" relationship:

Relation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it. We are molded by our pupils and built by our works...I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, say Thou. All real living is meeting. (Buber, 1958, pp. 11-15)

The “yearning for a genuine form of communication”, described by Alice
Miller, and for a relational space in which to feel protected, leads us back to the garden. As a metaphorical frame the garden sows the seeds for a way of being in relationship. Reminding us of the interconnection of all things:

As we garden we experience time past and time present. Touching the earth—digging, planting, harvesting—connects us literally and spiritually to all those who have dug, planted, and harvested before us. Working in the garden permits us to begin to understand the woven pattern of relationships in nature, and teaches us that nothing in nature is either independent or isolated.

(Streep, 1999, p. 15)

Primal health can be cultivated. The way each person regards his [sic] own health and the way society regards public health may be compared to the way a gardener tends his plants. To be a true gardener one has to be aware of a plant's fundamental requirements and be able to meet them. (Odent, 1986, p. 83)

Admiring a profusion of tiny yellow flowers on a gently arching stem, my neighbor asks me the name of the plant. While I know the type of soil it prefers, how much water it likes, and that it cringes when its cool, I can't actually name this plant that I am so intimately involved with. Raising her eyebrows, she asks, "I thought you were writing a thesis...isn't your dissertation about gardening?" Looking back at the tiny yellow flowers, I reply, "Yes, I am writing about the garden. My dissertation...about gardening? Well... it is but it isn't".

The truth is, I don't know the names of a surprising number of plants growing in my own backyard. I can tell my neighbor precisely when that little yellow beauty began flowering, (because I monitored the swelling buds several times daily), and that last year it really didn't show much, because, if you recall, it was a dry season. I can agree that, yes, holding moisture in sandy soil is a problem, and suggest wood chips as a good mulch. I can confidently recommend a cup of vinegar to up the acid in the soil. No, it will not hurt the roots. An experienced practitioner, while I cannot name the
plant, I am knowledgeable about the process.

Felicity, on the other hand, could name that flower—in English, and most likely in Latin—in the blink of an eye. She might feel a little less sure, however, of the clinical term usually applied to the feelings the therapist has in response to the client. She knows she has these feelings, and she can talk about them, but she is less likely to name them using the correct clinical term. I have more experience analyzing such responses, situating them in context, and using them to advance interactions. In other words, while Felicity has put people central in her work with plants, and while I have brought my work with people into the garden, with respect to formal knowledge, we each remain grounded in our original discipline.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that Felicity will be spending much time in the near future studying countertransference. It is also not likely that I will spend my summer memorizing the Latin names of plants. While Felicity is still involved in getting her experience properly recognized, such that she can be registered as a horticultural therapist, the success of her practice already demonstrates that she knows what she needs to, about working with people and plants. Some of this knowledge she acquired through course work, some through experience. Felicity also has more than her fair share of common sense—and she is not scared to use it.

I, on the other hand, am a complete fake. Not that I call myself a horticultural therapist—I do not—but I also have no formal training in horticulture. I am not a self-taught gardener, that is, I am not out there buying magazines or studying gardening books. My knowledge about plants comes only from trial and error, intuition and conversation. Emphasizing practice over theory, process over product, I too know what I need to, about working with people and plants. Common sense and leaving well enough alone play an important part in my work as a gardener.

For Felicity and me, extending ourselves beyond our expertise, beyond our knowledge of countertransference and Calochortus monophyllus, required stepping out onto unfamiliar ground. Blurring the boundaries between knowing and being,
extending ourselves beyond the familiar turf of discipline, meant extending our beings as humans. Motivated to bring a fullness to our work by adding diversity, texture and colour, we each expanded the context of our practice. Arriving at a similar place from different directions, the common sense, common ground between people and plants felt so right that it seemed familiar.

