Spiders Spin Silk

Reflections of Missionary Kids at Midlife

BY

Lois Irene Kunkel

A thesis submitted in conformity with
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Adult Education, Community Development
and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
of the University of Toronto

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SPIDERS SPIN SILK

REFLECTIONS OF MISSIONARY KIDS AT MIDLIFE

Lois Kunkel, Doctor of Education, 2000
Department of Adult Education,
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ABSTRACT

Mid-life offers an opportunity for those of us raised as missionary children to come to terms with our unique childhood experience. The adult missionary kids (AMKs) of this inquiry spent their formative years living away from their families in mission run boarding schools. Little research has been done with AMKs to see how their missionary childhood resonates in their lives at mid-life.

For this inquiry, I wanted to understand how those 'missionary years' continued to influence my life and that of other AMKs. Using reflexive inquiry processes, I became one of the participants of my investigation. I also interviewed three other AMKs, conducting in-depth interviews over several months.

As isolation is one of the most familiar themes for MKs raised in boarding schools, both in childhood and as a dynamic of adulthood, I did not want the inquiry to induce another form of isolation — the isolation inherent in a larger participant size, of questionnaires and generalizing themes. I wanted the reader to see their faces and to experience their person-hood. Artifacts in the form of letters and photographs are used to enhance this connection with the life experience of MKs.

With this inquiry, not only have I added to the MK literature as a whole, but I have added to what is, unfortunately, only a small body of MK literature that could be described as testimonial. Telling stories and having their stories witnessed so that the teller can receive her/himself in a new way is a form of arts-informed reflexive inquiry. I portrayed elements of trauma associated with the MK childhood experience.

In addition to contributing to the MK literature, the work contributes to the literature on midlife. Being able to break the silence of our missionary history and speak the truth of our MK experience is the most significant epiphany of an MK in early midlife.

West Africa, where I was raised, is the home of Ananse the Spider. The hermeneutical framework for this inquiry is an Ananse story and the spider provides the metaphor around which the stories and experiences derived through the inquiry process are spun.
Acknowledgements

There is a lot of love in this thesis. There is the love that I have received while writing it, the love which has enabled me to do it. I want to especially acknowledge and thank my spouse, John Olthuis. He has given me the space, support and time, to gestate this thesis and bring it into the world. What an incredible gift! My sweet son Matthew inspires me to be creative and playful. Being his mother has made me steadfast in my commitment to my own personal work. I believe his birthright is a conscious mother.

I want to acknowledge and thank my participants, Ruth, Sam and Jessica. They allowed me into their homes and their lives, in person or by phone, revealing themselves to me with courage and honesty. This thesis would not have been written without them.

I want to acknowledge and thank my family. They tolerated any abrupt phone calls for things that I needed like photographs, letters, and recollections. These phone calls were not unlike the letters we sent home from the boarding school, needing this or that. Thank you for trusting me with your treasures.

I am grateful to Dr. J. Gary Knowles, for his supervision and guidance – and for sometimes frustrating me into not just doing a good job, but doing an excellent job. I appreciate the time and effort of my thesis committee, Dr. Ardra Cole and Dr. Niva Piran.

This inquiry, this work of my heart, has had many helpers. It's a pleasure to acknowledge several significant debts incurred in the writing of this thesis. I am grateful beyond measure to Barbara Lander, my neighbour and friend, for her ability to listen inward and her capacity for metaphor. Barbara's editorial acumen and her shared vision of the thesis make her one of the midwives for this creative endeavor. Midwives come in pairs, and my friend and colleague Agnes Struijk, helped me spin this web from the very first.

Agnes spent innumerable hours with me and with this thesis. She gave me the confidence to believe in my learning style and to trust that I could be creative and write. And as if that were not enough, Agnes also designed the original artwork that graces the title pages of this thesis. My deep appreciation and gratitude to Peter Enneson and his daughter Keira, for the hours they spent making this thesis beautiful. Peter read the thesis once, obviously with his heart, for his design matches and enhances the shiny silk of my spinning.

The computer can be a mysterious challenge to me and I have had wonderful help in understanding and using it. I give my heartfelt thanks to Richard Lander for being my help-line at any time, to Elaine Gort for sitting beside me and patiently teaching me formatting skills, and to Chris Gort for both his computer skills and his answers to my anx-

[ iii ]
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There is a lot of love in this thesis. There is the love that I have put into it. It is my handprint, the handprint of a forty-three year old woman, a former MK. “Writing is the practice of asserting yourself”, wrote Natalie Goldberg in her book Wild Mind. I certainly have done that and I hope that my intention of writing assertively from a place of loving kindness is conveyed.
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Dragline

Ananse, the Spider and Nyame, the Sky God
The stars twinkle in the ebony night. The thumbnail of a silver moon shines over the children as it does over children everywhere. The children gather by the fire-pit. Their bellies are round and full after a meal of rice and palm nut soup. They sit near the mango tree. The ripe fragrant fruit hangs on long tendrils and makes spidery shadows on the ground and nearby huts.

The old woman, Mama Myers, is going to tell them a story before bed. Mama Myers settles her large, round, soft body on her stool. A young boy dares to move close, his head touching her knee. The old woman, eyes closed, rubs his head with her field-calloused hand. The children’s eyes are round with anticipation; they are ready to listen with their ears, their eyes, their hearts. The old woman opens her eyes and looks around at them. She beats three quick beats four times on her drum. In the silence that follows, She says “Once upon a time.”

The children reply, “Time.”

The story begins...
Long ago in Africa, long before there were any stories on earth, there lived a Spider named Kwaku Ananse. Kwaku Ananse spun the most glorious spider webs in all his village. But his wish was to spin stories and tales as magnificent as his webs. Ananse knew that all the stories on earth belonged to Nana Nyame, the Sky God.

So, one day, Kwaku Ananse threw his silk web up high to the sky. When he reached the court of Nana Nyame, the great Sky God, Ananse bowed low to the ground. “O, Nana Nyame God of All Things great and small,” he said. “I wish to know, what is the price of your stories?”

Seated with his elders, Nana Nyame laughed. “Greater ones than you have come to buy my stories, Kwaku Ananse.” The Sky God looked at Ananse’s spindly legs and choked through his laughter. “Someone so tiny, so insignificant as you could never pay my price!”

“I shall pay whatever price you ask,” insisted Kwaku Ananse.

So Nana Nyame answered Ananse. “My stories cannot be bought, except that you bring me these four things: Onini the Python, Mmoboro the buzzing Bees, Osebo the Leopard, and Mmoatia the Dwarf.”

“I will bring you all of these things,” Kwaku Ananse promised boldly.

So Ananse the Spider threw his silk web down, down, down, and scrambled back to earth. Aso, his wife, was cooking plaintain and peanuts in their hut. He told her all about Nana Nyame and what he must do to buy his stories. As they sat down to eat, he asked, “What is to be done that we may capture Onini the Python?”

Aso answered, “Cut a branch from a palm tree. Also cut some vine-creeper. Then take them to the river where Onini the Python lives.”

Kwaku Ananse headed for the river. As he walked along, Ananse talked out loud. He was all by himself, but he pretended that Aso his wife was walking beside him.

“But it is longer than Onini,” he said.

“It is not as long as Onini!”

“Tell the truth. It is longer, longer, very much longer than Onini.”

Then Kwaku Ananse said, “There is Python lying near the river. Let us ask him ourselves.”

Having overheard this imaginary argument, the Python inquired, “What is all this talk of Onini about?”

“It is I, Kwaku Ananse, and my wife Aso, who is arguing with me that this palm branch is longer than you. I say that it is not true.”

Onini the Python thought for a moment and then said, “Come measure me with the
palm branch. Then we shall see which of you is right.”

Kwaku Ananse laid the palm branch down beside the Python's long body. “You must stretch yourself,” said Ananse. Onini the Python did as he was told. Then Ananse took the vine and quickly wound it around Python and the palm branch. Thwitt! Thwitt! Thwitt! was the sound of the tying, till Ananse came to Python's head. Now certain that Onini could not escape, Kwaku Ananse stopped tying and shouted, “Ho! I shall take you up to Nana Nyame, the Sky God and receive his tales in exchange!”

Ananse was so pleased with himself that on the way home he spun the most elegant web.

When Kwaku Ananse reached home, he told Aso what had happened, adding, “Now there are the Mmboro the Bees to catch.”

Aso, his wife said, “Find a calabash bowl, and fill it up with water. Then go to the forest.”

Ananse did as she suggested, carrying the heavy calabash into the bush. Soon he heard the sound of Mmboro the buzzing Bees, hanging in the still air. He climbed a nearby tree and sprinkled water on them. The rest of the water he poured over himself. Then he covered his head with a plantain leaf.

Kwaku Ananse spoke to Mmboro the Bees. “The rains have come. Perhaps, you had better shelter yourselves in this calabash bowl of mine so the rains will not drown you. Can't you see that I cover myself with this plantain leaf to keep dry?”

The Bees replied, “We are grateful to you, Kwaku Ananse. Grateful to you.” And they all flew into the calabash bowl and disappeared. Bzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Suddenly Kwaku Ananse slapped the wet plantain leaf over the mouth of the bowl. “Ah, Ha!” said Ananse. “I have captured you. Now you too will serve as payment for the stories that I seek from Nana Nyame!”

Kwaku Ananse spun a splendid silky path back to the village.

Now there is Osebo the Leopard to catch,” Ananse said to his wife.

Aso told him, “You must dig a deep hole.”

So Kwaku Ananse set off in search of Osebo the Leopard's tracks. When he found them, he dug a deep hole in the path. He covered the hole with branches and returned to the village.

Early the next morning, Kwaku Ananse went back to the bush. He found the Osebo the Leopard lying at the bottom of the pit and called out to him, “Oh Osebo, I have warned you not to drink the palm tree wine. Now look at you. You have fallen into this pit. If I help you out, surely tomorrow you would try to eat me and my children.”

Osebo the Leopard replied, “Oh no, Kwaku Ananse. I could never do anything as bad
“But still, I am afraid you would,” Ananse insisted.

“Ananse,” begged Osebo the Leopard, “if you help me get out, I will never catch you or your children, nor any of your cousins.”

Kwaku Ananse cut two bamboo poles from a nearby grove. He stuck one bamboo pole into one wall of the pit. Then he pushed the other pole into the wall opposite and said to Osebo the Leopard, “Place one paw here and the other there.” Osebo did as Ananse instructed.

Out of sight of Osebo the Leopard was a cage near the top edge of the pit. As Osebo climbed up, Kwaku Ananse lifted the door of the cage, then let it slap down. Thump! Osebo the Leopard was trapped in the cage. “Foolish, foolish Leopard! Now I will trade you for the stories of Nana Nyame, the Sky God.”

Kwaku Ananse was very pleased with himself. As he walked home, all along the path, he spun a beautiful spider web.

When Kwaku Ananse reached his hut, he carved a flat-faced wooden doll, an Akua’ba, from an odum tree. He tapped some sticky white fluid from a rubber tree and painted the doll’s face and body with it. Then he pounded eto from mashed yams. Ananse put some eto in the Akua’ba doll’s hand. He pounded more yams and put them in a brass pot. After tying a string around the doll’s waist, he took the Akua’ba and placed her at the foot of the odum tree, the place where the Dwarves come to play.

Along came Mmoatia the Dwarf.

Mmoatia asked the doll, “Akua’ba, may I eat some of your eto?”

Kwaku Ananse jerked the string, and the Akua’ba nodded her head and did a little dance.

“She says I may eat some.” When Mmoatia finished eating, she thanked the doll, but this time the Akua’ba did not answer. “Perhaps she is asleep. I will open her eyes with my hand.”

When Mmoatia tried to open the doll’s eyes, her hand stuck there in the gum. “My hand is stuck!” she cried. “I will take my other hand and try again.” Now both hands were stuck fast. Mmoatia pushed against the Akua’ba doll with her foot, and it, too, was stuck.

Suddenly Kwaku Ananse jumped out from behind the tree. “Now I have you!” he shouted. “I shall take you to Nana Nyame, and he will not be able to refuse me his stories!”

Kwaku Ananse went back to the village with Mmoatia the Dwarf entangled in his spider web.

After gathering the Python, the Bees, the Leopard, and the Dwarf, Kwaku Ananse spun a majestic web around his catch. He threw his silk web up, up, high up to the sky.

When Kwaku Ananse reached the court of Nana Nyame, the great Sky God, he bowed
low to the ground. "O God of All Things great and small, here are Onini the Python, Mmoboro the Bees, Osebo the Leopard, and Mmoatia the Dwarf. All are payment for your stories."

Then Nana Nyame called together his retinue of elders. He put the matter before them. "Great kings have come and gone, unable to pay the price for my stories. But here before us is Kwaku Ananse, a tiny, insignificant fellow. He has given me Onini the Python, Mmoboro the Bees, Osebo the Leopard, and Mmoatia the Dwarf. Let us sing praise to Kwaku Ananse. He has paid the price for my stories."

"EEEE!" shouted the elders.

"Kwaku Ananse," said Nana Nyame, the Sky God, "from now on and forever, I give all my stories to you. Kose! Kose! Kose! Bless you! Bless you! Bless you! No more shall they be known as the stories of Nana Nyame, but from now on we shall call them “anans-esem” or Spider Stories."

And so it came to be that Kwaku Ananse travelled from town to town, spinning his splendid Spider tales. Sometimes he told the stories with drama and dance. Always the stories lived on in the listeners’ memories.

______________________________

An Asante/Twi story,  
told to me by Augustina Oppong-Boateng,  
The garden spider begins its web by trailing its dragline and spinning the strong bridging line that will suspend the entire web, attaching it at either end (Kunkel, p. 27 of this manuscript).
Long ago in Africa, long before there were any stories on earth, there lived a Spider named Kwaku Ananse. Kwaku Ananse spun the most glorious spider webs in all his village. But his wish was to spin stories and tales as magnificent as his webs. Ananse knew that all the stories on earth belonged to Nana Nyame, the Sky God.

So, one day, Kwaku Ananse threw his silk web up high to the sky. When he reached the court of Nana Nyame, the great Sky God, Ananse bowed low to the ground. "O, Nana Nyame God of All Things great and small," he said. "I wish to know, what is the price of your stories?"

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"I will bring you all of these things," Kwaku Ananse promised boldly.
Nyame asks for four things: python, leopard, bees and dwarf. The number four is an ancient symbolic number. "There are four cardinal points, four winds, four elements, four humours, four letters in the name of God (JHVH or YHVH) and of the first man (Adam), four arms to the cross, and four Evangelists. The Pythagorean tetraktys is the product of the sum of the first four numbers. Four symbolizes the earthly, the totality of the created and the revealed" (Chevalier, & Gheerbrent, 1996, p. 402).

Four is perceived to be the number equalling wholeness and completion. "The whole system of Jungian thought is based upon the fundamental importance which he attached to the number four and he regarded quaternity as 'the archetypal basis of the human psyche'" (Ibid., p. 406). "The functional aspects of consciousness are thinking, feeling, sensation, intuition" (de Vries, 1974, p. 201).

First we must return to the issue of paradox. Until and unless, we come to terms with that great mystery of coexistent faith and pain, our discussions on MKs [missionary kids] and adult MKs will only prove fruitless and divisive. Without that paradox, talking about the need for healing quickly degenerates into either attacking or defending parents, missions, God, or someone else. We never get to the real issue: What are we going to do about the wounded ones? (Van Reken, 1995, pp. 429-430).

In spite of the growing efforts to help current TCKs [third culture kids] better understand and use their cross-cultural experiences, most TCKs from previous generations grew up with little assistance in sorting out the full effect of their third culture upbringing. No one understood that help might be needed, let alone what to do if it were (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, p. 269).
My family in our first year (Lois second from right).  
My sisters and I are wearing typical Liberian dress.

Along Came a Spider

The red dust of the road upcountry still tickles my nose. The drive from the capital city Monrovia begins on a paved road that ends abruptly with a jolt onto a rough, spine-jerking, red, dirt road. We haven’t been in Liberia many days and we have come to the mission station where we will live. It is near the town of Totota, which is about the halfway point into the interior.

The mission station has a school and the houses and buildings ring the ball field that also serves as the landing strip for the mission plane. Our house is surrounded by fruit trees: mango, papaya, and guava. Yellow flowering bushes line the driveway and towering bougainvillaea stretch across the veranda. My senses are stimulated by the sounds, the smells, the colours. My body is as sticky with this new sensory world as it is with the searing heat. A few Liberian children have come from the town to see who the new kids are. My sisters and I play with them but we don’t understand a word they are
saying. “Speak English!” I demand. Indignantly, they reply, “We are speaking English!”

Another mission family, originally from Ghana, invites us to a family birthday. I am dazzled by the bold colours of the day. My whole life, all seven years of it so far, has been spent among off-white people on the off-white prairie in an off-white house. I am in a house where the rooms are painted pink, green, and blue. Bold colours are all around me. The people are all colours, with skin the colours of ebony to ivory and every shade in between. The cake is iced pink, blue, and purple. There are no familiar people in the room except my family. I feel my stranger-ness. I feel shy and unusual.

I am given a piece of cake. I look around and find a seat in a corner where I can feel safe, comforted by the pink walls. In anticipation, I raise up a forkful of cake, opening my mouth wide to receive it, ready for its sweet taste. At this precise moment, a spider drops down on his silk dragline right in front of my cake. My hand moves the cake into my mouth before my mind registers the fact of the spider. In goes the cake. In goes the spider. It happened so fast, I don’t even know what the spider looked like. I sit in stunned amazement. My cheeks are round with cake. The spider wiggles at the back of my throat. Inside my head, my mind is shouting, “Yuck! A spider!”

The pink walls now corner me. I sit there and frantically wonder what to do. Spit or swallow? I want to do something. I want to spit. The spider wiggles and wiggles. “Is the spider poisonous?” I wonder. I’ve been warned that most bugs are poisonous here in Liberia.

I swallow.

I swallow the spider. I feel it slowly slide down my throat with the moist lump of my cake. I decide, automatically, not to make a mess by spitting out the cake. I know that I must not, must not, call attention to myself. I decide not to embarrass my parents by spitting out the cake. I swallow that spider.

I am seven years old. I am a German-Canadian girl, the daughter of new missionaries. I sit in a mission house near Totota, Liberia. I have swallowed a spider in West Africa. I have swallowed a spider in the homeland of Ananse.

I know now that this is my story, the story that I want to tell you. This is the story that I want to tell because it is the story that has led me to myself and the wisdom of spiders.
I CAN'T REALLY SAY where it all began. There seems to have had more than one beginning. Or perhaps there is more than one spider. Or perhaps it is the same spider manifested at different points in time, embodied in me at particular life stages and in particular places, emboldened to appear by other forces, perhaps drawn out by others in my life. The spider I know weaves webs. Not all spiders weave webs.

I have experienced the spider's web in so many ways. Sometimes the web entangles me and I struggle to unsnare myself. I need to make meaning of each particular capture. Sometimes I need to make connections and the web leads me from one place of attachment to another. I have felt pain and loss when a web is damaged, torn loose or ripped. I am left with fragments, bits of stories, interrupted connections. I have learned that meaning gets made exactly when there appears to be no meaning.

One beginning for this story is when I began my doctoral studies at the University
of Toronto in 1991. I meant to write about my adopted Ojibway brother. I intended to create a counselling protocol for families like mine who, through cross-cultural adoption had inadvertently became a cross-cultural family. I wanted to do something big and meaningful but I kept feeling lost. The more I struggled for clarity, the more elusive the topic became.

I was disengaged from my own spinning, entangled in a web of self-importance. Through exploring my brother’s story, I had thought I was both the all knowing spider and the web. I was going to be my brother’s hero and help his life to have larger meaning. We would be important and famous, a cross-cultural duet holding workshops. I had been entangled in my brother’s story for a long time. We have many points of pain in common. From the moment I laid eyes on him when he was three and I was sixteen, I bound myself up with him and he with me. You can ask anyone in my family about this!

Eventually, however, I realized that this wasn’t my story to write. Or if I do write it, I have to write my own story first. My genesis is a story before the story of my brother and me. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was made flesh”¹.

“Logos thinking,” Marion Woodman (1985) writes, “tries to solve the mystery, rather than enter into it” (p. 169). I couldn’t solve the mystery of my brother’s life in my family. The flesh of my Word is in my own life, in my own story before I met my brother, and it reveals some of how and why I am so identified with my adopted Ojibway brother and inter-cultural issues.

At the same time as I was struggling to begin my thesis, I was co-facilitating an inter-church committee whose task was to help these churches with their response to the detrimental effects of residential schools. The committee was comprised of Native and non-Native church bureaucrats along with Aboriginal people who had attended these schools. The meetings inevitably included stories: of loss, anger, and pain woven inter-generationally, and of rape, both cultural and physical rape. A colleague and I facilitated and navigated these meetings, usually held in the large meeting room of the Quaker House in downtown Toronto. One entire wall of this meeting room has windows that faced onto garden and trees, a place for our eyes and spirits to rest in the midst of all the emotion and conflicting agendas.

One afternoon at a coffee-break, Stella, an older Native woman, came to me as I

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¹ John 1: 1 &14. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” (The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, p. 1286)
studied the words on the flip-chart and kindly asked, “My girl, how are you feeling?”

I liked Stella. Her honesty and vulnerability had brought an authenticity to our meetings. I wanted Stella to like me too. I smiled at her. “I feel all right, I feel a little tired.” “I’m worried about you,” she said. “Your aura has changed this afternoon from blue to gray.”

I learned that aurases made themselves known to Stella. She had always seen them, even as a child. This impressed me, but Stella later told me in her inimitable Native voice: “It is a mixed blessing. You can get real headaches sometimes.”

Stella had survived a lot. She was a small girl when she first went to residential school and she was beaten and raped. She was lonely for her family and she would cry at night. The impact of this experience in her life caused much sorrow for a long time. When she finally found the courage to claim her life for her own, she spoke out about her experiences. She wanted her story to help others to reclaim their lives.

Her story vibrated in me. On the night that she first told it I lay awake, awash in feeling and recollection. I was seven when I went to live in a boarding school. I too had cried at night, lonely and sometimes frightened in my bunk bed in the African dark of the dorm room.

Stella’s story stirred me, her words, like northern lights in my soul, dancing awake my own boarding school story. Her story and those of other committee members mulched and hoed a part of my life that I had not tended for a long time. No, that’s not true. I had been tending to it, or at least parts of it, but all alone. I had been without community, without context. I had been exploring my boarding school experience as part of my therapy journey, thinking its impact was solely part of my personal pathology.

Stella revealed to me the price she paid for her story. The qualities in her that I admired, her honesty and vulnerability, had cost her dearly. Because she knew the cost, and had paid the price, Stella could hear the questions I was asking. Like Aso, she helped me to find the way to the answers. What Stella showed me was that Ananse was already inside me; I had already swallowed the spider. I too, had paid a price for my stories and I had a right to tell them.

What I longed for now was to explore these stories with others, with other missionary kids who had lived this kind of experience. Did the other missionary kids who lived with me in the hostel in Liberia still wonder and struggle? Were they also trying to make meaning of their lived experience? What had their stories cost them?

In July 1992, twenty years after my family and I had left Liberia, I searched out and called some of these boarding school companions. Each one knew in an instant who
I was. Immediately. As I said, “This is Lois calling, Lois Kunkel,” they were already exclaiming “Lois!”

And so the fragments of my story began to be returned to me, rewoven into new connections with an old community.

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We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

(T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding, 1944, p. 48)
The Spiderlings of Ananse and Aso

There are only a few people a missionary kid (MK) of any age can truly share his or her life stories with. Those who 'know' are those who also lived it. Often MKs pack away this experience and live with an ahistorical gap, as if that period of time never actually happened. So many are silent about significant parts of their lives. Some have pathologized their experience and themselves. Doris Walters, in the acknowledgments for her book An Assessment of Re-entry Issues of the Children of Missionaries pays tribute to the children of missionaries "who have sacrificed as much or more than their missionary parents" (1991, p. vi). Yet only in recent years has this sacrifice been acknowledged and described.

Many children are raised in foreign cultures and countries. These include the children of missionaries, diplomats, military and business people. Because they grow up in countries whose culture is different from their passport country, they have been called "third culture kids (TCKs)." This term originated forty years ago with Dr. Ruth Hill Useem, a sociologist at Michigan State University. While working with U.S. business and government families on assignment overseas, she observed that their children were different from children who had not lived outside the U.S. Their sense of identity was created from the combination of at least two distinct cultural components: their home culture (or their passport country) and their host culture. These two combined in a unique way into the shared lifestyle of the expatriate community, making it a distinct entity and Useem defined it as the third culture. Pollock and Van Reken in their book, The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing up among worlds, define a TCK as

a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCKs life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (1999, p. 19)

MKs are a unique group within TCKs because they must integrate yet another significant culture, that of religion. Christian missionaries see themselves as responding

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2 Cited in The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing up among worlds by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, 1999, p. 20. The term 'third culture kid' (TCK) is frequently used in recent MK literature.
to the Great Commission. They are sent forth to proclaim the Gospel to all people, near and far, who have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ. This call is felt as a 'divine mandate'. Enormous human and material energy has been spent and continues to be spent on responding to this call. After the Second World War, many Christian denominations vigourously promoted missions work, often inadvertently expecting missionaries to be 'superior' Christians. Africa, Asia, Latin America came to be regarded as exotic rather than as the 'real-life' places that they were. Sunday Schools took up special offerings and read heroic stories about missionaries at the frontiers of faith.

The missionaries going to Africa were the heroes of their home locales, not unlike the patriotic military heroes who went off in the cause of freedom into the two great wars of this century.... This prime value placed on the missionary evolves into the mythical picture of the self-sacrificing hero. It goes on from there. The work of the hero is so exalted that any distractions fall to a much lower priority. The predictable result is that the organization so glorified the missionary and the mission that other elements in the picture (children being the most relevant) were significant only by derivation. (Final Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry to the Board of Managers of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1997, p. 58)

Missionary Kid Literature

A large part of the body of literature related to missionary kids has a recent history. Much of the research produced before the 1970's was anecdotal, articles appearing in church-related publications. Other writing was not research based and little of the research was empirical (Powell, in Bowers, 1998, p. 433). From the 1970's to the present time, MK research has moved into greater depth and wider content areas. Many of the studies undertaken are based on doctoral dissertations (Danielson, 1981; Herrmann, 1977; Schipper, 1977; Wickstrom, 1978); these are unpublished and therefore inaccessible to most MKs. The research focus has ranged from the effect of boarding school experiences on later educational and vocational outcomes (Reynolds, 1972; Ridley, 1986), to understanding personality and psychosocial variables (Wickstom & Fleck, 1983), to understanding the impact of re-entry (Austin & Van Jones, 1987; Walters, 1991).

Three international conferences in the 1980's addressed a variety of issues and concerns related to MKs (International Conference on Missionary Kids: ICMK-Manila, 1984;
ICMK-Quito, 1987; ICMK-Nairobi, 1989) and these conference findings have been published (Echerd & Arathoon, 1989; Tetzel & Mortenson, 1986). In 1987, an inter-mission group composed of representatives from ten mission agencies formed a research organization called MK CART/CORE (Powell, 1998). Since that time they have focused their research efforts on three areas: defining desirable qualities for boarding school personnel (Powell & Andrews, 1993); adult MKs (Andrews, 1995); and more recently, the missionary family study.

The MK research literature includes studies that are primarily quantitative in nature, rather than qualitative research, and, where interviews are employed, the individual stories are seldom told (Alford, 1971; Brisben, 1989; Larson 1971; Stough, 1989; Wickstrom & Fleck, 1983). For the most part, then, in the literature, MKs are faceless, nameless, and story-less. Griffen (1983) found an “appalling dearth of literature regarding missionary children” when she undertook her doctoral studies (p. 52). She found that “many of the responses [of MKs] were disturbing because of the lack of feeling, the denial of feelings, and self-negation” (p. 48). She writes, “missionary children, in many instances, have successfully repressed the separation traumas, and, in adulthood, contend that their separations were ‘managed’, ‘lived through’, or ‘of no consequence’ (p. 4). Griffen’s doctoral thesis was precedent-setting in the 1980’s in its critique of the missionary assumption and its compassion for the MK.

A more recent MK CART/CORE questionnaire study surveyed hundreds of adult MKs and found that twenty-nine percent of those surveyed had received some form of professional counselling. An additional twenty percent felt that they would benefit from counselling. Andrews comments that

While questions about the nature and length of the counseling that these adult MKs received may need to be addressed, it seems likely that this variable reflects, not on the counseling itself, but on the people who seek counseling. In other words, adult MKs who are not doing well existential-ly, religiously, and spiritually would be the ones who would most likely seek counseling help (1995, p. 420).

In writing The Life and Times of an MK, Buffam acknowledges many of the emotional impacts experienced by an MK yet seems to sublimate them to his Scriptural perspective (1985). In his preface, he writes,

We’ve learned, however, that missionaries’ children don’t blossom naturally into models of saintliness; also that what we as parents don’t learn in time can hurt us and our offspring. Still, thousands of older missionary parents would testify to God’s faithfulness and to the joy their children
have brought them. Our heavenly Father wonderfully unmesses the mess and blesses the messer (pp. xi-xii).

Buffam, as an MK and the father of MKs, writes his overview of MK life from the inside. Yet his book is impersonal and reminiscent to me of my MK years when if I didn't have a personal or epiphanal experience of Jesus, I felt inadequate, unlovable, and unredeemable. His overview of MK life stops before mid-life. Buffam, like Andrews, is situated in the Christian belief system that perpetuates the Great Commission. Their writing suggests a split between the emotional wounding and the Christian teachings. This split seems dissociative in nature and repeats the original MK trauma.

Other researchers make different judgements of the missionary experience for MKs. Walters published her doctoral dissertation and, like Griffen, was one of the first people to publicly acknowledge the sacrifice that MKs make. She writes, "To all children of missionaries of every denomination who have sacrificed as much or more than their missionary parents, I salute you and ask you to continue to inform us on how we can better meet your needs" (1991, p. vi). In her investigation of re-entry issues, she names the issues and honours the suffering. Her empathic research is grounded in theology, psychology and in the lived experiences of MKs. While she uses biblical metaphors for the MK experience, they are not prescriptive or judgmental.

Van Reken created a first person narrative outlining her experiences chronologically from her first year in an MK boarding school to being a missionary mother of MKs (1985). She writes vulnerably, admitting her pain; she shares her suffering and struggles, including her midlife depression. However, she is compelled by her Christian belief system to redeem her experience: "Jesus is a Redeemer and can remove the scars caused by the hurts of years ago" (p. 172). More recently, Van Reken has acknowledged this paradox, writing "For the specific pain vs. faith conflict, however, I believe there is one deeper step to go — and it is an essential one to optimally help AMKs. That is to have a look at a basic theology of grief" (Van Reken website, June 15, 2000).

Pollock and Van Reken (1999) address the common themes of the "third culture kid" experience, unashamedly naming the pains and wounds. Their text incorporates reflections written by MKs in addition to material collected by questionnaire. "Naming things well is important to research", writes Ward (In Bowers, 1998, p. 445). He continues,

One of the first things God did with Adam was put him to work as a researcher. Adam didn't have much to go on - there wasn't previous data, and Adam couldn't go to a library. But God gave him an assignment of taxonomy: naming the animals. Almost anyone can start with that. Name your universe. See what is there and call it something. Doing that well is
an important task (p. 445).

One of the kinds of MK research that Ward encourages is narrative representation. He writes, "A high percentage of other cultures do think in terms of narrative representation as a valid way to describe.... where the value of the story to be told is the central thing (1998, p. 450).

Not only does my research embody the stories of MKs through the use of narrative-like vignettes and artifacts but it furthers the understanding of the MK at mid-life. There is still very little research or writing about adult missionary kids at midlife.

Pollock (1986) writes:
The TCK/MK never stops being one; it is a life time experience... Not much research has been done with this group but the observations of those who are 'inside' the group indicate that during the mid-twenties to mid-thirties, the impact of their third cultureness has a profound impact on career, family and personal well-being. (Quoted in Walters 1991, p. 233)

In her edited collection of articles and presentations from the ICMK conferences, Bowers includes a section of three articles on midlife (1998). The collection is mixed in terms of how the various authors name the experience of an MK, yet the tone of the book indicates more openness and acceptance of what's really happening to MKs and their families.

My Inquiry

When I began this inquiry, I had a great fear of revealing, revealing not only myself, but my family. I feared how my parents would respond to my new understandings and interpretations of my experience. I wanted to protect them as I had for so many years. This is a common theme with MKs. MKs, as I will reveal, realise very early that our parents made the choice to be missionaries for honourable reasons. We didn't want to disturb them from their 'calling' with merely personal complaints or distress. This knowledge that our parents are on a 'holy venture' can cause children to be instinctively silent. MKs feel loyal to their parents who, they understand, are being loyal to God. MKs want to be loyal to God too. Sometimes missionary children were actively induced to silence.

Because of the high value placed on direct missionary work with African communities, children at Mamou were exhorted to suffer in silence about their distress because telling their parents would upset them and make it hard for them to perform
their ministries. Letters were censored. Children were advised not to upset their parents, lest their ministry to Africans be compromised and Africans left to their pagan ways. (Final Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry to the Board of Managers of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1997, p. 59)

Eventually the impact of silencing is internalized, causing a dissonance to occur in we MKs. Often, this sense of dissonance is not discovered or understood until mid-life, when in the natural psychological and spiritual life-cycle of a human being, we may be "stunned into consciousness," (Hollis, 1993, p.18), made aware that "the values, ideals and beliefs that served us well on the first half of our journey are simply not up to the task of meeting the challenges of life's afternoon" (Brehony, 1996, p. 327).

Learning to speak

Learning to speak my experience to my parents and my family took time. Although my parents supported my choice of inquiry, they also sensed that they might be blamed. Yet, in a recent phone conversation with my mother, she said, "It is time these stories were told. It is time the voices of the children are heard." I think my mother now feels vindicated, her inner instincts validated by our voices. I think mothers of many MKs may feel this way too. As Fine (1992) has written, "To unearth the secrets is also to tap the costs of the silencing" (p. 23).

Like many MKs, for years I had put away my Liberian experience, yet their imprint never left me; in fact, I now know that they informed my values and choices. For this inquiry, I wanted to understand those years and their continuing impact in my life. I wanted to talk with the kids I grew up with about their experiences and their understanding of that part of our lives. I found truth in this statement: "Telling a personal story becomes a social process for making lived experience understandable and meaningful" (Ellis & Bochner, 1992, p. 80).

My intent is not simply to document memories, providing a historical overview of the early life of missionary kids raised in boarding schools. Rather it is to make sense of the recollections, to explore the past in the present tense. As Gallagher (1992) writes, "This past is not past in an objective sense; it is a past that is continually lived" (p. 94). This inquiry, then, gathers the recollections of women and men who spent significant years of their childhood’s in missionary-run boarding schools and explores how these experiences are “continually lived” in their adulthood.
I set out to find an inquiry approach that would encompass me, my participants and the inquiry that I wanted to undertake. To do this, I realized that I first needed to articulate my learning style. Knowing is a verb as well as a noun and I learn best when my whole being, body, mind, and spirit is engaged in the process that I call embodied knowing. Initially, this led me to heuristic research.

Heuristic research does not prescribe a methodology. It offers a process to discover the meaning and essence of significant human experiences. The heuristic research journey begins with something that has come forth from within the researcher's life experience. The researcher must have actual autobiographical connections with the phenomenon being investigated. Moustakas (1990) states:

Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. (p. 15)

This is one of the distinguishing features of heuristics: it invites the researcher to become passionately involved in living the question internally; it grants permission for embodied knowing.

Therefore I am also one of the participants. By using the heuristic phases of immersion and incubation, I deepened my own understanding of the phenomenon that I wanted to investigate. Some of the vignettes that illustrate the common themes for a MK at mid-life are my own life experiences.

Once I understood what it was I wanted permission from the Sky-God to tell, I knew where to find others who also yearned to tell. Others who yearned to tell not only their stories but knew the cost of those stories.

The Women and Men of this Story

The stories I include come from numerous conversations I have had with MKs of many denominations who grew up in many different parts of the world. All of the participants in my inquiry lived away from our families for significant parts of our MK lives. School days were spent living in boarding schools or hostels or living with other missionary families near a school. Two participants were born on the mission field and spent their pre-school years interacting primarily with the nationals of that country; two others came to the mission field as young children.

All of the stories are held by me in trust. All identities, except mine, are protected
by pseudonym. The voices come through in the thesis in three ways: as vignettes of actual experiences they shared with me; as the common themes or strands that emerged as I compared their stories; and, in the “making meaning” chapters of the last section.

I gathered information in various ways. I collected some of it informally, outside of the formal relationships with participants, gathering information in conversations with siblings, friends, and in my psychotherapeutic work with MK clients. I sought out MKs who had lived in Liberia at the same time as me. I especially delight in the renewed friendship with my old room-mate and friend from my boarding school days at the Phebe Hostel in Liberia.

Other participants came to me through word-of-mouth knowledge of my academic interest or through my work as a psychotherapist. Included, too, are the voices of my three sisters, who lived this family experience with me. In November 1994, along with one of my sisters, I participated in a workshop facilitated by a group called “MKs in Recovery”. The workshop provided a forum for us to tell our stories. It was a watershed for us as sisters; a time of telling, of surrendering our silence, of listening to each other with new ears. Our husbands were with us too, and they heard our words along with the stories of other MKs. For the first time, for them and for us, our stories and experiences had context and community.

Widdershoven (1993) writes:

In telling stories about past experiences, we try to make clear what these experiences mean. According to Gadamer, this requires that we try to see what the experience has to say to us, that we try to apply it to our present situation. In this process of application, the meaning of the experience is changed, as the worldview that is constitutive for the experience is fused with the perspective that is presented in the story. Our story is part of a history of interpretations, which changes the meaning of our life. By telling a story about our life, we change our life. In doing so, the story itself becomes richer, as it is filled with life experience. Thus experience and story may be said to communicate with one another. (p. 13)

With three participants, Ruth, Jessica, and Sam (pseudonyms), I completed a series of formal, in-depth, audio-taped recorded interviews, either at their homes or by telephone. I transcribed these and shared them, respectively, with the participants. We discussed at length the life-cycle of an MK: becoming an MK, re-entry to the passport country, and present time. The present time interviews resonate with the profound effects our MK experiences have had on our lives, especially at midlife.

Ruth, Jessica and Sam allowed me to weave a communal web using the silk of
their stories. As spiders do, I ate the old web threads of our stories before spinning the new silk for a new web (Markle, 1994, p. 9).

Ruth

Ruth was born in West Africa, in Guinea in 1952. Her parents were missionaries with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). She lived her early life with her family quite isolated from other missionaries. At six years of age, she left home to attend school at Mamou Alliance Academy in Mamou, Guinea and lived there for ten years. The Mamou Alliance Academy was a boarding school for the children of C&MA missionaries serving in West Africa. The C&MA built the school, staffed and operated it during the entire time of its existence from the 1920s to 1971. Students at Mamou Alliance Academy, typically, stayed at the school for approximately nine months at one time. Most children did not see their parents for this entire period. Climate, long distances, and difficult travel made it impossible for most parents to visit their children at the school, and many of those who did visit were prevented by school staff from spending private time with their children.