While extending ourselves as human beings doesn't sound like that big of a deal, the pressures to conform to the institutions of our professions, within the institutions of our practice, are enormous. As professionals, we all want, and need, to sound like we know a thing or two, so the therapist tends to get stuck at countertransference, and the horticulturalist, at Calochortus monophyllus. This has implications across disciplines, between horticulture and therapy, research and art. As Krizek points out:

As we duplicate the accepted procedures of our disciplines, those into which we have been socialized, we correspondingly limit our potential for advancing the creative, or, ultimately, a truly innovative perspective. (Krizek, 1999, p. 98)

Conforming to institutional structures over time dulls our senses. As the gap widens between the person and her work, the knowledge our senses provide becomes less readily available. Flexibility and fluidity across roles gives way to convention. Constraining our most essential creativity, the loss of congruence between doing and being challenges feelings of professional satisfaction and personal authenticity.

And so what am I suggesting? That personal well being and professional productivity flourish when we extend ourselves in our work, beyond what we know into who we are? What implications does this have in health care practice, and for the health of the practitioner? What are the implications for clinical supervision and for the education of new counsellors? How can we maximize our potential for advancing the creative across disciplines?

Donald Polkinghorne in his (1992) discussion about postmodernism and the epistemology of practice, suggests that postmodern practitioners tend to draw on a variety of conceptual frameworks in their work, since “exclusive commitments to a
particular theory serves to limit a clinician’s understanding of the human aspects encompassed by the theory” (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 160). While the novice practitioner tends to follow the “rules and procedures they were taught in training”, with time and experience “sense-making templates” emerge that the more experienced practitioner can draw from (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 160).

The garden is useful as a “template in practice” because it brings us closer to “pure impressions and sensations” with our clients (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 160). It provides us with common ground as a starting place. Engaging at the sensorial level, we infuse our human connections with a deeper level of authenticity. Providing a common context in which to story our experience, the life giving force of the garden, with its texture and colour, is useful in practice, both as method and as metaphor.

As a metaphor for growth and renewal the garden can be used by the beginning counsellor and by the experienced practitioner alike. “Beginning with ourselves first”, are we engaged with our senses, and can we feel our emotions (Hunt, 1987)? Do we know what our sources of illumination are? What colours move us? What shadows might be blocking our place in the sun? Do we know what we are doing, and why we are doing it? Are we tending to our own health and cultivating our own creativity—alongside our clients?

While I am by no means suggesting that augmenting therapy with horticulture is always appropriate in practice, I do believe that the garden as metaphor has a timeless utility. When imagination is understood as an “attribute of the senses themselves...as the way the senses have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given”, then the garden—the touchable, sensate garden—provides an opening into new worlds (Abram, 1997, p. 58). The artfulness of the everyday makes itself evident when we keep our senses alive and alert. Stimulating our senses into imagining the most we can be, the garden invites “the promiscuous creativity of the senses” (Abram, 1997, p. 58). Juxtaposing the ordinary with the exotic, the garden contains our most basic human needs—food, shelter and safety—and the sacred mysteries of our creative potential.
So the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded. As we return to our senses, we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies—supported, that is, not just by ourselves, but by icy streams tumbling down granite lopes, by owl wings and lichens, and by the unseen, imperturbable wind.

(Abram, 1997, p. 65)
Innovation and Artfulness

In their (1993) research into the roots of creativity in the lives of women, Claudia Bepko and Joanne Krestan identify five categories in order to identify patterns in women's lives. These categories: lovers, artists, leaders, innovators and visionaries, serve to identify the central "story" in the lives of their research participants. Beginning their research they describe that:

sensing that love and creative energy are the core elements that determine the course of a woman's life, we wanted to understand the possibilities women have found for shaping their lives and how they create forms that become the external "medium" for their feelings...How do we find the courage to change when a form doesn't fit? (Bepko & Krestan, 1993, pp. 8-9)

Of the over three hundred women they interviewed,"Innovators" made up the smallest group, representing only ten percent of the sample (Bepko & Krestan, 1993, p. 141). Bepko and Krestan describe "Innovators" as women who reveal a "creative-integrative pattern" (Bepko & Krestan, 1993, p. 140). They define creativity as a type of authenticity and energy; while that which is artistic they define in association with specific modes of expression (Bepko & Krestan, 1993, p. 8). As a result, creativity and artistic expression do not necessarily always combine. In their conception of an Innovator, however, "the energy itself is creative—the need to express, the need to connect, the need to create forms, products, symbols that convey meaning, caring, passion, power" (Bepko & Krestan, 1993, p. 143).