Mamou Alliance Academy has been the subject of an internal investigation by the C&MA, culminating in a report released on November 15, 1997. Former students, including Ruth, had brought forward allegations of physically and sexually abusive misconduct by former Mamou staff members. The report acknowledged the abusive misconduct and, in several cases, took disciplinary action against the staff members responsible for it and made reparations to the victims, usually in the form of therapy costs. The report found that thirty percent of students experienced difficulties in later life as a result of the abusive experiences they endured while attending Mamou Alliance Academy.

Ordinarily, C&MA children returned to their parents' passport country for Grade Ten, or its equivalent, and to complete high school. Ruth, however, went to the Ivory Coast and lived with a missionary family there while she completed Grade Eleven by correspondence. She returned to the United States, to a C&MA run boarding school in Georgia, to complete her Grade Twelve. Her parents came 'home' to the United States on furlough the following year and Ruth went with them to Seattle where she attended university. Following university, Ruth became a minister and a missionary and served in the Philippines for four years.

Today Ruth is forty-seven years old. She is married and the mother of a six year old daughter. She is the co-director of a not-for-profit English as a Second Language (ESL) 'school'.
Jessica

Jessica's parents were already Lutheran missionaries in South America where she was born and lived until she was thirteen years old. She was home educated for Grade One. In Grade Two, she joined her two older brothers at a missionary-run boarding school where she was very unhappy. This first boarding school was not run by Lutherans, but by The Missionary Church and Jessica felt judged as "not Christian enough". It was chosen by her parents because it was closer to them, making regular visits possible.

For Grades Three and Four, Jessica lived at a hostel for Lutheran missionary children and attended an American school. She lived at home with her parents and younger sister for Grades Five and Six, attending a local South American school and her learning was supplemented by correspondence courses. Jessica returned to the Lutheran hostel to complete Grade Seven.

At thirteen, Jessica returned with her family to Canada. She lived at home with her parents and sister. In her Grade Twelve year, the family moved again, to the Prairies, where, later, Jessica took her nursing training.

Jessica is thirty-seven years old. She is married, the mother of a two-year-old son and she continues to work as a nurse.

Sam

Sam moved with his parents to West Africa in 1959 when he was four years old. He is older than his next sibling by four years and he has three brothers and a sister. His parents were Lutheran missionaries. Sam was home educated for Grades One and Two because the Lutheran Mission hostel did not accept children until they were in Grade Three. In Grade Four, his family went on furlough to the United States where they lived for one year.

Sam returned to West Africa and lived at the Mission hostel for grades five through eight. The hostel 'parents' had changed while he was away. He had this same set of hostel parents until Grade Eight when a new set of parents came. The family had another furlough in the United States for Sam's Grade Nine year. When he returned to Africa, Sam lived at the Lutheran Mission house in the capital city and attended an America Cooperative School until he completed high school. In 1973, he left West Africa and returned to the United States to attend university. Sam quit university two years later.
and spent some time “learning to be an American”. Sam has completed a university degree and works as a self-employed vocational rehabilitation counsellor. He is forty-four years old, has been married for over twenty years and has no children.

Lois

I was born in Canada in 1956 and spent my early life in rural Manitoba where my father was a Lutheran pastor. In 1963, my family moved to Chicago where my parents attended mission school for one year. My family moved to Liberia, West Africa in 1964. In that same year, at age seven, I went with my two older sisters to board at a Lutheran-run hostel at Phebe Mission Station attending an ecumenically run school nearby. I spent my school years at the hostel until Grade Seven when my family went on furlough and lived in Vancouver for the school year. For Grade Eight, I returned to the Phebe Hostel. After that, I lived at the Lutheran mission house in the capital city of Monrovia and attended the American Cooperative School for Grades Nine and Ten. My two older sisters were already attending high school in Canada when my family returned to live in Winnipeg in 1972. We all moved to Winnipeg to be together and attended, but did not complete, high school. I lived with my family in Winnipeg. In 1975, I moved to Saskatchewan for one year, to work as a youth worker for my church. In 1976, I returned to Winnipeg and enrolled at university as a mature student, completed my B.A. while I also worked for several interchurch organizations. I accepted a job in Toronto with a national interchurch organization, which promoted Aboriginal Rights and Justice, moved in 1984. I returned to school in 1988, privately training in psychotherapy while completing a Master’s degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of Toronto in 1991.

I am forty-three years old, married with a three-year-old son, and I work as a psychotherapist in private practice. I put away active work on my doctoral thesis during the first year of my son’s life. As I re-engaged with my writing, the element of motherhood and the dynamics of mid-life became significant to this inquiry.
Spinning this Story

Entry into the narrative tradition enables individuals to realize that the significance of their own lives stems in large part from their interlocking connections with the lives of all the others who share a particular psycho-spiritual tradition. It lets people realize that individual experience is not isolate but is part of a coherent and timeless whole, providing them with a means of personal empowerment and giving shape and direction to their lives.

The seamless web of human and nonhuman life, which is simultaneously the oral tradition and the thought of Old Spider Woman, is neither causal nor sequential. It is achronological and ahistorical, and it is simultaneously general and highly specific (Allen, 1986, p. 100).

To structure a story so that it is a seamless web, neither causal nor sequential, is difficult. "What's miraculous about a spider's web?" asked Mrs. Arable in E.B.White's Charlotte's Web. "Ever try to spin one?", asked Dr. Dorian (1952, p. 109).

In my spinning of this inquiry, I began to envision the familiar orb web, spun by the common garden spider, Araneus diadematus, as the hermeneutical circle of my inquiry. The garden spider begins its web by trailing its dragline and spinning the strong bridging line that will suspend the entire web, attaching it at either end. The bridging line in this inquiry is: how do our missionary kid (MK) stories and histories resonate in our lives now, in mid-life?

My personal story of swallowing the spider led me to Ananse and it is Ananse who provides the strong bridging line, the metaphor, for this orb web. But as I began to spin this story, to create the bridging line using the silk threads of my own experience, I knew I needed and wanted to make this a communal web. And so, just as the bridging line, which appears to be a single thread, is actually comprised of multiple strands, the framework for my story is threaded through with the stories of others like Jessica, Sam, and Ruth, our individual parts weaving the larger whole.

After the spider makes the bridging line strong, it begins to extend the frame, building a scaffold of mooring lines. Each of these lines is anchored by a glob of silk known as an "attachment disk" (Mason, 1999, p. 50). In my story, there are four attachment disks, what Jung would call "nodal points", those points in our unconscious especially charged with energy (Jacobi, 1959, p. 33). Python brings abuse and silence to con-
sciousness; leopard brings loneliness, loss of family, and the sense of disconnection; bees are paradoxical, belonging and not belonging, issues of identity and the gift of differences; and dwarf reveals inner wisdom and the child's spirit.

Once the frame is secure, the spider spins radial lines like the spokes on a wheel. These radial lines are the emergent MK themes.

Now the spider crawls to the center of the web and begins to spin in a circular pattern, working from the inside out to the largest circumference, using its legs to measure the spaces between each turn. The initial spiral is spun with dry silk. After this web is woven, the spider retraces her steps and eats the threads of the initial circular scaffold, replacing the dry silk with glue-like sticky threads. The old becomes the new, and, as each of the sticky threads is attached to one of the spokes, the spider snaps the line to spread the sticky coating into a series of evenly spaced bead-like globules, like a row of translucent pearls. As I went back and forth, back and forth, dialogically spinning circles of meaning across the framework of the MKs stories, securely attached to and informed by the Ananse story/attachment disks of python, leopard, bees and dwarf, I was able to see the structure of the whole inquiry, and to create a “hermeneutical circle” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 58).

Hermeneutics concerns itself with developing understanding through interpretation. The interpretation required to understand phenomena in the hermeneutical tradition is thought to have dialogic and dialectic qualities. Dialogic refers to the back and forth movement between the interpreter and the text, between the researcher and that being researched, for the purpose of seeking meaning.

Hermeneutics was once used primarily in Christian contexts: to understand a particular Bible passage, one was required to put it into context of the whole Bible. In his book Hermeneutics and Education (1992), Gallagher writes,

the meaning of the part is only understood within the context of the whole; but the whole is never given unless through an understanding of the parts. Understanding therefore requires a circular movement from parts to whole and from whole to parts.... The hermeneutical circle, therefore, is not a vicious circle. The more movement in this circle, the larger the circle grows, embracing the expanding contexts that throw more and more light upon the parts. (p. 59)

Spinning the threads of the web from the inside to the outside is a good image for the heuristic approach of this inquiry. What David Hunt calls “an inside-out approach” (1992, p. 3) means beginning with myself, as in this inquiry. In The Renewal of Personal Energy (1992), Hunt defines renewal as “the process of connecting with personal energy, of
releasing it, and transforming it into action” (p. 2). Darroch (1982) describes it this way, For it is the revelation of story which provides that which we were and that which we shall be. As our narratives are separated from and returned to our lives, so are our lives separated from and returned to our narratives. Our lives are pulled from our history in the telling of them. And so re-created. And so returned to our history and our future differently. (p. 108)
The Great Commission

It is 1963. My family and I have moved from Rosenfeld, Manitoba to Chicago, Illinois so that my parents can attend ‘mission school’. We are living in an apartment block and our family has two apartments because we are six people. There are two apartment buildings beside each other and they are filled with people learning to be missionaries. The apartments are next door to the seminary compound which has many old trees and old brick homes. My new friend Joan and I play underneath some enormous evergreen trees that are closely planted in a circle. We can go inside this circle of trees where there is a sheltered open space covered in a soft cushion of dried pine needles. No one can see us. It is our special hiding place.

My friend Joan’s father is a professor at the seminary. She has three sisters and no brothers, just like I do. We play a lot, mostly make-believe with our dolls. I am learning to ride a bike too. My dad holds the seat and runs beside me as I struggle to keep my bal-
ance. I ride on the ball-field beside our building and sometimes on the sidewalk, which has cracks, and then I fall.

One night we watch the Wizard of Oz on television. We watch it in the second apartment and my mother makes us T.V. dinners to eat. It is a special night. I am afraid of the "Wicked Witch of the West" and can't stay in the apartment when she comes on the T.V. I go anxiously back and forth between the two apartments, tense and scared for Dorothy, the lion, the Straw-man and the Tin-man.

One day they rush a T.V. into our classroom. My teacher is sobbing, "The President has been shot and he's dead." I don't really know anything about the President. But I am distressed that she is crying because I like her very much and I feel sad for her. I go to her house to see her just before we leave Chicago. She is working in her garden and I say "good-bye".

Just before Christmas I have my seventh birthday. I am overjoyed to receive the black-skinned doll for which I have longed. She has long black shiny hair and is made of hard brown plastic. She is beautiful and I name her Ruth. My parents are delighted by my joy for they have taken time from their missionary studies to search all over Chicago to find me this black doll. They tell me, "Do you know how hard it is to find a black doll in Chicago?"

The only black people I am conscious of are another missionary family from Tanzania. They have come to live in the building next to ours and they have a young son about four years old. He has never seen snow and I have never seen anyone who has never seen snow. I watch him from up high out of our apartment window. I watch him as he stands there with his brown eyes wide open, his head lifted up to the sky, and his pink tongue reaching out to taste the falling white flakes of snow.

After we live for the year in Chicago, we go back to Rosenfeld, our home for my first six years of life. Rosenfeld is a small farm town in southern Manitoba and my father has been the Lutheran pastor there. The parish of St. John's Lutheran Church and the Central Canada Synod of the Lutheran Church in America commissions us to go overseas as missionaries. I suppose, technically, they commission my parents or perhaps only my father. My sisters and I are wearing new dresses, with matching hats and gloves. We stand beside our parents at the front of the church. I feel the words of Jesus as the pastor proclaims His commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:16. The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
I am filled with these words. I feel this as my responsibility. I think God wants me too, and not just my parents.

Reading these words recently to my sister Ann, she remarks that she remembers this day too. "It brought us out of the ordinary", she tells me. "It made us important".

Lois and her doll, Ruth, springtime 1964
After the spider makes the bridging line strong, it begins to extend the frame, building a scaffold of mooring lines. (Kunkel, p. 27 of this manuscript)
So Ananse the Spider threw his silk web down, down, down, and scrambled back to earth. Aso, his wife, was cooking plaintain and peanuts in their hut. He told her all about Nana Nyame and what he must do to buy his stories. As they sat down to eat, he asked, "What is to be done that we may capture Onini the Python?"

Aso answered, "Cut a branch from a palm tree. Also cut some vine-creeper. Then take them to the river where Onini the Python lives."

Kwaku Ananse headed for the river. As he walked along, Ananse talked out loud. He was all by himself, but he pretended that Aso his wife was walking beside him.

"But it is longer than Onini," he said.

"It is not as long as Onini!"

"Tell the truth. It is longer, longer, very much longer than Onini."

Then Kwaku Ananse said, "There is Python lying near the river. Let us ask him ourselves."

Having overheard this imaginary argument, the Python inquired, "What is all this talk of Onini about?"

"It is I, Kwaku Ananse, and my wife Aso, who is arguing with me that this palm branch is longer than you. I say that it is not true."

Onini the Python thought for a moment and then said, "Come measure me with the palm branch. Then we shall see which of you is right."

Kwaku Ananse laid the palm branch down beside the Python's long body. "You must stretch yourself," said Ananse. Onini the Python did as he was told. Then Ananse took the vine and quickly wound it around Python and the palm branch. Thwitt! Thwitt! Thwitt! was the sound of the tying, till Ananse came to Python's head. Now certain that Onini could not escape, Kwaku Ananse stopped tying and shouted, "Ho! I shall take you up to Nana Nyame, the Sky God and receive his tales in exchange!"

Ananse was so pleased with himself that on the way home he spun the most elegant web.
In Ghana, Onini the python is known as hard to conquer. He can wrap himself around you and squeeze the life out. (A. Oppong-Boateng, personal communication, December 30, 1999)

Pythons are also called constrictors because they squeeze their prey to death. They wind themselves around the victim and tighten their coils.... They squeeze just enough to stop the victim's breathing and blood circulation.... Pythons swallow their prey whole, without chewing (World Book Encyclopedia, 1971, Vol. 15, p. 814).

The Shadow: man's weakness and unconsciousness, and thus a theriomorphic symbol of the Self in dreams.... the world of instinct, especially of the vital processes least accessible.... the most ancient phallic symbol.... deceit, craftiness, the Devil: the latter often has the apple of temptation in its mouth, he is the oracular serpent in every Paradise, coiling the apple-tree (de Vries, 1974, p. 412-413).

But what happens when the environment is not safe, or caring or nurturing? For some adult MKs, it has even been abusive. What about the adult MK who talks of his bitterness and resentment regarding "some of my early childhood horrors at the hands of missionary dorm parents"? When that happens in a system which - from a child's perspective - represents God, how will that child see God? (Van Reken, 1995, p. 432)

The missions family comprises missionary couples and their children as well as singles quasi-related not by blood or contractual ties but through roles assumed in a system with family-like functions and responsibilities. Because the missions community takes on the character of a quasi-family system, occurrence of sexual immorality carries with it similar components of incest experienced in natural families, including family dysfunction, reactions to exposure of sexual immorality, victim's self-blaming, power differential between victim and perpetrator, betrayal of victim's trust and secrecy (Kellogg, & Hunter, 1993, p. 45).
Not All Spiders Weave Webs

If spiders are caught in the open, some can exhibit aggressive displays in a last-ditch attempt to ward off the predators. The larger mygalomorph trapdoor spiders and tarantulas strike a formidable pose of aggression, rearing up on their hind legs and exposing their fangs. And many spiders, if threatened, will simply bite and use their venom on the intruder. (Mason, 1999, p. 95)

Tarantulas are well known but widely misunderstood. Contrary to popular belief, most tarantulas do not have venom that is dangerous to humans....The misconceptions surrounding tarantulas actually start with their name, which comes from the village of Taranto, Italy, where, during the Middle Ages, the bite of a spider was blamed for the disease tarantism. Victims of the disease were said to suffer everything from pain, swelling, and nausea to delirium, priapism, and exhibitionism. The popular cure was to perform a frenzied “tarantula dance” for a prolonged period. This dance has survived today as the tarantella. (Ibid., p. 6)

We live on the mission station near the town of Totota. It isn’t a very large mission station. Ringed around an air-strip/ball-field are our houses, the school and dorms for the Liberian students who come to the mission school, and other buildings for the Kpelle language literacy centre. Some of the missionaries teach at the school and some do translations of the Bible into several of the twenty-eight dialects spoken in Liberia. My parents live here so that they can study Kpelle because my dad is going to be the pastor in a Kpelle area of Liberia.

All of us are home, my three sisters, and I, and our parents. Our house is painted chalk white. It is surrounded by red flowering hibiscus. Purple and scarlet bougainvillia vines grow up the side of the house. The driveway is framed by bushes with yellow bell-like flowers. In our yard there are trees: mango, guava, and papaya trees. Our house is on an angle, facing into the mission station. There are no other houses behind us and only one house on one side of us. Around our house is a bit of yard and then there is ’the bush’, the Liberian rainforest, a tangle of vines and tall, tiered trees that is home to monkeys, snakes and many poisonous reptilian creatures. Behind our house is an enormous
balsa tree. We built a tree-house in its low and inviting branches.

My three sisters and I, and my dad and mum are hanging out at the front of the house, beside the veranda. As we horse around, a huge, hairy, black tarantula falls off the roof and lands on my dad’s head! We girls scream and jump around. We believe that tarantulas are poisonous and we have been warned about them. My dad grabs a broom and beats it to death. This tarantula is very big: its body is almost the size of my father’s fist and, when you add in those thick hairy spider-legs, it is huge and evil looking.

This is what I believe is my dad’s spider story. There are other versions. So is this my dad’s spider story or my family’s spider story? Or is this one of Nyame, the Sky-God’s stories?
Family Versions of the Tarantula Story

Dad's Version

"IT WAS JUST BEFORE SUNRISE, about 7:30 A.M. I was the first one awake and I was meandering down the hallway towards the kitchen to make coffee. Just as I was turning from the hallway, I noticed a large black thing at the top of the screen door by the front steps of the house. Looking closely I could see that it was a very large, very black and hairy spider, a tarantula. It was the size of my fist. I hesitated there, wondering what to do now. We had been told that a tarantula's venom was poisonous. You girls were home, still asleep.

I got the broom from the kitchen and I went out the kitchen door and around to the front steps. Using the broom handle, I pinned the spider against the screen. I could feel it fighting back. In my hands and arms, I could feel its vibrations all the way down the broom handle. I felt so amazed at its strength and how vigourously it struggled. We both struggled: I to kill it and it to live. I had to use my strength to squish it.

After it lay dead on the ground, I felt awful. I grieved. It had struggled so hard, with such fierceness. Why hadn't I just caught it somehow and released it back into the bush behind our house? We were just so new in Liberia. I responded to protect my girls."

Mum's Version

WHAT MY MOTHER RECOLLECTS is as follows: "Your Dad and I are at the front of the house, just the two of us. You girls are not there. You are having a rest. Suddenly, the tarantula falls down from the roof. It scared us and we felt afraid for you and we wanted to protect you. At that time, we believed that a tarantula had poisonous venom. So your Dad killed it. After you girls woke up from your rest, we showed it to you. I don't recall any other missionaries seeing it. Later on, Dad and I felt embarrassed at our terror, after we learned that tarantulas may not be so poisonous, certainly not deadly. We decided that next time, if there is a next time, that Dad will just carry it off and release it back into the bush."
Mary’s Version

Mary tells me that she remembers this event vividly. “It was just dad and me by the veranda. The tarantula was on the top corner of the screen door. I watched Dad knock it off with a broom handle. I could see the broom handle vibrate as the spider bit the handle when Dad was trying to squish it. I'll never forget seeing the tarantula alive and then seeing it dead. It was terrifyingly exciting.”

Elisabeth’s Version

“I remember that someone saw the tarantula, but not who. Dad came and got a long stick to get the tarantula out of the drain pipe. We were all excited and a little spooked, because it was so poisonous. We were just getting accustomed to creepy crawlies being so available. Remember the shiny green wall lizards? Then Dad squished the tarantula and we all looked at its hairy body and legs. Then he took it away.”

Ann’s Version

“Yes, I remember the incident. We have recalled it from time to time. It’s part of our family legend. We were brand new to the country, to the deep, dark, continent of Africa. I’m not sure what time of year it was - was it before we went to the hostel or at a time when we were home on break? I think it was just we girls playing around outside or on the veranda. I don’t know who saw it first but when it was discovered, we were horrified and in great fear. Snakes, scorpions and tarantulas were to be feared. We yelled and screamed and Dad came. Did he come from inside the house or from the thatched palavar hut where he was learning the language? He got a broom. The tarantula was in a corner at the top of the screened veranda — was it inside or outside — and Dad used the broom handle to squash the tarantula. However it wouldn’t kill easily. Dad said he could feel the vibrations all the way down the broom handle. I don’t know what was done with it after it was killed. All I know was that Dad saved us.”
My Wet Bed

Furtively I pull up my sheets and make my bed. My sheets are wet again! I don't want the housemother, Aunt Bertha, to know. She's already mad at me about how often I wet my bed. She checks my sheets, and sighs, and rips them off and tells me to take them to the laundry room, and do I know how much extra laundry I am making. I don't know why I wet my bed. Except that it's so dark in the hallway and the bathroom is right at the end. Between me and the bathroom could be anything! Nanette already had a scorpion in her bed! Right in her bed! The hallway is so dark at night that I can't see anything. The hallway is screened in on one side and the night is ebony black and alive with the sounds of creatures. Alien creatures that can bite and poison you. Not like the crickets I'm used to. Even the trees seem alive and like they might get me through the screens. I'm not going down that hallway. If I were at home, I wouldn't wet my bed.

Aunt Bertha took me to the doctor and they gave me capsules for bedwetting. The capsules are white and they have liquid inside them. I can't swallow pills, I just gag, so I chew these yucky capsules. They taste awful. Aunt Bertha makes me take them in front of her so I have to take them.

I wish they'd put a night-light on in the hallway. I hope Aunt Bertha doesn't check my bed again today.

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3 "It was reported that many of the younger children developed nighttime bedwetting at Mamou. Many were subsequently punished and/or humiliated and this, in all probability only compounded the problem" (Final Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry to the Board of Managers of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, November 15, 1997, p. 47).
RUTH REMEMBERS SNAKES AND SCORPIONS at her boarding school. “We always had to check our shoes before we put them on and pay attention to those things. It was just the routine. In the village where my parents lived, we had lots of snakes too. I just grew up with poisonous snakes.”
Hostel Life

First of all I must describe the hostel. It is something like a boarding school, but not quite. At my hostel we only sleep, eat and live there. Our school is about a mile away. The hostel is a hundred and sixty miles from the capital city in Liberia, West Africa. It is situated on a Lutheran Mission called Phebe. On Phebe station there is a hospital, a nursing school and one hundred families living there. We visit our parents once a month on weekends, over Easter and Christmas. Our school ends June 14th and starts September 3rd.

Our hostel has thirty rooms, twelve bedrooms, three bathrooms, huge living and dining rooms, and large kitchen and laundry rooms. In Liberia, men from eighteen to thirty apply for jobs. Usually their wages are twenty-five to thirty dollars a month. The hostel hired seventeen men. Two laundry men, three cooks, two men to dust and clean up, and ten yardmen. The hostel had twenty-five people last year. There were thirteen girls, ten boys and two hostel parents.

Today is Monday and another school day. Yesterday all the kids came back from a weekend at home. At seven o’clock the bus leaves for school. Our school is located on the Cuttington College campus near the town of Suakoko. It is called the Campus School, and run by the Episcopal Church for missionary kids and some Liberian children. It is a small school with three schoolrooms and an office. It is a pretty building. There are pretty red flowers in the front yard.

There are forty-three students in our school. There are five teachers. We start out the day with a bible reading. Sometimes the kids get to choose a bible verse to read and sometimes we’ll choose a verse from the Song of Solomon, just to get the teachers upset! We continue the day with Math, English, Social studies, recess (where we eat a snack) and maybe Art or P.E (physical education). One year it seemed that we had peanut butter and mint jelly sandwiches every day. I think someone donated a case of mint jelly to the hostel. It doesn’t taste great with peanut butter. Peanut butter and mint jelly sandwiches are hard to trade too.

Our schoolrooms are divided into seven classrooms. We have the same teacher for every subject. Our school goes from grades one to eight. We have fourteen children in our third and fourth grade room.

*School report written by Lois Kunkel, Grade Three (1965)*
The Song of Solomon is a book of the Old Testament. It is a collection of about twenty-five lyric poems or fragments of poems of human love and courtship such as would be sung at weddings. The Song dates from about the third century B.C. but its material is much more ancient. The first verses give a flavour of its text: "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant...." *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1977).
The Campus School, located on the Cuttingto Campus at Suakoto, Liberia.

My fourth grade class (Lois second from right, front row) shared a teacher with another grade.
Phebe Hostel living room.

Meal time at the Phebe Hostel.
Playing volleyball after rest period, Phebe Hostel.

The Hostel family, 1966
The Hostel family, 1967.

The Hostel family, spring 1968.
How I Like the Hostel

We have a routine at the hostel and it is regulated by the bell. The bell rings in the morning at 6:15. We eat breakfast from 6:30 to 7:00. Then Uncle Ian drives us to school in our school bus. Our school is in a nearby town where the Cuttington College is. At 1:00 school is over and Uncle Ian comes and picks us up.

After school the bell rings for dinner at 1:30. Then at 2:00 we ring a bell for rest period. At 3:00 the bell rings and our rest period ends. After rest period, we have study hall and do our homework. Then we can go out and play.

Sometimes my friend June and I go walking out in the orange grove to our favourite hill. The hill isn’t very big but it has a huge orange tree right beside it. We’ll sit there and talk awhile and then we’ll go and play volley ball with some of the girls.

The bell rings at 6:00 for supper, which lasts to 6:30. We ring a bell at 7:00 for devotions, which takes half an hour to an hour. Usually one of the kids reads the bible and we sing. We love to sing. Sometimes one of the house-parents will read us a story. If we really like the story, we beg for more than one chapter.

Then we take our showers. Each night we need to take a shower because we get sweaty and dirty during the day. At 8:00, everyone is supposed to be in bed for lights out. Sometimes we sneak around after lights out visiting other girls in the dorm. Some of the more daring girls, like my sister Elisabeth, sneak down the boys dorm, but I’ve never done that. We’re not allowed to go down each other’s dorms. I’d rather read my book by the light in the closet.

On Saturday we get to sleep till 7:00. Then the bell rings and we get up, make our beds, eat breakfast, and then clean our rooms. We have choir from 9:00 to 10:00. We have dinner, and rest period, and then I supervise a little sewing class. We play after sewing class.

On Sunday we sleep later too. We have to make our beds before eating breakfast. After breakfast we clean our room a little bit. Then we get our money and go to church.

School report submitted by Ann Kunkel, Grade Five, October 28, 1966
Ruth tells of the bells at her boarding school, Mamou Alliance Academy, in West Africa.

"I think we woke up about 6:30 A.M. with the bell. There were at least thirteen bells throughout the day."
Years and years and years later we tell each other of our experience. My three sisters and I sit around a restaurant table under a hanging macrame lamp. We're having supper near our family cabin, in the Manitoba resort town of Sandy Hook. I am asking them to remember the time I was sexually molested. I am insisting on this conversation. I am insisting on telling them.

I tell them of the house-father coming into my room after lights out. He would make the rounds from room to room, saying "Goodnight", ensuring that we were settling into sleep. Sometimes the house-mother came to do these things but whether she was busy with their own children or he had defined this to her as his job, I do not know. There are many things I do not know about how this routine was viewed by his wife.

I roomed with Kim. My bed was by the window then. Our room had no bunk beds, Kim's bed was across the room by the wall. He would say a quick goodnight to Kim, and then he would sit on my bed and rub my chest. He would rub my tiny budding

Lois (on right) and her sisters attending a wedding.

Silence is Golden?
acorn breasts. This happened every night for a long time.

Then one night when the house-mother had gone to Monrovia, the capital city, to buy supplies, he came into my room to carry me to his bed. He woke me up. Still heavy with sleep, I groggily went along. I can still feel the moment of terror when I really wake up in his bed, and begin to what is to happen. I can still feel the physical sensation of deciding to pass from consciousness, to disappear.

When it is morning, he wakes me up and tells me to go back to my room before he rings the bell to start the hostel day. He doesn’t want anyone to see me go back to my room.

He watches me as I go down the hallway of the girl’s dorm and through the door into my room.

Only then does he ring the bell.

I am wearing the lavender nightgown with the lace trim that my mother sewed for me. I am ten years old.

That evening as I wait for the supper bell to ring, as a few of us are gathered at the bulletin board, he comes over to joke with us. My whole being feels heavy and numb, like a limb that has fallen to sleep. I can’t smile. I can’t joke. I can’t believe that he is acting so normal. I do not want to be near him.

We are in a public place, my sisters and I. As so often happens, they are caught off guard by my emotional honesty, and especially by my lack of concern for the fact that we are, after all, in a restaurant. But, one by one, as if they can’t resist, they respond to me. One of my sisters remembers that when these house-parents came to visit us when we first moved back to Winnipeg that I told her not to leave me alone with him. She didn’t know why; she just did what I asked. She also tells us that she knew he did this to another girl in the dorm. Another girl who had breasts. Her room-mate. My sister protected herself by wearing a thick layer of noxzema on her face at night so she would look and smell repulsive and keep him away from her.

Another sister admitted that he rubbed her chest too, as well as her back. It felt soothing to her, parental. She didn’t feel abused by this experience.

Another sister tells us that she would lie awake at night while he was in their room. She roomed with two other girls and he rubbed the full-breasted chest of one of her room-mates. She said that she lay awake, silent and furious, fists at her sides, “ready to plow him” if he should touch her. She thought we all stayed silent at night because it was lights out and we were good children.

She never talked to her room-mates about this. None of us talked to our room-mates about this. Only now are we talking to each other.
The Fangs of Fear

I feel my weariness. It's behind my eyes. It's around my heart. I am crying with weariness and frustration. Another sleepless night. Another night with fear. All that old fear - old, old, old fear! I am frustrated that it doesn't go away. This old fear that still can haunt me. It grips me like a spider on its hunt for prey, sinking its venomous fangs into me, paralyzing me. I lie awake worrying about intruders, and my safety, hyper alert to every sound. And now, now I am responsible for the safety of my baby son, Matthew.

He came in the night. He woke me from my sleep to take me down the dorm hallway and into his apartment. I stumbled in my sleepiness, in my purple flowered nightgown. He molested me in his bed and, in the morning, just before he rang the bell to wake up the hostel, he sent me back alone down the hallway to my room. I felt entombed all that day. I can remember the feeling of that paralyzing physical heaviness.

My face is tired now, my face feels so sad. My eyes are tired with tears and lack of sleep. My neck is heavy with the effort of holding my head.

I am so angry that I can still feel this way. That I can still feel this fear and have it grip me so fiercely! I don't want this feeling in my life with Matthew!

I will be prey no longer.

This is what I pray.
Lois at the time of the abuse.
The Age of Enlightenment

The moment of enlightenment came for me at age ten. It comes at the precise point in time when I realize that what I am holding in my hand is a penis. A large, engorged, hairy, adult penis. At least it feels large in my ten-year-old hand.

It doesn’t arrive right away, this moment of awareness. I hold this thing in my hand for a moment, or several, not registering what it is, not having any experience otherwise to know. How I arrive at knowing what it is, I don’t know. The moment of clarity comes cataclysmically, shock waves reverberating in my body and up to my head as my brain registers.

My brain registers this thing in my hand as a penis. I can’t cope with this knowledge. This is not expected. This is knowledge too overwhelming and frightening for me. I thought I was safe. I expected to be safe. I am not safe and I am frightened.

In a split second, I decide to go away, not to be present anymore. My brain saves me from this moment and mercifully blanks out. My body responds by passing out, or this is what it feels like. I am not consciously here anymore. I am not consciously here anymore for a very long time.

The moment of enlightenment passes. It passes into darkness. It passes into darkness where it stays dissociated, until I am ready to hold its knowledge.

Dissociation is like the spider’s ability to autotomize. When a predator grabs a spider by one leg, that spider, to save its life, will instinctually amputate its wounded or caught leg. Young spiders can re-grow legs that work almost like new while mature spiders must do without those lost limbs. Autotomy comes in handy to escape tricky situations (Lovett, 1991, p. 20).

5 If spiders are threatened, they suddenly drop to the ground on the silk line. Many spiders pull then pull their legs close to their bodies and “play dead” in a behaviour called catalepsy. When all is clear, the spiders will ascend their silk climbing rope (Mason, 1999, p. 97).
Halting a Lion

We sit in Agnes' psychotherapy office, the three of us missionary kids and her. I have invited us here to participate in a day using the expressive arts as the medium of our sharing. I am the only one who knows each one. I know them by their real names and by their pseudonyms. We look at each other with eyes that are both eager and scared, curtains that we are peaking through. Ruth begins. She begins by showing us a picture of her daughter, by telling us of her daughter's recent birthday, a birthday that makes her the same age Ruth was when she left home to live at her church-run boarding school in West Africa. Ruth says,

I wanted to plan a wonderful birthday party for my daughter and instead I dropped into a body-numbing depression. It took me a few days to realize that what I was feeling was depression, my mind had gone so blank. Once I had this awareness, I roused myself into action and her birthday party was a success.

Ruth introduces herself to Jessica and Agnes, telling them a small morsel of her story: "I was born in West Africa.... The experiences of my boarding school are horrendous.... I don't tell people I am an MK. I am so ashamed of coming from an evangelical church." She tells some things and I add a few more tid-bits because I want to. We pause. We breathe, taking in the telling and the rustling/ruffling of our own recollections stirred by her telling.

Jessica reaches into her purse for a photo of her son to show and to tell. He is a baby, a toddler. Jessica begins to tell us about her journey of becoming a mother. "I didn't think I would be able to be a mother. I believed for a long time that I wouldn't have the capacity to be a good parent. Therapy helped me clear the space to see that I did want the experience of being a mother." Jessica tells about her early life in South America, about all the connections and dis-connections of both her family life and her schooling experiences. She tells us of the enormous healing that has happened with her own mother since the birth of her son. There is so much to tell. We are listening with our hearts and we resonate in our cellular bodies with her telling. Like spiders, we are communicating with our sensory perception.

My turn. What to tell. I am humming with places of connection to their stories. I, too, begin with my son, my special precious son, who at this very moment is at home playing with Jessica's son. Children. Our children. There is something significant about
children in the telling of this story. Ourselves as children and the healing we are suffering because we have our own children and with them we are learning about ourselves. We also tell each other of our spouses, our husbands. Relationships where we have, each in our own way, felt loved unconditionally, respectfully. And within that circle of belovedness, we have bravely taken up our journeys of self-awareness.

I am telling them about being at the hostel at thirteen years of age:
I was the oldest child at the hostel and the only one in grade eight. The house-father became very ill and the family had to return to the United States. After that our parents took turns staying at the hostel for a few days each until the end of the school year. Because I was the eldest, the kids turned to me for comfort and security. There were many nights when I would hold crying girls. Girls lonely for the house-parents who had left and lonely for their own parents. The parents didn't know our routines, so I became the one who organized things and told them how things were done. There I was, a young, white, blonde girl telling African men how to prepare the laundry or meals. My grades at school suffered. No one asked me how I was feeling, not even my parents. All the parents praised me for my competency and grown-upness. I roomed by myself at the time and after I had helped with lights out, I would go to my room and quietly play a Mary Hopkins record and cry into the darkness. I felt so alone.

I feel the listening of Jessica and Ruth and Agnes. I feel their eyes upon mine, their open faces receiving me. We can taste the morsels of our shared experiences. Communion. Spinning silk, weaving connection.

Agnes invites us to move into the other side of the room where she has art materials set up: paints, clay, pastels. Hesitantly we choose something. Ruth chooses paint and a fat paint brush. Jessica looks around and around and chooses paint. I sit on the floor with pastels and paper. Each of us inside the web of our own experience, orb, funnel, scaffold, intent on expressing it with the art medium we have chosen. Agnes moves around, prodding, provoking, containing. Ruth makes sounds and beats at her paper with her fat paint brush. Jessica works quietly, her energy intense and focused. I move from pastels to adding plasticine to my picture, accentuating the teeth of the smile that covers the paper. Our aloneness is connected with the task of making art and so it is not aloneness that is separate, like so much of the aloneness of our childhoods. Like the Mexican colonial spider (Metepeira incrassata), we construct our individual webs within a common framework, communicating by the vibrations of our spinning (Mason, 1999, p. 71).
Our collective consciousness returns to the room, to our present time. Jessica completes her family portrait. Ruth draws her daughter at school. I sit with the clay sculpture I have made, wondering how it has come about and what it means. It is a good time to stop, to pause, to eat lunch. We create a picnic on the floor and chew bagels and slurp soup. Sharing bread is so biblical, I think, now, but not then.

Hungryly we chew the morsels of experiences that we have given each other along with our food. Emerging from our separate webs we tell of our artful inquiry, creating a common web of the MK themes that we share in varying styles of intensity.

There are some species of spiders who live together in relatively peaceful colonies. These social spiders may construct common webs and share their prey communally. Other species spin their webs individually yet within a common framework. "When spider webs unite, they can halt a lion" says a Ethiopian proverb (Mason, 1999, p. 68).

Ananse is well pleased with us. We have spun our stories inside his silken web, strengthening it. With him, we continue to capture Onini the Python.

Some weeks later, Ruth sends me an e-mail message. She has been reflecting on this day and how it is lingering with her. She writes, "I went into the day of art therapy enveloped in a fog of pain. When I am in it, the fog feels eternal. I do not know when it began and I certainly do not know how to move out of it. So I fear I will remain there forever.

When I participated in the day of art therapy, my daughter had been in Grade One for three months. My abuse began in Grade One. I felt abandoned by my parents to dorm parents who were cruel. My Grade One teacher was sadistic. I was enveloped in a fog of pain.

I drew my teacher with her wide mouth. My thinking began to have focus and I began to feel the rage and hate of the very young child that I had been. I stabbed my teacher. And I stabbed her. And I stabbed her. Almost without shame, I stabbed her.

And then the fog was gone.

I began to draw what I would have liked for the young Grade One student that I was. But I could not fill in the picture. I still have not been able to. But for now, I am all right about not knowing. It is enough that my Grade One teacher is out of my head."

Spinning into this web of connection, Jessica sent this e-mail message about the day:

"I can't remember if I mentioned to you that I shared one of my pictures with my
parents when they were here at Christmas. I wasn’t planning on doing this, it happened kind of spontaneously. I was talking to them on the day they left to go home and told them of the experience of doing the art therapy session with you. I decided to show them the picture of the little child and explained what the picture meant to me. I even had the guts to be honest and tell them that the black hands represented them sending me away to school.

It wasn’t so bad talking to them about it, although I don’t think I have ever been as open and honest about the negative aspects of being an MK, and being away from home. Although I have seen them since, we haven’t talked about it further. My parents do a pretty good job of hiding their feelings, especially when it comes to their children, so I’m not sure how they really felt about my sharing my thoughts and feelings with them. It was somewhat cathartic for me to be so open with them, though. But I was also aware of hurting them by telling them the truth.