They describe that for: "the Innovator, creative self-expression is as much a necessity, as intense an energy, as the need for relatedness...The Innovator is the woman with a passion for ideas, for music, for abstract forms, for any artistic medium, for a specialized career, for a chance to bring her ideas to bear.
But, while passion in our lives may throw caution to the wind, when we portray passion in writing, or when we write passionately, there is judgement. The art of thesis writing involves knowing when and where fiction might be appropriate. (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 31)

For both Felicity and me, innovating a new practice involves reinventing our professional identity. Our shifts occur in opposite directions: I find a way to integrate the garden into my work with people, while Felicity finds a way to connect her work with plants to people. For both of us, the momentum that led to this shift came suddenly as a kind of “aha!” or critical incident. We each felt that we knew what needed to be done, and we did it. While we encountered obstacles along the way in the development and manifestation of our ideas, neither of us ever doubted the trueness of our vision. Driven by the belief that “these people can do things...they should be working with plants”, Felicity wrote a proposal for horticultural therapy programming in a nursing home that described the needs of the elderly in imperative terms. She turned the realization of those needs into a right that had to be immediately awarded through the implementation of her program. Similarly, driven by the belief that the clients at the Youth Clinic needed a garden to grow, while pitching the need to develop this garden (to clinic board members, to potential donors, to public officials), I spoke in urgent terms.

As individuals, neither of us ever doubted our agency. Propelled by an internal momentum, we did not stop long enough to wonder about our ability to make our dreams a reality. With the intensity of a vision guiding our way, the question ‘can I do it?’ never seemed relevant. It needed to be done, and we were clearly the one’s doing it. Nor did Felicity or I ever sit back and marvel at our success. Without self-consciousness, we proceeded more like instruments affecting action. Fortunately, we were both successful; consciousness came with the satisfaction of seeing our dreams materialize.

While the actual shift that led to new action seemed precipitous—the gradual processes that led to the innovation can be read in each of our portraits. What do the
portraits tell us about the area of inquiry? Is it possible to see the life history roots of the qualities that allowed each of us to reinvent our professional identity? Is that quality flexibility? Can a sense of entitlement be glimpsed? Or is it a certain way of looking at personal professional identity that is somewhat more fluid than formed?

Further, why is this important? What can we learn from this research? As Brent Kilbourn (1999) suggests in his discussion of the qualities of theses, the writer of the alternative thesis must still be able to answer the question: "What is the nature of the claim in this study?" (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 28). A thesis, he reminds us, "must make a substantive contribution to scholarship" (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 28). Further, while the epistemological and methodological conditions of the construction of my thesis have "freed me from narrow interpretations of terms like claim, argument, and evidence", I am nevertheless obliged to explain why I have done what I did, and further, what it means (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 28).

Process and content intertwine in what Kilbourn terms "self-conscious method" (Kilbourn, 1999). He asks that:

A doctoral thesis should demonstrate self-conscious method. It should betray the author's sensitivity to concerns about the connection between method and meaning. An author should be aware of the bearing of method on what the study has to offer in ways that move beyond glib nods to the horrors of positivism or the abuses of narrative. The author should explicitly demonstrate an awareness of his or her role as a writer with a biography. The author should, in some way, make clear her or his sensitivity to the conceptual and methodological moves made during the conduct of the study and in the presentation of the study as a readable document. The author should show an awareness of the bearing of those moves on the overall integrity of the work, should be able to give good reasons for making them. (p. 28)

While I believe that I have already attended to the majority of these issues, what remains outstanding is another type of discussion "about the connection between
method and meaning.” My purpose in engaging in this discussion is to “seek optimum resolution of process” (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000). Bringing closure to the researching process with a discussion about method and meaning is a little like mulching perennials for the winter; in the process of ending I am also preparing for a new beginning (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000).