I shared all the artwork I did with my husband and he expressed the energy and emotion he felt in my work. He was impressed by the images and colours I used, so much so, that he gave me an artist’s kit for Christmas. He told me it was something I “needed”. It meant a lot to have my husband acknowledge the importance of that day and the expression of my feelings in that form.

I really felt energized and very excited when I came home that day we did the session. It was like opening a door to my soul, to be able to express my feelings in that way, and in such an open, caring and understanding atmosphere.

I also think that it has contributed to my current therapy, in making me more aware of my feelings. I feel like I am at the verge of something, what, I don’t know, and it is very scary. I have become aware of how dissociated from my body I have been. I am really uncomfortable in my skin right now, but I don’t really know where it is coming from. How does this relate to you and the work you did on the art day and your work on your thesis?

I also want to say to you how much I am in awe of the work you did that day. It literally sent chills up my spine. It was so powerful and really spoke to me. I think it startled me, but it also evoked a physical, visceral response in me. It was thrilling, horrifying, sensuous, frightening, fascinating to me.”
Lois and her sisters at the St. Paul's River, Liberia.

Capturing Onini the Python

I am sitting on the floor of Agnes' psychotherapy office. I am sitting beside a lump of clay and I take some and squeeze it in my hands, warming it up. Ruth is talking about lanterns and candles. She is telling Agnes about when she lived in a mud hut with no electricity.

Listening, candles enter my imagination and I remember the time my family lived with no electricity. We lived in the bush, nearby the great and mighty St. Paul's River, the only people for miles. The St. Paul's River was home to hippopotamus and crocodiles. We would fish there with our dad, and during the dry season, when the river dried up, we would hike inside its dry bed. The night would descend abruptly at six o'clock, no dusk to give us warning. We would light the kerosene lanterns, eating and reading by lantern light. At Christmas, we had real candles on our tree - magical!

I loved living in that place. My whole family loved living in that place. It was a place...
of grace for us as a family. A space of our own. There were no other missionaries to interfere
with our way of being. There were no Liberians nearby that we needed to be missionaries for.

I begin to shape a candle with the clay.

I roll the clay, pulling it up into a candle shape. I am trying to shape a flame at the top
of the candle. I look at the clay candle. It looks nothing like a candle. It looks very much like a
penis. Scorched, I pull my hands away. It stands there on the floor, a foot-high penis-candle.

I grab the clay and smash it. I do not want to make a penis. I do not want to remem-
ber a penis in my childhood. I roll the clay around in my hands. I don't know what to make.
I am feeling blanker and blanker. My mind is empty too. I roll the clay around in my hands,
my inner voice soothing my blank space, soothing my remembered young one with her recol-
lection of this penis. "There, there. It's okay to be blank. It's okay. Breathe. Mmmmm. Just
be. Just be." Listening, my hands shape a bowl, a container with high walls. I sit holding it.
"What in the hell am I doing? What in the hell am I feeling?" I don't even know where I am
anymore, except in physical space. I am here and I am back there. I am big and I am small. I
say that I am okay and I feel scared. My therapist-self says, "Follow your process."

I hold that clay bowl smoothing its sides. As I do this I look around the room at
Ruth and Jessica, at the paintings they are making. I see some marbles and I get up and take
one - a shiny, silver one. I put it in the container. I sit back down on the floor by the clay. I
feel stupid. I feel like I don't know what I am doing. My chest feels blank. My brain feels
blank. My inner voice murmurs again, soothing me. I begin again with a lump of clay.

Again the candle I am making becomes penis-like and this time I just let it be. I
shape the penis-candle, giving it balls. I exaggerate its shape and size. I shape my child's
hand and I curl it around the penis. I realize that I am holding my breath. I release it
and breathe in and out. My ears are tingling. I feel that moment when my hand felt his
penis. My ten-year-old child's hand holding his large, engorged penis.

Surprisingly a sense of play washes over me. Ananse has arrived. My brain is lit
up by his energy and mischievously says to me "the age of enlightenment!"
Spontaneously, I stick a purple feather in the top of the penis, rendering it ridiculous.
After the spider makes the bridging line strong, it begins to extend the frame, building a scaffold of mooring lines. Each of these lines is anchored by a glob of silk known as an "attachment disk" (Kunkel, p. 27 of this manuscript).
When Kwaku Ananse reached home, he told Aso what had happened, adding, "Now there are the Mmboro the Bees to catch."

Aso, his wife said, "Find a calabash bowl, and fill it up with water. Then go to the forest."

Ananse did as she suggested, carrying the heavy calabash into the bush. Soon he heard the sound of Mmoboro the buzzing Bees, hanging in the still air. He climbed a nearby tree and sprinkled water on them. The rest of the water he poured over himself. Then he covered his head with a plantain leaf.

Kwaku Ananse spoke to Mmoboro the Bees. "The rains have come. Perhaps, you had better shelter yourselves in this calabash bowl of mine so the rains will not drown you. Can't you see that I cover myself with this plantain leaf to keep dry?"

The Bees replied, "We are grateful to you, Kwaku Ananse. Grateful to you." And they all flew into the calabash bowl and disappeared. Buzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Suddenly Kwaku Ananse slapped the wet plantain leaf over the mouth of the bowl. "Ah, Ha!" said Ananse. "I have captured you. Now you too will serve as payment for the stories that I seek from Nana Nyame!"

Kwaku Ananse spun a splendid silky path back to the village.
The sum of the characteristics taken from all cultural traditions indicates that the bee was regarded everywhere as a choleric creature, that is a creature endowed with the element of Fire.... The bee cleansed with fire and nourished with honey; its sting burned and its glittering form cast light (Chevalier, & Gheerbrent, 1996, pp. 79-80).

.... It is this dual dimension — collective and individual, material and spiritual — which enriches their symbolism as a whole wherever it occurs (Ibid., p. 79).

Alienation seems to be one of those deplorable by-products of being a child of missionaries, growing up in another culture, and then being transplanted into the country of one's parents, which is, in essence, a foreign land to him or her. The word 'alienation' itself is an atrocious word, which speaks of isolation, rootlessness, not belonging, and loneliness. Culture Shock has its own etiology or cause, symptoms, and cure. It is precipitated by anxiety that naturally results from losing all of one's familiar signs and symbols upon reentering a new culture. Culture Shock may be likened to a kind of disease that affects people who have been suddenly transplanted into some new, strange country.... This sense of alienation, of not belonging, carries with it a mixture of feelings such as doubt, insecurity, loneliness, fear, anger, and detachment.... A sense of alienation derived from a sense of rootlessness is perhaps the greatest and most difficult issue with which children of missionaries must cope (Walters, 1991, pp. 75-77).

Children of missionaries are often the unsung heroes of the missionary enterprise. Some of them emigrate to new lands and languages; others are born in new lands among languages different from that of their parents. The adjustments these children must make are varied and challenging (Beck & Hubbard, 1987, p. 291).
Soon after we arrive in Totota, one of the older students at the school, Daniel, comes by at night to help with the supper meal and the dishes. I like talking to him. We have rowdy jousting debates and teasing word play. Often I help him by drying the dishes. I am seven and a half years old; he might be about fifteen. I am a blonde, blue-eyed, white German-Canadian girl from the prairies; he is a tall, black, Liberian boy going to the mission school.

One night as Daniel washes dishes, and I dry them, the debate that had hitherto been teasing becomes deadly serious. Passionately, he tells me that one day, Liberians will take all the white people and put them into oil-drums and float them out to sea. I am familiar with oil-drums; we missionaries pack our belongings into oil-drums to send them by ship from our homes to the mission field.

Daniel tells me about freedom and oppression and slavery and colonialism. He is Kpelle, raised in the bush, and his people have been there from time immemorial. Daniel tells me that many Liberians who live in the capital city, Monrovia, along the coast, are descendants of the freed slaves, who came back to Africa from the United States in the year 1822. These freed slaves, called “Americo-Liberians” are the governing and business class in Liberia (The World Book Encyclopedia, 1971, Vol. 12, p. 207).

Daniel thinks that some Americo-Liberians know less than I do about Liberia, never having travelled into the interior or ‘upcountry’. They have never talked with someone like Daniel. Daniel says that people in the West think that Liberia is free but actually, it is “controlled by the United States”. He says this is obvious by the fact that you can use American money interchangeably with Liberian money.

I am stunned and I argue with him. He is going to take Me and put Me in an oil drum and float Me out into the sea? This is a totally new concept. I don’t understand it except emotionally. My friend would take Me and put Me out to sea simply because I am white! If I am recollecting correctly, I think that I knew somehow, somewhere within me, even then, that he was talking about some larger truth. Yet, in that moment, it was about him and me. I think I thought that he would make an exception for Me.

That night and for some months after, I dream about floating on the sea, bobbing on the waves in an old oil drum under a strong, sunny sky, waiting to be rescued.
We four sisters make kites with our mum. Each of us creates our own diamond-shaped kite out of blank newsprint. We make the frame with sticks collected from our yard. We draw our own pictures on them with crayons and paint. When we are done we run out to the ballfield/airstrip to fly them. I’m not sure if I have the same enthusiasm for flying my kite, as does my sister Elisabeth. We have to run a lot to get the kites into the air and keep them there.

Up high there is a good wind and it doesn’t take long for the kites to reach the end of their strings. Elisabeth’s kite is flying the best. Probably, she is the most determined to get her kite up and to fly it as far as it can go. That is Elisabeth for you! One by one, Mary, Ann, and I bring our kites down, take off our strings and tie them onto Elisabeth’s kite. Her kite is flying higher and farther so that we can hardly see it anymore, except that Elisabeth holds onto the taut string, so we know that it is out there.

As we stand watching her kite become a tiny speck in the sky, villagers begin to stream onto the mission station. They are running or walking fast and they are following her kite. Elisabeth’s kite has flown as far as the village and the people don’t know what it is. So they come, following the line of the string, and what they find are four little, blonde, blue-eyed white girls, ages six to ten years old and their mum, holding onto a kite string and gazing up at the sky.

All of us stand there, gazing at the sky, the sky of Nyame.

I know now that ballooning is like kite flying for spiders. It is the way of traveling for young spiders.

Ballooning usually takes place on warm, rather than windy days, when young spiders take advantage of thermal physics and take a ride on air rising from the warming earth. To begin their flight, the spiders usually climb onto a nearby promontory - a blade of grass or a fence post, for example. Next, they tilt their abdomen upwards and squeeze out a strand of silk, which is drawn upwards by the air currents, much as a kite string is. When the pull is strong enough for the young spiders to float in the air, they release their grip and take to the wind (Mason, 1999, p. 66).

A young spider may travel hundreds of miles by ballooning and in this way, they pioneer new habitats. We girls, too, had flown through the air, travelling hundreds of miles to this new land.

Now, my Ananse self chuckles that ballooning was a part of my world, part of what we were doing that day.
The Line

I hear the rain before I see it from my window at St. John's Anglican Convent, Toronto, where I sit writing at my computer. I hear the birds cawing as they rush to find shelter. I am trying to find words and ways to describe what I hear, how I know it is rain. It is rain that is full in its sound, not pitter-patter. The heavens have opened and the world is filled with the rush of rain. A waterfall, and yet I hear individual drops. They splash and bounce on the pavement and on the roof. At the window, I hear the collective sound of individual drops.

I am transported back to Totota. Elisabeth and I are out playing on the ball-field, which is also the airstrip. The rain comes fast and heavy, only it is a most peculiar rain. It is raining on only half of the ball-field! We stand with our bodies half in the rain and half out. There is this line drawn from above and the rain doesn't cross it. One part of the ball-field is drenched by the driving rain, on the other, the brilliant sun shines on dusty dry ground. Elisabeth and I move back and forth across this heavenly drawn line. In Africa, everything seemed unusual and perfectly usual.

This line seems so symbolic now of the way we had to continuously move in and out of two cultures: the culture of home and hostel, the culture of Liberia and Canada/United States, the Christian paradox of being in the world but not of the world. Perhaps it is Ananse spinning the thread of his silk dragline.
The Last Day

It is early in the day, I'm up with the sun. It's my very last day in Liberia. It is my Very Last Day in Liberia. Soon, my parents, my sister Mary, my brother Paul, and I will go in the mission van to the Robertsfield Airport and leave forever. I have been thinking about leaving for awhile, looking at Everything with my whole Being, smelling, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling. Willing myself to remember. Wanting to remember Everything in my bones so that I never forget.

I walk around the small coconut palm tree grove behind the mission house where I have lived for two years while going to high school. The coconut trees lead me down to the fence where the beach starts. I look through the wired fence that surrounds the mission compound to the thundering surf of high tide, listening, smelling, crying. I have my camera and I take some pictures of the sea. This same sea in which I swam almost every day for two years. This untameable sea, with its fierce undertow, that terrified me lots of times when I swam.

I am sick again with strep throat. My throat is infected, it is white with pus and it is difficult to swallow. I have a fever. Being sick has affected the way that I can say goodbye to people. I haven't had much energy for visiting friends and my mother has been irritatingly restrictive with me. I am more sick with sadness and regret. I am filled with things I want to say to this friend, or that, and I don't, because I don't know how or even what to say. I am aswirl with emotions that have no words and with unexpressed words.
I am having a hard time receiving their gifts and believing my friends' words of love and friendship, and that they mean Me.

The night before my family and I had eaten dinner at the Smiths' because Mother wouldn't let me go alone in my illness to say goodbye to Peter. I don't know what I would have said anyway. He and I looked at each other all evening and in the space - and there is space between us now - are so many words and emotions. I will never see him again. How do you say goodbye knowing that fact?

We had been boyfriend and girlfriend for more than a year and then something happened, I don't really even know what. I think I became too missionary for him and he began to date the Dutch ambassador's daughter. She could speak languages and play tennis. What did I communicate to him last night without words in that space that lay between us? Does he know how much I still care for him? Does he realize how confused I feel?

I know that I need to leave Liberia. There is something finished about me being here, my bones tell me that.

But it's not really Liberia that I want to leave. It's that I want something different in my life, maybe a different school. I feel all discombobulated inside.

Soon I will see my sisters, Elisabeth and Ann, and we will live in Winnipeg.
Preparing to leave for the airport on the last day in Liberia, 1972.

Leaving

It is a very sticky, hot, dry season, June day and my parents, my sister Mary, my brother Paul and I are at the Robertsfield airport waiting for our flight out of Liberia. When we got to the airport, many people were there from the congregations where my dad had recently been their pastor. They have come in vans organized by their parishes, to say goodbye to us. They collect in circles around us and begin to sing. With rattles, drums and finger-pianos, they make music in farewell. I am wearing my Liberia finery, a tunic top finely embroidered in the West African way, earrings, bracelets, and rings. My heart swells with the mixed emotions of happiness and sadness, as I stand there in the midst of their singing. Sweating singing.

Other people, other white people, crowd around snapping pictures and I am angry with them. I shout at one of them, “This is not a tourist attraction!”

This singing is for us, for my dad and for my family, who in some very few moments
will climb onto that airplane sitting out there on the sweltering tarmac and fly away.

I thought I wanted to leave, yet at this moment, I want to always belong to this country.

My sister Elisabeth had left Liberia a year before me, to complete high school in Canada. Many missionary kids did that so that they could qualify for an American or Canadian university. She remembers her moments before leaving.

I was feeling depressed. I remember looking out the car window as we drove from Bong Mine to the airport that morning. Inside I was saying, “Goodbye hills. Goodbye trees. Goodbye clouds. Goodbye red earth. Goodbye bush” and “I will probably never see you again.” Sort of animistic but I was very attached to the physical part of Liberia. I feared, even though I knew that it wasn’t true, I feared that I was going to a concrete, cement world. I feared that I was leaving my green behind, my closeness to nature. This was weird because I knew I was separating from my family, but perhaps this was a coping strategy for that loss of family bonds…. In Regina, I felt detached from myself all year. I fantasized about walking to my family. Just getting up and going.
Returning

We moved to Winnipeg in 1972, in the year of our Lord, and in my adolescence. I was not yet sixteen as it was July (and my birthday is in December). For the first time since our furlough of ten months in 1968 to 1969, my whole family was going to daily live together in the same house.

Elisabeth and Ann moved from Regina where they had been going to high school at Luther College, a residential school. Several ex-hostel kids from Liberia had gone to Luther College with them. Mary and I had been living at the Lutheran Mission compound in Monrovia while we went to high school at the American Co-operative School. Mum, Dad and my brother Paul lived in Bong Mine, about an hour upcountry from Monrovia. At Bong Mine iron ore is mined. It is like a little German town, protected by a large barbed wire fence, inside Liberia. My dad worked half time as pastor for the German congregation and with his remaining time, he was pastor to several Liberian congregations in the surrounding area.

Our house in Winnipeg is at 151 Garrioch Crescent, just a block from the church where my dad will be the pastor. It is not a very big house by Liberian standards. The ceilings are low and the windows are small. We won’t be able to extend our living area outside like we are used to in Liberia. It snows in Winnipeg. We girls have to share two rooms. When we arrived, there was only one bathroom on the main floor; Mum asked the church to add a second bathroom in the basement. She said she wasn’t going to fight to use the bathroom every morning.

Winnipeg can also be hot and sunny but so flat that you’d never believe that the earth is round. It has few trees, at least compared to the Liberian rain forest. I feel so exposed under this vast, endless, blue sky where you could watch your dog run away for three days. It doesn’t get dark right at 6 P.M. In July it stays light until 10 P.M., so unlike the tropics.

My mother’s sister, Aunt Katharine, takes us up north one week, to what’s called The Interlake region. We stay at her friend’s cabin on Lake Winnipeg, near the town of Riverton. As we drive there through flat fields of golden wheat and stones, I feel like I can’t breathe. I feel like a fish out of water, out of my element. There is too much space and too much sky. Sitting in her Toyota car, three of us scrunched together in the back seat, even my sisters feel foreign to me.

Being a family again, being a family that lives together, is going to take time.
Learning to be an American

“THE FIRST DAY I set foot at the university is when the real culture shock started. I had always thought I was an American, you know, growing up all my life. But that was in theory only. Having spent so many years overseas, I just didn’t have the same mindset.” Sam is telling me about returning to the United States after having lived for sixteen years in West Africa.

“I didn’t fit in with them at all. I was independent. I had lived away from home most of my life.”

I say to him, “So you thought you were an American and then found you weren’t American after all?”

“Yes,” Sam replies, “I was different. I think I had a lot of Liberian in me. In Liberia, I felt there was a lot more tolerance of people, for people being different. The things you can ask people were different here. I was seen as being forward, rude even.”

“I was very uncomfortable being at the university. It was a miserable experience. I became very angry at the time, very angry at the society, at their snobbery and self-centredness. I felt no sense of belonging. The friends I sought out were basically outcasts themselves. They weren’t a part of the mainstream. I lasted two years and then I quit college.”

“I went with a friend back to her hometown in Pennsylvania and spent the summer there. After that I visited some relatives in Minnesota and then went on a six week trip all over the western United States. It was during this trip that I decided not to go back for my junior year. It was a hard decision to make. I felt like a failure and that gnawed at me. But at the same time I knew it was a good decision to make because I wanted to spend time learning to be an American, adjusting to being here. I knew that once I got my focus, then, I could have a better angle on what to do. I felt really good after I had made that decision. To this day I’m so thrilled that I made that decision. To this day.”

Sam tells me more about returning to university and completing his Bachelor’s and eventually his Master’s degree. He tells me about his work history. Then, as we’re talking, he says quietly, “I still have a loneliness. I have, yet, at age forty-two, to feel a part of the greater society here. Now I could never go back to Liberia and live there and feel a part of that. I wouldn’t want to. But I don’t feel a part of...I mean I know I’m an American. It’s a label that I wear. But it has nothing to do with affinity. There is more Liberian in me than I ever imagined.”
Ruth is telling me about her experiences of re-entering the States and Canada. "When I was working as a nurse in 1975, somebody - I was in the States then - asked me what my nationality was and I said, 'I'm an Ameri...I mean I'm a Canadian'. And they looked at me as if I was crazy for not knowing my nationality. I was feeling a sense of rootlessness and it felt crazy. I wanted an identity and because my passport said Canadian, I decided to move up to Canada to see if I could feel Canadian, since I didn't really feel American."

I ask, "So you hadn't lived in Canada until then?"

"Yes, I did," she responds, "when we were home on furlough. "Did you feel American?" I ask.

"More so," Ruth replies, "but more, I felt nothing. I didn't feel Canadian. I didn't feel American because I always knew I was Canadian and that was another thing that made me on the outside - an onlooker. So I went up to Regina where I got my Master's of Divinity degree and I loved Canada. I think I liked it so much because I was so needy and I needed to like it.

I needed so badly to have an identity. I tried to develop a Canadian accent and I was a typical immigrant type of person. I wasn't an immigrant but I had a lot of similar feelings of wanting to be like the majority. I hated when people said I sounded like I was an American. I worked really hard on my accent. I worked hard on dressing like a Canadian. When I moved to Toronto I felt like I really belonged, like I was rooted. When I moved to Toronto I found that there were people who had had different experiences just like I had. The culture in general wasn't monolithic. People had different belief systems and different cultures and there was a fit for me here that felt really good."

"So," I ask Ruth, "can you easily say you are a Canadian now?"

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"TCKs (Third culture kids) can recognize that the monocultural person knows things about one culture that they may need to learn, while the TCK has cultural knowledge from outside. Such knowledge serves TCKs well in many situations in their life, but they may feel like "hidden immigrants" in their passport country. The sense of being off balance because of unknown history, rules, people, or humor, can be a shock to some. A lack of understanding of home country values - and sometimes conflict with them - creates a sense of being alien. A Korean TCK said "I think I am more comfortable as a foreigner in a foreign country than being a disguised stranger in my own country" (From Being a Third-Culture Kid: A Profile by David C. Pollock, quoted in Bowers, 1998, p. 53)."
“Oh, definitely,” she responds. “I’m a proud Canadian, a nationalistic Canadian. I have a sense of pride in my connectedness being that of somebody who was an immigrant. My moment of knowing how internalized Canada was for me, came when I lived in the Philippines. The Toronto Symphony came over to train the Filipino Symphony and they gave a free concert and I went. They played the Philippine National Anthem, and then they played the Canadian anthem, Oh Canada. Before I had cognitively realized what they were playing, I had already emotionally connected with it, feeling a deep sense of longing and identity.”
Not "My People"

I'm sitting here with my journal trying to make sense of the conversation I just had with Margaret Joy. I feel numb. Stunned. Bewildered. No one has challenged me quite like this before.

We were talking about why I had come to Sheshatsiu, Labrador. We were talking about why I feel so passionate about the Innu and their struggle for justice, for Ntesinan. I was telling her how much I want to help. Margaret Joy kept pressing me, pushing at everything I said to her. She seemed fierce with me. Finally she said, "The Innu are tired of people coming to help us. A lot of harm has come from so-called helping. You need to go home and figure out what it means to you — to you as a person — to be here with us in this struggle for self-determination. Why does it matter to you? How is your own search for self-determination connected to ours?"

Even though she saw my distress and confusion, she persisted, not meanly, just
firmly. "Lois, when you figure this out, when you understand that your passion for our struggle is connected to your own life, then you will be able to help us in a good way. You won't put all your emotional stuff onto us. Then you can come back and stand beside us and we will welcome you."

My tears fall on these words and make blotches on the page. My heart is swollen with tears. My longing has been set adrift.

I felt this longing to belong acutely in the first few years after we had left Liberia, in what the MK literature describes as the “re-entry” period.

This need to belong became my central focus in my teenage and early adult years. Not realizing why at the time, I became involved both socially and politically in cross-cultural events, particularly with First Nations peoples. I longed to belong. When Native people would say “My people”, they knew who they belonged to. “My people” had a place; culturally, socially, historically, geographically. My heart would burn with the longing to be included.

Missionaries never belong; they are always outside the culture they are trying to convert. I could never say that Liberians were “My people”. Yet I ingested the ethos of Liberia and its culture just by living there. Much within the Native traditional life-way is similar to Liberia and recognizable to me, perhaps not always consciously, but within my bones.

Sometimes in my work with First Nations, my not belonging felt as sharp as jagged glass. I didn’t know what I was doing there, and, yet, at the same time I would feel at home, too. It was confusing.

Then I would comfort myself with these words of Alf Dumont, a Native elder, himself a product of two cultures. Alf has often said, “The Creator gave us this special gift of walking between two cultures for a reason. As we live out our lives by honouring the gift and using the gift, we will understand the reason”.

These words would calm the storm within me and let me just be with it, in all my confusing, conflicting energies.
Returning to Phebe Hostel after a visit home.

The Sweet Sting of Family

My sister Elisabeth is crying and I can’t comfort her with my arms. I use my voice instead, murmuring at her over the phone line. Her lovely, cherished son, her first-born son, is turning eight years old today. With gulping sobs, she tells me, “I woke up this morning with such a feeling of dread. My body felt so heavy I could hardly move it out of bed. Jackson was so excited and I could hardly move. I could hardly make my face muscles move.”

“I gave him breakfast and got him off to school. I think I pulled off some excitement. I hope I did!” Her voice calms as she talks to me. It seems like it is helping her to have me listen, to have someone else know. “I spent the morning with Jasmine and now she’s sleeping. Thank God for her nap because I needed to talk to you!” Sobbing again, she cries, “What’s a family after eight?”

I am holding the phone receiver in my hand, connected to my sister by more than a phone line. Bonded to her by blood, and shared experience, by our family and by our
intuitive connection. I know her in my bones. I know what she is talking about. “I don’t know how to be a family after eight!” she wails.

Soothingly, I murmur at her, as if I could stroke her hair and rock her in my arms. “Just do what you did yesterday,” I tell her. “Do it today and then again tomorrow. Do it again the day after tomorrow and keep doing it. Then you’ll be okay. Your family will be okay.”

I don’t think my sister is talking about Jackson. I think she is crying for herself. She is crying for her family. She is crying for the family that irrevocably changed for her when she was eight. Maybe, in looking at Jackson this morning or last night, she saw what eight years old looks like and feels like. She’s remembering herself in her son. She’s eight years old with him today, and today, she’s leaving her family to live at the hostel. It is not a day to celebrate.

Ruth shows Jessica and me a picture of her daughter. “Natasha just turned six,” Ruth says. “I wanted to make a beautiful birthday party for her. Instead I just got depressed and more immobile as the week went by and her birthday drew nearer. I was completely unable to plan anything, even daily life. It even took me a few days to realize that it was depression that I was feeling, I had gone so blank.” Ruth pauses, tears rolling down her face. She wipes them with her hand. “Finally, the day before her birthday, I pulled myself together and made her a wonderful party.” With a flat voice, Ruth says quietly, “Six is the age I was when I left home to go to boarding school. It was the beginning of hell. I lost my family then. And I lived in a horrendous school. I will spend my life recovering and reclaiming myself. I feel so sad, so utterly heartsick, that my daughter will grow up with my suffering!”

In a conversation with another MK who spent her primary school years in a boarding school, she tells me “I know I should send my kids to summer camp and I can’t. I can’t even send them to camp.”

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7 Ruth attended Mamou Alliance Academy, a boarding school located in Mamou, Guinea. It was run by the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) for their missionaries serving in West Africa from the 1920s to the early 1970s. In 1997, the C&MA released a report of an internal investigation that acknowledged the physical, emotional and sexual abuses that took place there over a period of years, perpetrated by staff members, both female and male. The school was closed in 1971 due to political changes in West Africa.
After the spider makes the bridging line strong, it begins to extend the frame, building a scaffold of mooring lines. Each of these lines is anchored by a glob of silk known as an “attachment disk”.... What Jung would call “nodal points”... (Kunkel, p. 27 in this manuscript).
Now there is Osebo the Leopard to catch,” Ananse said to his wife.
Aso told him, “You must dig a deep hole.”
So Kwaku Ananse set off in search of Osebo the Leopard’s tracks. When he found them, he dug a deep hole in the path. He covered the hole with branches and returned to the village.

Early the next morning, Kwaku Ananse went back to the bush. He found the Osebo the Leopard lying at the bottom of the pit and called out to him, “Oh Osebo, I have warned you not to drink the palm tree wine. Now look at you. You have fallen into this pit. If I help you out, surely tomorrow you would try to eat me and my children.”

Osebo the Leopard replied, “Oh no, Kwaku Ananse. I could never do anything as bad as that.”

“But still, I am afraid you would,” Ananse insisted.

“Ananse,” begged Osebo the Leopard, “if you help me get out, I will never catch you or your children, nor any of your cousins.”

Kwaku Ananse cut two bamboo poles from a nearby grove. He stuck one bamboo pole into one wall of the pit. Then he pushed the other pole into the wall opposite and said to Osebo the Leopard, “Place one paw here and the other there.” Osebo did as Ananse instructed.

Out of sight of Osebo the Leopard was a cage near the top edge of the pit. As Osebo climbed up, Kwaku Ananse lifted the door of the cage, then let it slap down. Thump! Osebo the Leopard was trapped in the cage. “Foolish, foolish Leopard! Now I will trade you for the stories of Nana Nyame, the Sky God.”

Kwaku Ananse was very pleased with himself. As he walked home, all along the path, he spun a beautiful spider web.
In Ghana, Osebo the leopard is known to be dangerous and very hard to catch (Oppong-Boateng, personal conversation, December 1999).

Leopards are graceful, alert and cunning... These fierce animals eat meat and hunt their prey. Leopards are good climbers and spend part of their time in trees. They are unbelievably strong, sometimes carrying their prey up into trees (World Book Encyclopedia, 1971, Vol. 12, p. 177).

As with most of the large cats, the leopard is a symbol of ferocity and valor.... And there is definitely a lunar significance.... As a whole leopards are loners (solitary) although they do associate with others, they are most comfortable by themselves or within their own marked territories (Andrews, 2000, pp. 294-295). "Leopards have a strong hunting instinct and intuition, which usually shows up in cubs at an early age.... The leopard negotiates its environment in silence.... The leopard hunts best at night (Ibid., p. 315).

Understandably, missionaries and their children are particularly vulnerable to separation and its accompanying anxiety and fear.... One of the most significant experiences of separation occurs when the children of missionaries go to boarding school. When the six year old MK goes away to school for the first time, it often includes being away from home and parents for a number of months. Such a circumstance multiplies the child's anxiety in the separation from his or her mother and father (Bullock, 1993, p. 37).

It is my firm conviction that the missionary family ranks as high as any concern in missions, and that the health of the family structure and its individual members should be considered of the highest importance. It is the massive denial of this fact on the part of mission boards and professional missionaries which has kept anyone from looking at this area. Children survive. Some children survive quite well. However "survival" has engendered in it dynamics which resist such things as intimacy, trust, close emotional relatedness, and psychological health. Unless we look, we cannot know how best to equip missionary families with the tools for awareness, knowledge and healthy patterns for living.

This study highlight the fact that it is no longer appropriate to defend separation in missionary families as God's Will. Neither can it be excused as a "necessary hazard" of mission work. Lack of knowledge has for too long expedited psychological difficulties for missionary children. It is clearly time for Mission Boards and missionary couples to take seriously the ramifications of separation and its effects on the lives of human beings (Griffen, 1983, p. 98).
Born Again?

I am struggling to pull my suitcase down the girl's dorm hallway. It seems to have gotten heavier since I packed it. A tall, slender, curly, blonde-haired girl, older than me, walks down the hallway towards me. She doesn't offer to help me. Hands on her hips, she looks me over and asks, "Are you saved?"

This day is strange enough already. This, my first day at the hostel. My very first day of living away from my home, from my parents. "Saved?" I think inside my head. "What is she talking about?" I don't really want to be seen as not knowing something that seems very important to this older girl, especially not on my very first day. But I don't know "saved"; so I tell her that. She then asks me, "Have you taken Jesus as your personal saviour?" She seems to think that even though I am only seven and in Grade Three, I would understand her questions and have answers to her questions.

Dismissively, she moves around me to corner another new hostel member, maybe even one of my sisters. And I, with renewed effort, continue to pull my suitcase down to my new room.

I learned later, by my exclusion, that I had failed her test. Only the girls that had answered correctly were allowed to participate in her special bible study group. Obviously I have missed some rite of passage, some knowledge of entry into this new world.

Jessica tells me a similar story. "My first year at a boarding school was at a school not run by my denomination, but by a more evangelical Christian group. I remember being asked that from day one, 'Are you a born again Christian?' At that age, I was seven and in Grade Three, I didn't really understand what they meant. I don't even remember how I answered. I don't think I really knew how to answer so I was ostracized from that point on. Now the two girls that I was rooming with, one was my age and one was in

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8 John 3:1-5: "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered him and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (The Holy Bible, King James Version, 1945).
grade four. The older girl was kind, gentle, but she was pulled away. She was told by the other kids “don’t play with her, she’s not one of us”. So it was hard. I really felt the ostracism. They talked a lot about God but not a loving God. I did everything that was expected of me, but inside, I felt so lonely. This experience has had a big and lasting impact in my life, in how I view myself and with how I connect with people. I’m really insecure in initiating a relationship. I think ‘why bother, they are not going to like me anyway.’”
Jan. 6, 1945

Dear Mommy,

Daddy and I are very sad today. We wish you were here. But we know you are safe and happy in heaven. We miss you so much. We send you all our love and prayers.

Daddy & Mommy

March 15, 1945

Dear Mommy,

I hope this letter finds you well. I have been busy with school work and my job. I miss you so much. I wish you were here with us. I have been thinking about you a lot. I hope you are happy and healthy.

With love,

Daddy

Letters I wrote home.
“So, I ask Sam, how old were you when you first went to the hostel?” Prompted by another question, Sam talks. “I was in the Third Grade, I was eight years old. I was the youngest kid at the hostel that year. I was the little mascot, if you can believe that.”

“That’s how you were treated?” My voice sounds indignant.

“Pretty much,” Sam says. “I was taken under the wing of an older boy who was the big bad boy on the block. He took a liking to me. I was lucky as a kid that people took a liking to me. I’m not sure what it was. I was very shy back then. And it was a hard transition, at first, leaving home.”

“What do you remember about that?” I ask.

“Well, I remember crying at night, in my bed. Looking out the window.” Sam pauses.

“Crying silently?” I ask.

“Yeah. Oh yeah,” Sam responds, “only silently.”

I tell Sam, “Do you know how many MKs have told me this? Everyone I’ve talked to!”

He is surprised and asks, “Are you kidding?”

I say, “No. Everyone.”

He says, “Oh, man.”

I say, “Oh, man, is right.”

His voice trails off, “We all did the same thing then.”

He breaks the silence. “The first few weeks I went back every weekend and then my parents said, ‘Okay, you’re ready to stay’ and then I stayed. Mom said, ‘You’re ready’. Mom played the tough guy so that was it. My dad was Mr. Quiet, not very outgoing. He was sociable with people but he basically let Mom run the show.... I remember crying those nights.”

Ruth is telling. “I remember after we had visits home. We only saw our parents every four months. When they first left, after dropping us off at the boarding school, I would watch them drive away, wanting them to turn around and come back for me. ‘Come and get me!’, I would yell, silently, to the back of the car and the swirling dust. And I remember crying at night.”
Losing Our Families Twice

Jessica’s recollection of her house-parents in Grade Three isn’t very positive. “They weren’t very warm. They talked a lot about God’s love but I never felt it there. They talked about how we’re all one big family and I remember that, because I know how false it was. I heard their words; I felt only ostracism. They just didn’t expend any effort on me because I wasn’t one of theirs. It seemed like, for them, the hostel family was a job and part of that job included strapping.”

I’m sitting with Jessica in her living room. We’re seated at a pine wood table near the bay window that faces onto her garden, glorious in fall colours and textures. On the table sits our tea, a lit candle, and my tape recorder. Around the edges of this area are toys for her young son. It is a space that feels lovingly lived in.

I am asking Jessica about hostel life, her relationships with the house-parents and her siblings. Even as she pours our tea, she continues to talk. “My oldest brother, five years older than me, was in a separate building from my other brother and me. He went to a different school-room too. Mostly we saw and played with him when we went home for visits. My younger brother and I were in the same building and sometimes we would play together. It seemed like my younger brother was forever getting the strap for one thing or another. I could never understand why, I mean, my brother wasn’t a malicious person. He might get the strap for forgetting to pick up his clothes from the laundry room on time or get ‘demerits’ for being late to dinner. After you accumulated so many demerits, you got the strap. Any little infraction that you didn’t keep rigidly to, like the schedule or their expectations, you would get demerits. We were all so little! My brother is only two years older than I. He’d have been in Grade Five! I don’t think I ever complained to my parents about this because these were just things that happened. That was just life, you know.

My brothers must have complained though, because I think that is the reason why my parents moved us from this school to a hostel run by our missionary denomination. It was farther away from where my parents lived, so now we didn’t see them as often, but this hostel was a much better experience for me. I had a strong sense that I belonged there. My parents had a connection with the parents of the other kids.

Yet I realize now, though, that my connection to my siblings changed here. We were all separated out by grade and there was more than one set of house parents. My two brothers have a closer relationship now as adults than they did as kids. I’m still not
close to my eldest brother and as adults, there is distance between me and my younger brother. He and I are separated now by the difference in the way we make meaning of our shared hostel experience, in the way we believe it has affected our lives.

We didn't tell our parents all that went on. Even the house-parents didn't know all that went on.” Jessica pauses to sip her tea, her eyes looking out to the garden, yet far away, focused on another vista.

Ruth remembers going with her younger sister on the train to the boarding school she attended for all of her primary education. She was eight and her sister was six. “I recall that we wore plaid dresses. At that particular time, we were put on the train rather than my parents taking us because it was a ten-hour drive over bad roads. But going on that train was dreadful. My loneliness started right then, starkly, abruptly. When my parents drove us, I felt held and comforted by the ride together.”

“...I always felt that if I was good enough my Mommy and Daddy would come and get me. But they never did. The abuse started around the time I was six so I think that I probably felt I was a bad girl and that's why my parents never came.” Ruth is crying in her telling, clutching Kleenex tightly in her fist.

We are sitting facing each other on her couch, in her living room, with only the audio tape recorder between us. There is an intimacy between us that comes from our shared MK history. Ruth trusts that I am understanding her. I pause for a minute, and then I ask her if she talked with anybody, like her siblings, about her loneliness, her abuse. “No,” she replies, “we were very isolated from each other. They tried very hard to isolate us from our siblings. We were all to be part of God's family. They didn't allow us to sit together at meals, kept us separate by grades and activities. We had very little time in the day for socializing anyway.”

Ruth describes her boarding school to me. “We had more than one set of dorm parents. We called them 'aunt' and 'uncle'. We called all missionaries 'aunt' and 'uncle'. Sometimes the dorm parents were single women, but mostly they were couples. Over the ten years that I was there, we had five or six sets of dorm parents.”

Twisting the Kleenex in her hands, Ruth tells me that three of those dorm parents now face allegations of sexual misconduct. “Actually, make that four. There was also the school nurse - she was the one who molested me and, probably, a number of others.”

“At the height of our school’s history, there were more than sixty kids,” Ruth remembers. “There were two sets of dorm parents for every forty kids and most years, we were only about forty kids.”
I ask a question, “Do you have any recollections of dorm parents that you felt close to, or that you felt were parental or nurturing in any way?”