In choosing the content area for this discussion, I am aware that I have a variety of alternatives. In the course of the project, I have of course already made countless interpretive decisions. For example, in the first section of Felicity’s portrait, “cultivating childhood”, I adapt Laurel Richardson’s device “poetic transcription” (Richardson, 1992). My wish to capture Felicity’s essence in a way that prose cannot led me to select poetic form (Richardson, 1992). Further, my fondness for, and appreciation of Felicity’s use of language led me to the decision that I would use only her words in that section. Decisions about what got included, and what got left out, mix meaning and method.

Points of connection and of difference in our personal and professional experience emerged through the processes of research. Some of these are reflected in the portraits, in that I have chosen them as points of emphasis, others, seemingly less important, I have left off the page. For example, blending fact and fiction, in “That’s a lovely idea, dear”, I story the moment when Felicity first decided to design a horticultural therapy program in considerable detail. My own parallel incident, which appears in “The Skilled Practitioner”, also blends fact and fiction, although it is written in a different style, and therefore “reads” very differently. Here style itself is intended to evoke meaning: that slippery, slimy slug invites you into the common ground of the garden. My other ‘critical incident’, is written as part of chapter one in the “cultivating context” section in more conventional academic prose. Differences in emphasis include more detail in Felicity’s portrait about later life education and the development of horticultural therapy programming in institutional settings, and more detail in my portrait about family context and formative relationships. These differences reflect the significance of decisions and influences along each of our personal/professional paths.
Felicity and I share life-shaping experiences: up close glimpses of death, travel at an early age, the gift of sound bodies and good health. We are also enormously different: as women in our personalities, in our early experiences, and in the current expression of work. In making a choice about which areas to focus on, I am consciously limiting the scope of what I can accomplish here, and leaving a variety of interpretive spaces unexplored.

In listening to Felicity's stories I became aware of the quantity of material in my own history where my mother figures as an important non-traditional influence. My mother was, in fact, my mother is a powerful woman. As my friend Cecelia says, (with an ironic smile, while shaking her head), "even now." Even now that she is in a wheelchair, has no idea what day it is, what year it is, where she is, or even who she is, even now, she is a very powerful presence. The imagistic, intersubjective meaning making process that brought me to the fullness of that realization I have already rendered in Chapter Eight, in the section titled "Rereading Anne: Using Images Artfully". Following that realization came self-study data collection processes I describe in the sections titled "The Search for Goodness" and "Narrative and Snapshots".

From the quantity of material that emerged, came the necessity to make some decisions about refining my focus. Should I attempt to explore my mother's beliefs about female appearance and her experiences as a nudist? Could I story the influence her way of being in this regard had on me, her daughter? And if I could, would my reader be able to make links between the stories as told and the area of inquiry? In other words, could these stories sufficiently illuminate the area of inquiry and vice versa?

Through a process of reinterrogating my thesis question I established the areas that seemed most useful to foreground. Appearance, though interesting, did not seem like the most relevant strand of influence to follow. Since I was looking at agency or institutional settings as context for the expression of new practice, I began to think more deeply about how I regard those places. Thinking about what I have come to
believe led me to who got me thinking that way, which brought me full circle back to my mother. The process itself opened up a whole new variety of possibilities; specifically it led to the narrative snapshot where I describe my mother demanding that hospital staff relocate her father. The resonance of this influence, though less direct, can also be identified in the incident where it seems reasonable to child Maura to not do what the teacher is asking if she can offer a good reason; and to the narrative snapshot where child Maura organizes a sit-in at school to protest what she perceives to be unfair treatment by a teacher, or leaves school entirely when she feels threatened. Further, the circle has indeed come full circle: in several of the stories, I could now easily be mistaken for my mother, and my daughter for me. The life history roots are as visible, as are the intergenerational boundaries blurred.

Returning to Kilbourn’s request about self-conscious method, it is up to me to explain why I have chosen to represent this theme in this particular way. The point, that powerful women who challenge authority, who make no apology for it, and who never self describe as less-than, influence their daughters in manifold ways, is, as Kilbourn points out, “easy to make in academic prose, but it is hard to express in a way that shows its depth” (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 29). In order to access its depth, for my research audience and for myself, I attempt to get at its emotional significance. Selecting narrative snapshots as a medium, I maximize the “communicative potential” in the material through my presentational form. Cole and Knowles explain:

A life history account is...written or revealed with the express purpose of connecting, in an holistic way, with the hearts, souls and minds of readers. It is intended to have an evocative quality and a high level of resonance for audiences of all kinds (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000)

To accomplish this, I need to look at myself ontologically, to ground myself in a deeper sense of who I am. Putting my academic voice aside, I ask you to ask me to “Tell you a story”. As Kilbourn describes “the alternative writing form [is meant to] give the reader a more tangible experience of a phenomenon” (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 29). In
other words, I take you there; to the place where I can taste drywall dust, feel the hand of my grandfather, and hear the sound of my mother’s voice. I don’t believe that I could adequately evoke the resonance of this place in academic prose. Kilbourn describes the problem:

One problem for writing, and one reason depth is difficult to indicate, concerns intensity. Straight prose is limited for expressing depth because the time it take to articulate emotion in common language paradoxically can bleed the emotion of its intensity. The problem is also one of pace. Part of the solution is to slow the reader down to increase the chance of thinking about meaning. (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 29)

Issues concerning pace, and providing the space in our texts for readers to think, also relate to the spaces of suggestion alternative writing contains. As I discussed in Chapter Eight, in the section titled “Information, Knowledge and Wisdom”, I intentionally chose to leave my “self-study short of facts, of information or content in the traditional sense” (p. 140). I discuss my ideas about information, knowledge and wisdom in order to support this decision. I encourage you to use the spaces that I have left as your own meaning making sites. I hope that these sites aren’t empty spaces: my intention is that they should be full of suggestion.

My alternative style of writing is also intended to evoke an emotional response. In discussing the purpose of inserting poetry in academic prose Kilbourn describes: “Poetry is one way of expressing depth of feeling, of slowing the reader down, of providing the chance for a degree of contemplation and of empathetic response…[it has] relevance for contributing to the power of what is said” (Kilbourn, 1999, p. 29).

Forums and mechanisms for self-expression are as diverse and changeable as the individuals who embrace them. That they should be resonant and meaningful at one time, and less significant at another, speaks of our capacity for growth. Our pas-
sions change. The capacity to recognize and act, when that change is upon us, is as important as the ability to recognize passion in ourselves in the first place. Authentic self expression is not a matter of—when the going’s not good, it’s time to get going—but rather, “Am I extending who I am into my life and work in a meaningful way on a regular basis?” As Felicity points out in the following section, when that fit between the personal and the professional gets lost, the fit between meaning and purpose in the practice of our daily lives becomes tenuous. When congruence is lost, it is time to move on.

**Felicity:**

*This is a good idea*

I still feel, I feel good about my job. I like coming in. I think that’s very important. I don’t ever want to be in a position where I feel I have to stay at a job, that I have to do it.

I’m studying motion picture production at Ryerson now. I approached the American Horticultural Association and said, “I’ll make the educational film”. And they said, “Excellent”. I got a grant through the Baycrest Foundation to make a video about horticultural therapy. So I started a film company called “Wild Oats Productions”. Apparently oats means friendship, in Japanese, maybe. I can’t recall. I wanted to do the Baycrest video under “Wild Oats”, so that when I went for funding for the film I could say, “Well, this is an example of my work”.

I’m here because I want to be and when the filming comes, maybe I’ll do that. For me that’s peace of mind. I think that if I ever felt trapped in something or I had to be there, then I would know I was finished.