Ruth snorts, “No! No. It did not seem that they saw their role as being nurturing in any way. They never, that I recall, gave hugs. Tenderness was sexual. I never felt parented. No ‘how was your day’ or ‘how are you doing?’ They made is feel they were there only to keep us in line and to ensure that our basic needs were taken care of. Rarely did we have outings on weekends or games.”

Part of the routine, Ruth tells me, were the announcements after lunch of who would get whipped. “The whippings were done by the dorm parents, in the center area of the boarding school, so we could hear them. You got whippings for ‘transgressions,’ they called them. Transgressions could be having dust balls in your room, or if you talked during the rest-period, or if your bed wasn’t made right. The whippings were done with rubber slippers made out of old tires, or belts.”

After a pause, Ruth says, “Teachers usually stayed for many years as did the school nurse. But dorm parents changed regularly. They’d stay maybe two years. Some of them had their own children as well and they would live in the dorm like everyone else.”

Sam’s recollections of the different house-parents he experienced, are vague and few. They just didn’t seem to be very important to him. This is interesting to me because Sam and I lived in the same hostel going to elementary school and, then again, in high school. I ask Sam about his first set of house-parents in his first year.

After a pause, he tells me, “I don’t remember the house-parents at all.”

So I tell him their names.

He asks me, “Do you remember who they were?”

“I do,” I tell him.

I can hear him thinking. “Hold on a minute,” Sam says, “that’s the old guy who would squeeze you when you asked to leave the table! He’d squeeze you with a full stomach - but I think they meant well. They were old.”

“The house-parents we had next,” Sam tells me, “we didn’t like each other at all. I liked Aunt Ilsa, but Uncle Ian, no. He’d play the authoritarian, with his big clodhopper work-boots. He was always trying to nail the instigators and I was on his list. So he’d be extra tough on me. He’d come and shine his flashlight right in my face when we were in bed, after lights out. That’s what I remember the most about him, those checks at night. He’d try and catch us goofing off when we were supposed to be going to sleep. I don’t remember him coming down the dorm, going from room to room, saying ‘good-night’.

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He would stand at the end of the dorm and flick the lights on and off, yelling 'Okay, lights out!' Sometimes Aunt Ilsa would come and say 'good-night' from room to room though.

"So, what was your sense of the hostel?" I ask Sam.

"Well" he replies, "I remember it being very structured. I got that structure down to a science. I became very skilled at following the routine and then I could deviate from it without getting caught. I knew what the expectations were but I was quite independent and I didn't like authority back then. The authority was quite punitive, as you remember. You were grounded or stuck in a corner all afternoon for a few days. So I always wanted to do my thing and not get caught. That kind of preoccupied my time."

"What about your siblings?" I ask.

Pensively, Sam reflects. "I didn't really have a sense of my siblings at the hostel. My two youngest siblings were at home. I wasn't at school with them. And with my brother, well, I was four years older than he was. I looked out for him. We were always close. We still are."

"The last set of house-parents we had in elementary school, I remember feeling close to them." Sam is back in time now as if our conversation is fertilizing his recollections. "I don't remember any details, just that sense of closeness. They seemed more engaged with us kids, both of them were. It made a difference that Uncle Tim was close to us too. They cared and wanted to know about us. That was a contrast with all the other sets of house-parents I ever experienced."

"Now, the house-parents we had when we went to high school in the capital city of Monrovia and lived in the Mission House, well, I don't know where they found those people! They had their rules for us but they didn't really monitor anything. It seemed like they had their routine and that was the way they communicated with us. End of story. There was no interpersonal relationship with us at all. They also acted very punitively. Near the end, my parents had to come down and tell them to mellow out."

Sam's voice has lots of energy now. "You know what I really remember about hostel life? I remember leaving the hostel whenever I could and going to visit people at their homes. Other kids on the mission station or friends from school. It was a pleasure to get away from the hostel and be a part of someone's family, even for a little while. I remember some really wonderful parents."

Then Sam asks me and I can hear that he is interested to find my answer, "So what do you remember about the house-parents we had? I mean, I'm impressed that you even remember all their names!"
I'm bursting to tell.

Bursting to switch my role for a moment from interviewer to the one who tells, especially since Sam knows these same people. It's so fascinating to talk with Sam because even though he was there, too, he is a boy and he lived in the boy's dorm. He experienced the same things differently.

I tell him about Aunt Bertha and my wet bed. About Ann going blind. I tell him that I have the most mixed feelings about Aunt Ilsa and Uncle Ian. "I really loved Aunt Ilsa. I love her still, in my memory. She entered into my imaginary world with me. She taught me how to knit and we baked cookies. I think that after I was abused by Uncle Ian, I became her shadow. I stayed real close to her. I found her to be very mothering of me and I needed that."

I tell Sam about taking my abuse allegations to the national church. "I do regret not being able to now tell Aunt Ilsa how much she meant to me."

"We came back from a furlough to find new house-parents for my grade eight year, Uncle Tim and Aunt Marion. Uncle Tim got really sick that year and they left the mission field early. It was a very difficult year for me. I felt loyal to them and angered by the gossip that they seemed to generate amongst other missionaries. They had a different style with us from what people were used to. Like you remember, Sam, they did stuff with us a lot."

"Uncle Tim especially, was interested in us and our spiritual lives. But even that was confusing for me at times. Confusing because I wanted to have a meaningful spiritual life so he would like me."

"It was a difficult year because I was the only grade eight student at the hostel and a lot was expected of me. I had two friends, who lived on the mission station, yet I was always unsure of my place with them. They could visit and hang out with each other much more than I could. Maybe they'd like each other more than they would like me!"

"And my two older sisters weren't at this hostel anymore. They were too old and had gone down to Monrovia to attend high school. I missed them a lot. I thought they were having a real life and here I was stuck in old boring Phebe Hostel. I didn't see them very often, not even on our regular visits home. We wrote sometimes though and they would send me some exciting things from the big city."

"I agree with you Sam, about the house-parents in Monrovia. I don't think we had a relationship other than reporting in for meals and the routine. I don't recall having a conversation with either of them about school or life in general. I remember them fighting with Elisabeth. They didn't like her. They found her difficult. They were negligent of us really. Mostly what I remember about living at the Mission House in

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Monrovia was that we just looked after ourselves or that we kids looked out for each other. Often, I would go visit other friends for weekends or meals."

"My first year in Monrovia I was there with my sister Elisabeth. Our eldest sister had left Liberia to attend high school in Saskatchewan and our younger sister was still living at the Phebe Hostel. Then Elisabeth left to join Ann in Saskatchewan and Mary joined me in Monrovia. We wrote letters a lot, especially Elisabeth and I. I missed my sisters.”

I’m telling Sam about my sisters now. "It’s hard to describe my relationship with my sisters. For one thing, it’s different with each one. We are all bound up with each other by our shared history and we’re fiercely loyal. Yet there is a quality of disconnection too. I think we assume we know things about each other when we haven’t told each other. Maybe we still think my parents are the hub of knowledge. Sometimes things will happen in my family and I won’t hear about it, like a parent needing surgery or a sister moving. Now I don’t live in the same city as my parents. Elisabeth and I live far away from everyone else and far away from each other. But I think we are just used to having very independent lives and we’ve had them for a very long time. I tell people that I left home at seven."

"The other day my mother was recalling that when we first went to the hostel, she specifically asked that we sisters room together for awhile. She wanted us to get used to living away from our family. The house-parents, Aunt Bertha and Uncle Ronald said no. They told Mum that the sooner we integrated into the hostel family, the less homesick we would be. And so we learned that the hostel family was to become the more important value. As my sister Mary said recently, ‘We did family when we went home for visits.’ She also told me that she knew her sisters were there for her if she needed us but that she didn’t need us. But we never roomed together at the hostel until we lived in the Mission House in Monrovia.”

"Mary is correct; we ‘did’ our relationships with each other when we went home for visits. And because my parents didn’t live near other Lutheran missionaries, we were each other’s only playmates whenever we went home for our regular visits or holidays. I’m glad about that now. I think it secured a sense of closeness that we still believe in and build on. Yet I didn’t confide in them about the sexual abuse I experienced and I really don’t know why. There are so many things about them that I am only learning now, as I ask them questions for this inquiry. I wonder a lot about how we would be if we had lived together as a family during those years."

“The other thing I find strange,” I tell Sam (Sam is getting an earful now) “is that they kept wanting us to be one big hostel family, and so we were. And yet, now, as adults, we have no contact with each other. Mostly we don’t even know where each other is. It’s like we’ve lost our families twice.”
The Scarlet Letter

"My brother, sister and I had the label of being the lonely ones. It was like we were wearing this scarlet letter of loneliness." In a voice clotted with tears, Ruth is telling me about her life at her boarding school. Isolated from her family, only able to see them every four months, their letters restricted and censored, she felt the weight of her loneliness in every pore of her body.

"I remember crying at night. I would read books about little girls like Heidi (Spryi, 1946) and Little Women (Alcott, 1994) and I would sob, wracking sobs. I even remember thinking 'why am I crying so hard?'"

"I knew from the time that I was very little that other missionaries disapproved of how my parents' parented. They felt that my parents were too lax. I always felt that we were a bad family because my parents didn't punish us enough. Everyone said that was how you knew somebody loved you, if you were punished. And my parent's didn't, and it wasn't until I was in therapy and berating my parents for not loving us enough, that my therapist said, "Hey wait a minute!" I told her that my Mother cried when we went away to boarding school and that other missionaries said that if my Mother didn't cry, then we kids wouldn't have such a lonely time of it."

In a recent phone conversation, my mother tells me "the house-parents didn't like us there very often. My impression was, 'don't come too often, you upset the children'. So we only came to visit you when there were special programs or for our monthly visits. Personal visits, at other times, were discouraged. After a while I didn't ask anymore, that's just the way it was."

9 Other accounts detailed ways in which even further limits were placed on family communication through 'censorship' of the children's weekly letters to parents and through the limitations placed on family visits when parents were in the vicinity of the school" (Final Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry to the Board of Managers of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, p. 38).

10 "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" Proverbs 13:24. "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn away from it" (Proverbs 22:6. The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, 1977).
Sunday Nights

We line up on Sunday nights for our chloroquine pills, the little chalk-like tablets we take to prevent malaria. They don’t really prevent malaria, we get sick with it anyway, like the flu, once or twice a year. Once my sister Mary got really sick, she went into convulsions. It was scary and I was afraid she would die. But, if we take our pills regularly, we shouldn’t get malaria bad enough to die.

If we are little, we only have to take one pill. If you are a bigger kid, you have to take two. I can’t swallow pills, they make me gag. I used to chew my chloroquine just plain but the new housemother, Aunt Ilsa, gives me strawberry jam to chew them with now. You can’t imagine how bitter and vile these small pills taste. They are so bitter they make my whole body shiver and sometimes, even with strawberry jam, I want to throw them up.

The jam helps me swallow. But for years and years and years afterward, the taste of strawberry jam is bitter.

My sister Ann also remembers their bitter taste. She remembers coming back to the hostel from our monthly weekend visits home and how that vile, bitter taste matched the aching homesickness inside her. For her, those pills were like adding insult to injury.

11 “School authorities tend to discourage frequent parental visits in the course of the school year – the child’s emotional tempo can be disrupted when Mom and/or Dad leave. But two or three times between long vacations parents may spend a day or two near their youngsters, possibly when special events are scheduled. Most parents of course would prefer to have it otherwise, and headmasters aren’t inflexible in the matter…. If they’re reasonably short and very sweet, letters from home are welcomed and shared. Parents understand that it’s better not to try to direct their child in school details; he’s now under another authority in that domain. Of course moral principles in moderation and warm encouragement are in order” (Buffam, 1985, p. 104).
Letters we sent home via the mission plane.
Lamentations

I don’t remember all the details. What I do remember is that Ann got sick and she was sent home. In fact Ann became blind.

It is just weeks into our first year at the Phebe Hostel. I am there with my two older sisters, Ann the eldest, and Elisabeth who is next. And then there is me, Lois. Mary, who is eleven months younger than me, is still at home. She is too young to be at the hostel. You have to be in the Third Grade. The hostel is only for children in Grades Three to Eight. Phebe Hostel is on the mission station called Phebe. Phebe is a big mission station because it also has a hospital and the mission airplane. There are lots of missionaries living here, people who are teachers at our school and others who work at the hospital. At this time my parents live at another mission station called Totota, about two hours drive away on a bumpy red dirt road.

We sisters aren’t allowed to room together. Well, maybe we are allowed but it isn’t encouraged. Aunt Bertha and Uncle Ronald (we call all adult missionaries ‘aunt’ and ‘uncle’), who are our ‘house-parents’, want us to be “one big hostel family”. So, right away, our family is separated and each of us girls rooms with other girls. Ann keeps trying to be responsible for Elisabeth and I. She bugs us to wash our hair or clip our nails. We aren’t very kind to her. I just treat her like my big sister and tell her to bug off. Actually it is probably Elisabeth who tells her to “bug off”; I probably tell her “yeah, yeah,” and then don’t do what she asks.

Early on there is an ‘incident’. It happens in my room. I’m rooming with two girls who are my age, Nanette and June. I sleep on the top bunk, Nanette on the bottom bunk and June in the bed across the room - except the rooms are quite small so June isn’t that far away. Nanette is getting into bed one night and she pulls back the covers and in the bottom of her bed is a scorpion! It is very black and shiny and it seems about a foot in length from top to bottom and its tail is curving forward in defense. It is very scary in a thrilling kind of way! The three of us start to scream and the other girls in the dorm come running and then someone must have gotten Aunt Bertha. I don’t remember how the scorpion got dealt with, whether it was killed right there or not. I have a vague recollection of Aunt Bertha with a broom. Anyway, Ann is screaming, too, and for some reason Aunt Bertha slaps her hard across the face.

The slap does Ann in. She gets sick and goes blind. Everyday, Elisabeth and I run to see her in her dorm room after school is over while we are waiting for lunch. We can
see her but she can’t see us. She is put into the hospital too. I don’t remember just how many days go by.

One day when I go to see her she is gone. They have sent her home without telling us. I am very upset. They have sent her away before Elisabeth and I can say good-bye to her. What are they thinking! That it won’t matter to us!

It still matters to me as I write this. I feel the tears well up and blur my eyes so that I can’t see the computer screen.

They sent her home to be with Mary and Mum and Dad and our cat Melisha. After a few days at home, she could see again. My mother says that Ann followed her around like a shadow and asked her over and over, “Don’t you miss the girls? Don’t you miss the girls?”
Dear Mom, Dad, and Mary,

...I'm homesick... Mommy I'm homesick and so is Lois.... Mom instead of being a little homesick I'm really homesick, my throat's tight and my stomach feels funny. Mom, I want to come home to you very much.

love, Ann (age nine)
October 14, 1964

Dear Girls,

...Ann, dear, I'm sure everything will look a bit better about the time of Christmas vacation. No one can be tops in everything even if they wanted to. Each one of us must find out what we can do best and leave the rest to someone else. And for some of us it takes a little longer to catch on, but when we do we can hold our own. Don't be shy to ask for help. And learn to concentrate on the one thing you are doing - whatever it is - and leave the rest for later. Everyone gets confused if they try several things at the same time. Play when you play. Read when you read. Do arithmetic when you do arithmetic.

This will, of course, take a little time to learn but it will save you a whole lot of trouble. And learn to be more care-free and not worry about every little thing. Then you will look back to your school time at the hostel as a very, very happy time; a time when you learn to know and get along with all kinds of people and did all kinds of things. Really, this goes for all of you.

As for being a little homesick - well, that must be expected. It happens to all, and it would be real strange if it didn't happen to you. But you can feel close to home and yet enjoy your life there. Kind of being in 2 places. But this feeling does not have to make you sad or ruin your fun.

I hope you will all learn some of these things, a little at a time....

Your everloving "Old Father"
Dear Mom, Dad and Mary;

...Don't! I say don't! come and visit us. We're better off without you.

love Ann  xxxoo
Dear Elisabeth and Lois,

Ann had a good day today with Mary in their own little "private school." She really was quite upset, but I hope she will get back into the groove in not too long a time. We also hope she will regain a little more weight. She was a little shy about being seen outside today but when Pastor Leidenfrost came by he invited her to come along and see the garden they were planting. She helped plant the beans....

Love and Kisses and Stuff

"Old Father"
Dear Elisabeth and Lois,

I'm fine. I don't know when I'll be coming back to the hostel. I feel so much better. I'm gaining weight because of mom's good cooking. I hate to say this but I'm a little hostel-sick for you. Write me a letter soon. May God take care of you. I wish I shall soon come back again and happy.

Love Anu

(at home in the evening)
This Same Moon

My mother is weeping on the phone with her remembering. She is telling me about the time that Ann was sent home from the hostel. It was our first year and Ann was having a hard time living without her family. Ann had been complaining about going blind and she wasn't eating. They flew her up to the hospital at the mission station of Zorzor to see Dr. Stull. He said there was nothing physically wrong with her. His prescription: to send her home for a while.

My mother started off this story okay, clear-eyed and firm of voice. “Aunt Bertha and Uncle Ronald, the house-parents, brought her home. I made them tea. Ann silently sat there with her big eyes, she was so skinny. Aunt Bertha was like an old turkey who had been offended. She just couldn't understand why Ann wasn’t happy. She kept saying ‘all the children love the hostel’. Ann was home for a few weeks. I guess one day I was laughing. Ann got upset with me. She cried ‘How can you be so happy when the other girls aren’t here’!”

My mother’s voice breaks, I hear her sob over the phone line. “It is thirty-six years ago! It still makes my heart break!” I hear her breathing. She goes on. “I gathered her up and told her that every time I see the moon, I think about my girls. I think that this same moon is shining on them. I told Ann, that when she goes back to the hostel, she can look at the moon and know that I love her and the girls.”
Happiest at Long Distance

"...because they'd sent me away. I'm the first one they sent away." Sam is telling me about his sense of his family, how he feels about them and how he relates to them now. "I had all the right words, you know, 'We love you', et cetera like families say, but it hit me about five or six years ago - I was never there." Thoughtfully, with pauses to recollect or to ensure clarity in how he articulates his thoughts, Sam is telling me about his longing and his loss. "My two youngest siblings feel a greater sense of family than I do, or does my brother next to me... It's a lonely feeling. And now, going to visit my family is tolerable, fun - at least in the first couple of days. But then, I don't know what happens, I get triggered." Sam pauses, he sighs.

I encourage him to keep talking. I ask, "When you get 'triggered' what happens?"

Sam responds, following his train of thought that seems connected from his heart to his brain. "It's very depressing. I don't understand what's going on. And then I don't know how to be a part of what's going on." Sam says softly, "I feel rejection and then I internalize that. I just don't feel I can relate to them nor do I feel like they can relate to me because they don't really know me. I'm making a bigger effort lately. Fighting through my inner self, my inner turmoil, to put it aside."

"I remember the visits home from the hostel were fine. They were short. We kept our conversations at the surface. It never went deeper than that. And I was such a passionate, emotional kid. In hindsight, I think that I acted out because I didn't have those deeper emotional needs met. I wanted someone to see below my surface. I know that we did that then because we still do it now. And now when I want to know what's below the surface or tell them about what's below my surface, I meet all this resistance."

"If we were home longer than a weekend, let's say for the summer holidays, we'd start butting heads. It seemed like my parents were trying to overcompensate for not being parents. They'd try to tell me what to do and my attitude to them was 'what makes you think you can tell me what to do'. The love was there but we were always fighting."

"Even when leaving Liberia, I was by myself. I climbed onto that airplane by myself. That's the story of my growing up. I've never felt a part of my family because I was always away, and sent away. The siblings that came after me have some sense that I blazed a trail and somebody to go to, to be with. But I wasn't in the picture when my two youngest siblings made that cycle. I was already too much older. So I never got to know them until we were all back in the United States as adults." Sam is quiet for awhile, listen-
ing inward to himself.