I know there are some people that think: “I’m going to start a job and I’ll do it forever.” I can’t see that. It’s more for me: “This is a good idea.” Okay, so I’ll do this now. Going to school for film. Forming goals, having them work out. Following dreams.
Maura

In art the act of being determines the situation in which the form becomes the work. Through the meeting that which confronts me is fulfilled, and enters the world of things, there to be endlessly active, endlessly to becomes It, but also endlessly to become Thou again, inspiring and blessing. It is “embodied”; its body emerges from the flow of the spaceless, timeless present on the shore of existence.
(Buber, 1958, pp.11-15)

I love the Royal Ontario Museum like few other buildings in Toronto. The stone stairs worn in the centre from the tread of so many, the regal wooden totem pole ascending above, the atmosphere cool and calm, solemn and expectant. Descending the stairs toward one of the recently opened (since I was a child coming here, that is) galleries, I pass by the cut off to ancient Egypt, and the door to the dinosaurs. The bat cave tempts me, but I carry on....After all I am here on business relating to my thesis.

Entering the Heritage Gallery of Canada’s People, I check my invitation:
*The Multicultural History Society of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum present “Growing Cultures”*.  
Photographer: Vincenzo Pietropaolo  
Researcher: Gerda R. Wekerle  
Curator: Elizabeth McLuhan

The room is full to overflowing. Making my way through the crowd, I encounter various artifacts: a well used wooden winepress, a woven reed basket filled with fresh figs. I locate a program and begin to scan the photographs lining the walls. Immediately I feel my heart catch in my throat and my eyes well up with tears.

There is “Kwan Ying Chee’s jar of seeds”, “Clifton Taylor’s callaloo garden”, “Salme Soovere with rhubarb”, and “Claude Elhai with tomato”. This section of the exhibit is titled “taking root. Transplanted Cultures”. The accompanying text explains the resonance of the garden as method and metaphor in the lives of the people in the portraits:
For many immigrants, gardening is a way to transmit cultural traditions to their children, through growing plants used in family recipes or herbal medicines, and through passing on traditional garden lore. A garden is not just a plot of land. It is comprised of memories of the past and hopes for the future. Gardens nurture the body, but they also address emotional and spiritual needs. (Wekerle, 2000, p.2)

Beneath the portraits are earphones. Putting them on I am immediately transplanted into a garden filled with callaloo. It is the day that the first baby leaves unfurled. Listening to the passion in the voice of the gardener while standing before his image, I can taste the soup he will make using his grandmother’s recipe.

Another section of the exhibit titled “cultivating neighborhoods Community Gardens” tells me that there are now over eighty community gardens in the Greater Toronto area. The text points out that:

sometimes the sheer effort involved in creating a community garden, and in keeping it going, can result in a network of connecting and caring that extends beyond the growing season. This network of community involvement often bridges cultural and generational differences. (Wekerle, 2000, p. 2)

Community gardens in Toronto are supported by the Toronto Community Garden Network through Foodshare, a non-profit agency that works with “communities to improve access to affordable, nutritious food”. Foodshare runs a community kitchen program, does education about organic gardening and composting, and offers information and resources about starting community gardens. Foodshare also runs the “Seeds of Our City” program, which supports the link between bio-diversity and cultural diversity through seed exchanges. Connecting people to their agricultural history and culture, this program also “contributes to a healthy and sustainable local food system” (seeds of our city, 2000, p.1).

Other sections of the exhibit catch my attention: “feast for the eyes. Labour of Love” explores the role of the garden as phenomenon in everyday urban life. Focusing
on the people-plant connection these images depict the garden as an opportunity for respite. A retreat from urban living, these often tiny “self-contained worlds” offer sanctuary to the gardener” (Wekerle, 2000, p. 3).

“fields of play. Alternative Gardens” show the imaginative possibilities of gardeners and gardening. Found objects mix with plants in sculptural arrangements. There is “Lisandro Pacheco’s portable garden”, and the “toy garden of George Manousiadiid”. Here practicality gives way to delight. Finally, while reading the text of “home harvest. From Garden to Table”, I start to feel hungry:

Immigrant gardeners often try to recreate natural aspects of their homeland. Many bring farming experience and knowledge about plants and gardening that is not reflected in Canadian gardening guides. They experiment in the Ontario climate with plants indigenous to other places. Methods of cultivation, often organic and high-yielding, provide models of sustainable gardening. Family gardens supply almost everything required for traditional meals, from fruits, vegetables, herbs, and spices, to preserves, jams, and wine (Wekerle, 2000, p. 4).

Eating a delicious spring roll at the reception (catered by Foodshare), I marvel at the integrity apparent in all aspects of the work represented here, and of the opening event itself. This is research that “stands for something”. It is making a difference to real people living real lives right now (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000). Gazing around the room at the people who are Toronto’s incredible cultural diversity, it seems to me that accessibility in research is a moral issue. Looking at my invitation again, I check the fine print: “Research for the exhibit was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University”.

I am inspired and encouraged. This exhibit is so grounded in the real world. There is no obscuring of common sense strategies in scientific language here. We are now miles away from that researcher in Chapter One, that well intentioned man who
couldn't bring himself to use the word "food", while presenting about eating and the elderly. This research representation moved me. It connected, in a holistic way, with my heart, soul and mind (Cole & Knowles, forthcoming, 2000).

Almost axiomatically, interpretive social scientists assert that our work has consequences for others and ourselves. Sometimes we write about the consequences to others, but less often do we write about the consequences to ourselves. Even more rarely do we consider those consequences in terms of subjectively felt experiences. (Richarson, 1992, p.125)

Four years ago, when I wrote my proposal, I was working as a counsellor at Youth Clinical Services in North York. I was: doing individual clinical work, I was facilitating groups, I was a union steward, I was negotiating a new collective agreement, I was coordinating the horticultural therapy program, I was soliciting donations and funding to keep the program alive, I was supervising a student. And then I took a leave of absence in order to finish my degree and to continue to care for my mother. Six months after I left, the clinic was given notice to move. It is now located in an office space in a nearby strip mall. There are no windows. The green space is gone.

What I have just described in a few quick sentences, without emotion, was of course a long drawn out process filled with anger, sadness and anguish. The garden had been enjoyed as phenomenon, method and metaphor by so many; now it could only serve as a metaphor, and it was not a positive one. With the tangible inspiration for my thesis gone, my work no longer felt immediately relevant or useful. Demoralized, I began to think about a shift in focus, or emphasis.

Freed from my responsibilities at the clinic, my clinician hat laid to the side, I was able to pay more attention to the development of my identity as a researcher. Processes that at times felt compelling and exciting (described in the process vs. product section of chapter one), also presented practical difficulties. In my thesis work, this became a problem of never being able to catch up to myself: my identity development
processes as a researcher were so much in flux that much of what I did (and wrote) seemed to me to only have very temporary relevance. Meanwhile, in my personal life my mother’s ever-increasing needs for care meant that I was spending less and less time with my research. It is only in the last few months that I have been able to directly unite the professional and the personal by reading sections of my thesis aloud to groups of residents at the nursing home where my Mom now lives.

Lorrie Neilsen suggests that we construct ourselves, our ever-changing multifaceted identities in the everyday practice of the personal and the professional. As researchers integration and congruence can occur:

By bringing together the academy and the kitchen table, by moving whatever conceptual furniture is necessary to make room, to shift and shift again the centre of our inquiry into multiple—and perhaps conflicting—contexts, we will begin to truly live our notions of shifting identities, of the value of embodied knowing, of the connection between the personal and the political.

(Neilsen, 1998, p. 142)

With a full-bodied attentiveness to researcher values, comes a broader research agenda, and an acceptance of a more modest set of expectations about each individual research project.

Now I find myself about to board another airplane, this one bound for the Advances in Qualitative Methods in Health Conference, in Banff, Alberta. Tucked away in my bag for review on the plane is a presentation my research partner and I have worked very hard on. Titled "Living and Dying with Dignity: The Alzheimer’s Project", it is an arts informed community based life history research project. A large-scale project with resonant personal implications, I can sense that my professional identity is on the move once again.

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Most people would look at the garden that provided the inspiration for this thesis and pronounce it dead. Indeed the individual garden plots, once so carefully maintained by clients, are so overgrown that it is hard to find the stones that delineate one from the next. Garbage that has blown across the area hasn’t been picked up: a white plastic shopping bag covered with orange neon writing clings to a partly falling down grapevine lattice, bits of paper and plastic cups are stuck in the lower branches of a miniature lilac. The time of year is also not generous: drifts of partially melted filthy snow cling to the still frozen ground.

But what I know is that gardens never die. Plants die from neglect, from too much sun, from too little water. But gardens never die. People leave gardens; they give them up for dead. They move on, they forget, they start again.
For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven; a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted...
(Ecclesiastes, 3)
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Appendix

Interview Guide

Part 1/Questions about working with people and plants

• Can you tell me about a typical day at work, what you do and how you spend your time?

• What do you like most about your job?--dislike?

• How much time do you spend (each day and each week) working with clients with plants?

• How much time do you spend alone at work (each day and each week)--and how and where do you spend this time?

• Tell me about your clients--who they are, how they were referred to you, how long you have been seeing them, the quality of your relationships (keeping confidentiality in mind).

• Can you remember the first client that you ever worked with as a horticultural therapist? Can you tell me about that experience (keeping confidentiality in mind)?

• What does the garden at your workplace mean to you?

• Do you belong to any professional associations or organizations, and if so, what does this membership mean to you?
• Tell me about any professional development activities that you are engaged in conferences, courses, writing, reading. What of these do you do during work time?

• Tell me about how the changing seasons effect your work / personal sense of well being.

• How much of yourself do you feel that you put into your work? How, where, and does it feel like the right amount?

• Can you tell me the story, in lots and lots of detail, about how your horticultural therapy program was born? Who was important / helpful in its development? What got in the way?

• How long has the program been operating and how is it different than it was then? (details about the evolutionary process)

• Can you tell me a story that dates back to the time when the program was just getting going?

**Part 2/Questions about the work environment - agency or institutional context**

• Can you tell me more about the horticultural therapy program (parts you might not be directly involved with)?

• Tell me about working here : who do you report to? who wrote your job description, who do you speak to when there is a problem?
• Can you tell me about the organizational structure of your workplace. Is there a Board? Tell me about communication within the system.

• Tell me about your paperwork requirements (clinical notes and client files; quarterly reports; reports to supervisors) How much time do you spend doing this?

• Tell me about the people who you feel support you in your work—and how they show that support.

• Tell me about where the horticultural therapy program fits into other services or programs that your workplace offers.

• Is the community involved / welcome in your garden? Do they use it?

• Tell me how confidentiality issues are handled here. How was the process established? Have there ever been any problems around this?

• How is your program funded? Do you feel like the funding is secure? Who does fundraising? How did this arrangement develop?

• Can you tell me about how problems are handled in your workplace?

• Do you feel like you “fit in” at work? Do you feel different?

• What are your colleagues like? What do people here usually do for lunch?

• How do you feel that the horticultural therapy program is regarded by your colleagues? How is it talked about? Is the garden “used” by those not directly involved with the program, and if so, how?
• Can you tell me about the process of institutional change as you have experienced it?
• What do you see as the horticultural therapy program’s potential?

Part 3/Questions about personal life and background

• What kind of jobs did you do before this one? What do you fantasize about in terms of future work?

• Tell me about your first personal garden, and other gardens that you’ve cared for or about.

• How and when did you decide to become a horticultural therapist? How did you learn about horticultural therapy as a profession?

• Tell me about your educational background/experience.

• What does your family think about the work you do? Have they always felt that way?

• Can you tell me about the physical surroundings of your upbringing? Did you come from a “green” family?

• Can you tell me about some of the kinds of things you do to take care of yourself? How frequently do you find opportunities for personal/professional renewal?

• Tell me about your most treasured plant—where it came from, how long you’ve had it, who cares for it when you are away?
• Tell me about your oldest plant (same leads as above).

• Do you have a "green" mentor? Can you tell me about that person and what they mean to you?

• Where do you see yourself going with your work?

Can you tell me a story about:

• a personal gardening experience

• who you were as a child

• a relationship that you had/or are having that involves plants in some way

• an experience where you did something new or different