"I have a longing. I want to be entwined with my nephews and nieces and their parents. But I can't stay with them for long periods of time without getting angry and just losing my patience. So I'm happiest - and it is painful for me to say this to you- I'm happiest at a long distance."

I feel so keenly about what Sam is telling me. I have my own stories about not being seen. Even my parents did not seem to see me, did not look behind my face. They saw me coping and I was very good at that. But nobody seemed to see how awful that was for me and how much stress I was feeling. I tell him about this. It's my bartering, story for story. It is my way of building connection, coming out of the silence, bringing words to our experience.
The MK Who Never Went to Church

I'm talking to Sam on the telephone. We share the same experience of having lived in the same country while our parents were missionaries. We even went to the same hostels at the same time. We're talking about being MKs.

Sam is saying, "I have a lot of anger going back to the root of being a missionary kid." "Say more about that," I reply. "It's the hypocrisy in the church that I grew up with. Missionaries typically went overseas to help people but it was from looking down their nose. They felt they had a superior position. I felt they looked down upon the Liberians. They expressed a conditional love. It had nothing to do with God in my view. It was actually, quite a punitive relationship. And I'm very angry at the church. I left the church when I was still in Liberia. I didn't go to church at all. I'm the missionary kid who never went to church. You probably never saw me go to church in high school." I tell Sam that I can't remember. I probably didn't want to go then either.

This is clearly a subject that Sam likes to talk about. I need to do very little prompting only murmur a lot of "mmm's". He goes on. "Being an MK really hurt my relationship with God because it seemed to be more about our relationship with the institutions of religion instead of our relationship with God. Being an MK was a cultural thing for me, not a belief system. It seemed like it was a cultural thing to be a Lutheran versus a Baptist for example. I don't believe this is what God talks about at all."

"After I had been back in the United States for a few years, I found a church that was non-denominational. It was a place that stressed a relationship with God and I became a believer. I developed my relationship with God there."

Sam pauses, "When I stop talking, you gotta fill in." I laugh, "Sam, you don't need help talking. We have to pause to breathe too!"
After the spider makes the bridging line strong, it begins to extend the frame, building a scaffold of mooring lines. Each of these lines is anchored by a glob of silk known as an "attachment disk".... What Jung would call "nodal points", those points in our unconscious especially charged with energy" (Kunkel, p. 27 of this manuscript).
When Kwaku Ananse reached his hut, he carved a flat-faced wooden doll, an Akua'ba, from an odum tree. He tapped some sticky white fluid from a rubber tree and painted the doll’s face and body with it. Then he pounded eto from mashed yams. Ananse put some eto in the Akua’ba doll’s hand. He pounded more yams and put them in a brass pot. After tying a string around the doll’s waist, he took the Akua’ba and placed her at the foot of the odum tree, the place where the Dwarves come to play.

Along came Mmoatia the Dwarf.

Mmoatia asked the doll, “Akua’ba, may I eat some of your eto?”

Kwaku Ananse jerked the string, and the Akua’ba nodded her head and did a little dance.

“She says I may eat some.” When Mmoatia finished eating, she thanked the doll, but this time the Akua’ba did not answer. “Perhaps she is asleep. I will open her eyes with my hand.”

When Mmoatia tried to open the doll’s eyes, her hand stuck there in the gum. “My hand is stuck!” she cried. “I will take my other hand and try again.” Now both hands were stuck fast. Mmoatia pushed against the Akua’ba doll with her foot, and it, too, was stuck.

Suddenly Kwaku Ananse jumped out from behind the tree. “Now I have you!” he shouted. “I shall take you to Nana Nyame, and he will not be able to refuse me his stories!”

Kwaku Ananse went back to the village with Mmoatia the Dwarf entangled in his spider web.
Ghanaians believe that dwarves love babies. They love them so much that they may even come and steal your babies for their own. Dwarves are good things (A. Oppong-Boateng, personal communication, December 1999).

The doll is related to the symbol of… dwarf. These represent a deep throb of wisdom within the culture of the psyche. They are those creatures which go on with the canny and interior work, who are tireless. They work even when we are asleep, most especially when we sleep, even when we are not fully conscious of what we are enacting (Estes, 1992, p. 89).

Although the length of time needed for someone to become a true TCK can’t be precisely defined, the time when it happens can. It must occur during the developmental years – from birth to eighteen years of age. We recognize that a cross-cultural experience affects adults as well as children. The difference for a TCK, however, is that this cross-cultural experience occurs during the years when that child’s sense of identity, relationships with others, and view of the world are being formed in the most basic ways…. TCKs simply move on to being adult third culture kids because their lives grow out of the roots planted in and watered by the third culture experience (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, p. 27).
Church choir at Easter Sunrise Service.

Ecumenical Easter Sunrise Service.
A Gift from Nyame, the Sky-God

It is dark as we drive along the red dirt road taking us from our home to the mountain-top where the Easter sunrise service will be held. I am in the car with my sister, my brother and my parents, our little world travelling in the sightless and dense dark, early morning. We round a bend in the road and, in the yet black morning appear lights. Swinging lights, lanterns and flashlights attached to no one that I can see. And out of the darkness come voices, voices singing, voices singing in harmony, in the call and response pattern that is so Liberian. All I hear are the voices; all I see are the lights. The poignant beauty of the moment reverberates in my being. I want to weep in the darkness.

We reach the mountaintop as the sun's early light brings the landscape into relief. We are on a mountaintop, a mountaintop mined flat by the German owned Bong Mine Iron Ore company. Around us are other mountaintops, still peaked upward, still green with the tangle of rainforest. In the distance I can see villages, tiny mud and palm
thatched houses clustered together, the morning fires smoking skyward. I can see the Bong Mine Iron Ore Company compound; European looking houses along paved roads, street lights, swimming pool, hospital, supermarket, all contained by a high wire fence.

From this height, I can see the people walking now, a few hundred of them, streaming up the hill from many villages, and many miles, for this opportunity to celebrate together. They settle into groups bound by language and familiarity. Each congregation has its own choir and evangelist waiting to preach to his people in his own language. The service begins with song. In English, we sing the familiar Easter hymn, “Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!”

The early morning energy wanes into noon torpor as the sun climbs across the sky. People move around, children play, some eat. Nursing children are passed around from one willing woman to another. Evangelists preach and pray. The choirs sing, enhancing their rhythms with rattles, drums, and finger-pianos. My father preaches in English, his words translated into other dialects. The sermon thus seems to go on and on. I am restless with the sitting and yet I am acutely aware that this is my last Easter in Liberia. I want to imprint everything in my mind and heart. I want to remember all of this, the sounds, the smells, the sights.

The last choir begins to sing and I move nearer to them. I watch a woman, completely enveloped, head to toe, in the white cotton cloth of her Easter choir garment. She is large and regal. She plays a rattle; a round brown gourd carved with designs and lovingly rubbed with white clay. The round handle, a stick inserted inside the gourd, is worn smooth and soft. I watch her shake this rattle. I watch her arm and wrist, transfixed by her technique, mesmerized by her aura. I long for her rattle, which, in that particular moment becomes the symbol of my connection with this land, this land of Liberia that I am going to soon leave. My longing reaches her. How could it not, it is so palpable!

The choir stops and begins to gather up. With solemn dignity the woman comes over to me and, with great kindness, honours my desire with her rattle. She doesn’t speak English and I don’t speak her Kpelle language. No spoken language is really needed right now. I stand with her rattle, thrilled and shamed and blessed, all of it at once.

Many years later, back in Canada, my friend Lorraine, an Ojibwa from northern Ontario, tells me that her people believe that the sound of a rattle shaking is the sound of creation. The sound of creation, I muse, is the sound of life emerging out of chaos. Was this rattle, I wonder now, a portent of the journey ahead? This journey, that now in midlife, has led me back to myself, to my genesis, so that I “may know the place for the first time” (Eliot, 1944, p. 48).
Benediction

It is lunch time at St. John's Anglican Convent in Toronto. I lift my eyes from my plate, where I am absorbed with my food. I gaze around at my table-mates, one man and two women. Each one is using both their knife and their fork to eat. So am I.

This was not allowed at the hostel. Knives were not allowed to be held in the hand as one ate with one’s fork. The polite way to eat, we were taught, was to cut whatever needed cutting at the start of the meal and then to put our knife down. Our hand that held the knife was to sit limp in our lap while our fork hand did the work of eating.

My mother did not think that this was The Polite Way of eating. My mother said that this was The American Way and she encouraged us to stay with The Canadian Way of eating. My mother was stubborn about preserving things Canadian, like using ‘U’s in spelling and eating with knives.
This was a familiar struggle for my sisters and me, Canadian versus American. Since most things Canadian were not firmly entrenched in our minds or remembered, we often surrendered to The American Way. It was a daunting task to take on the housefather or mother or our teachers at school - for The Canadian Way. Mostly we let our mother do it when she came to the hostel. She would take our spelling test to our teachers and tell them that in Canada, labor was spelt labour, so technically we hadn't spelt it wrong. “Look it up in the Oxford Dictionary,” she would tell the teacher.

It mattered to our mother that we be Canadian. She was from the prairie, a staunch, proud Western Canadian of the Tommy Douglas variety. Like Douglas, the former premier of Saskatchewan, her people were strong social gospel advocates. The prairie had shaped my mother’s heart and her psyche. She brought Canadian books and music for us to the Liberian rainforest. We could feel her love for the vast flat land of golden wheat fields and endless blue sky, as she told us stories of her childhood. The prairie was poetry for my mother. Even the bitter cold of 40 degrees celsius below zero shone in her eyes.

It took me a long time to love the prairie as my mother does. I thought I just would, when we returned to Winnipeg after eight years of living in Liberia. I thought I just would because my early years were lived on this same prairie. But I didn’t. It took me almost four years. Four years where I didn’t feel Liberian anymore and I didn’t yet feel Canadian.

I remember the day I loved the prairie. I was driving from Winnipeg to Saskatoon in my big, blue Plymouth Fury II, hugging low to the road, on the flat highway somewhere around Foam Lake, Saskatchewan. It was springtime, the air fragrant with new possibilities. I could hear the geese honking long before I could see them. I pulled the car over to the shoulder of the road and climbed onto the roof. I watched the geese fly over me in a glorious “V” formation, honking their way to heaven in the still frozen north. I breathed in the spring air. I breathed in the flat land and the endless blue sky fading into a sunset of radiant orange and pink.

For the very first time that vast expanse of sky felt like a benediction. “The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace” (Lutheran Book of Worship, 1978, p. 119). That sky shone her face upon me and gave me peace and plenty of it. My inner conflict of identity surrendered to the sky and the honking geese. I finally claimed Canada as my own.
A Time of Telling

I am sitting with my dad in the hammock in the palaver kitchen that’s beside the Steven’s house. He has come to pick up my sisters and me from the hostel to take us home for a visit. Dad and I are having our siesta together. The palaver kitchen is like a mud hut with no walls; the smooth mud floor is the colour of peanut butter and it has a thatched roof of dried palm leaves. It is a hot, humid afternoon and we snuggle together in the hammock. I am very glad to see him. Right now I don’t have to share him with anybody. Being with my dad in this way makes me feel safe in the world.

I speak many words. I talk mostly about my distress that I can’t tell time. Clocks don’t make any sense to me. I am embarrassed in my class at school. I am the only one in Grade Three who can’t tell time. I feel stupid because everyone says it is so simple and yet those hands on the clock all look the same to me!

My dad has a big watch with clear numbers. Lazily as we rock in the hammock, he moves the hands around his watch and shows me how time moves, what the big hand means and what the little hand means, how those hands work together to tell us time. I still feel that sense of safety as I recall how we drifted in time and space. He wasn’t impatient or judgmental. He just kept moving those hands around his watch. And then I got it! I still remember this moment. All of a sudden there it is. It just is there! My brain receives it. I can feel my brain getting it. It is like some grey matter shifts around inside my head and I can actually feel it in my body as it moves and rearranges itself. I can tell time! And I have been in time with my father. I am ecstatic. I know that I have been seen and heard in time.
The End Room

At the end of the girls' dorm is a door. It is a closet door and in that closet is a large brown cardboard box filled with old clothes and pieces of cloth. At the end of the girls' dorm is a door that leads us into a box that leads us into our imaginations.

After lunch we have rest-period and after that we have study hall and then we are free! Free until supper time and showers, devotions and bedtime, that is. We get Aunt Ilsa to open the door and we dive into that box to see what's in it today. We find the long flowing robes to clothe the subjects of the House of Cleopatra. Nanette, Lucy and I are Cleopatra. We wrap ourselves in yards of green and yellow striped material. We are all three wrapped together in the cloth and we have to move in coordinated rhythm. Inelegantly we waddle as one out into the vast back yard area and sit near the entrance to the girls' dorm. Near swaying palm trees we plunk down under a graceful Flamboyant tree with lacy green leaves and melon-orange flowers. It provides a regal umbrella for us in the hot afternoon sun.

As the collective Cleopatra we expect the other kids to come and pay homage to us in the drama that we are creating. Girls and boys, Grades Three to Eight, together create this drama. It unfolds from moment to moment. Sometimes we are all in the same spot. Sometimes there are several dramas taking place around the yard, held together by the theme of Cleopatra and Ancient Egypt.

We had seen an old black and white movie about Cleopatra the Friday night before, which is movie night at the hostel. Often the Friday night movie sparks our imaginations and we create our dramas from them all week. It is a collective imagination, for even if it is just one of us kids that has the particular idea for a particular day, it is altogether that we enact it. We create it as we go along. Sometimes we drift apart with little scenes taking place here and there and we never get it together again. Most often we weave in and out of each other's scenes, all of it impromptu acting, though we did not yet have a name for it.

We've been cowboys and Indians lurking among the orchard trees of citrus fruits and banana. We've been soldiers in the longest day, whistling as we hurled ourselves into battle. In the bush, we can sometimes find these large, puffy, white mushrooms, about six inches in diameter, and they make magnificent bombs that splat and stain. They are wonderful to throw and not so wonderful to be hit by! As slaves, we have dug gold for Caesar and sighed and pined for the love of Solambo.

We do this almost every day after study hall - when we are free.
Palaver Kitchen

Hostel Kids playing after rest period.
The Collective Cleopatra (Lois on right).

The Drama unfolds.
The Fathers Wept

My father has gone ahead of me to clear the path. He has used his machete of parental protection to make the way open for me as I asked him to. So now the official process can begin. A rush of anxiety catches my breath. I think, "Oh my, am I ready?" Breathing, deeply, I know I am ready.

I am ready to take my sexual abuse as a formal case to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I want them to know what happened to me at the hostel in Liberia and I want them to be accountable. They were careless with my safety and I want them to make amends. I want to do this to recover something in myself, of myself. I feel both bold and scared.

I asked my father to find out how to do this and with whom to talk. He went first to the Canadian Evangelical Lutheran Church national office to talk to the Director of Overseas Missions. Later, he told me that when he told this church official what I had experienced, this man, also a father, got up out of his chair and went and closed the office door. When he sat back down he told my father that he had a daughter who had also been abused on the mission field. The fathers wept.

As it turns out, I have to talk to the Director of Missions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America because it is the American church body that had sent our family overseas. Amazingly, it turns out that the person I have to talk to is in fact someone who knew my family in Liberia! She will remember me as a girl. It also turns out that the head of the appropriate department is someone who knows my father. So I anticipate that I will be well received.

Because I attached a monetary demand to my letter, they deal with me differently than I have expected. I am dealt with cautiously and legally by the institution. Their reticence to offer compassion hurts and angers me.

However, the lawyer sent to Toronto to interview me is respectful. He has done this many times before with other Christian denominations and he seems to know about the depth of the hurt. After I have told him all that has happened, he responds. He says he believes me.
Mrs. Vincent Doesn’t Really Live Here

I arrive home on the school bus and rush to my room. My dolls Ruth, Thumbelina, and Blonde, and stuffed animal Toby are waiting for me. They’re ready for their lunch. I seat them around the cardboard table and serve them the construction paper ham sandwiches I created yesterday during rest period. The bell gongs, announcing lunch for me and I tell them to eat well. I take my home-made money and go to lunch. I eat with the hostel kids. I probably look like one of them even though I am just boarding here while my husband is away. Afterwards, I pay for my lunch and Aunt Ilsa tells me there is no mail for us today.

I return to our room. We all share this room with another hostel girl, June, whom we like. I’m tired today, so we rest during the rest period. I do volunteer work, sometimes, after the rest period. I go to the pharmacy at Phebe Hospital and wash and dry the glass slides used for blood work. Uncle Ned welcomes me and tells me my new nurse’s cap looks nice. Aunt Ilsa and I made the cap last week. After I complete my job, Uncle Ned often gives me an eye-dropper, or something medical like that, which I add to my first aid kit for my kids.

I’m Mrs. Vincent and I’m staying at the hostel while my husband is away working in Saudi Arabia. I may seem like plain old Lois to many people at the mission station and the hostel, but inside me I know that I’m Mrs. Vincent. My kids mean a lot to me. Caring for them, along with going to school and having to do the hostel routine, defines my days. Ruth is my black doll with long silky black hair that I like to braid. She was my birthday gift when I turned seven and we lived in Chicago. Toby is a soft, golden, stuffed animal dog. He was a gift for Christmas. I named him for the golden Labrador dog my family had to give away when we moved away from Rosenfeld, Manitoba so that we could become a missionary family in Liberia. He sleeps with me at night. Thumbelina was a gift from Joan, my friend from ‘mission school’ days in Chicago. In the summer of 1966, on our first furlough “home”, I visited with Joan and her family. They took me to a shopping mall and bought me this doll! Thumbelina has a soft, pink-coloured cloth body and plastic arms, legs and head. She is beautiful and snuggly to hold. Joan has a Thumbelina doll too, so now we both have one - something to share even though we live so far apart.

Blonde is new to my family. She is made from unbleached cotton with moveable legs and arms. One of the missionary mothers made her. Blonde’s hair is blonde like mine, made with yellow yarn and she has blue eyes like mine too. She is stuffed with
dried sugar cane fiber. Mrs. Long makes these dolls and stuffs them with the sugar cane spits that we missionary kids chew and save for her. We love to chew the sugar cane. We have a foot-long cane that we chew, sucking the sweet juice from the fiber as we soften it with our saliva. It is one of the more exciting treats we discovered when we came to Liberia, to our own Jungle Book story.

I truly believe that my dolls need me and I know that they love me. Having them to love and care for makes the days here easier as we wait for Mr. Vincent to return. This stay at the hostel is just temporary.

Soon my family will all be together again.

January 18, 1968

Dear Mrs. Long,

Thank you for your inquiry about the hostel.

Yes, we would like to have your four little brats with your four, that will make exactly 50 squirming little ones. I see they are in 4, 3, and 2. We only take 7th and those groovy Beach Boy records.

Well! We only serve one! We in Liberia, you should know. The kids go to school, read, science, etc. They’re going to like that from about 3:30 till 10:00. We don’t believe in studying, we feel they should have fun. They have homework, they have 4th grade but they’re going to be in their skates lessons to the trout and hold their heads. We win too well, but outstanding tennis.

Gone one man who acts tired in California.

When I can give you now, if you need to send your children, we know of some boarding schools.

Sincerely with love and kisses,

Aunt
Spinning Numinous Silk

I have known these four women for many years. Twenty-seven years, if you count them, which I do sometimes. I count them because, as an MK, I used to think I would never know anyone that long. We met in the spring of 1973, when we attended a Lutheran youth gathering in Kenora. Kenora is a small, predominately white town, in northwestern Ontario. Surrounding the town are several Ojibwa First Nation's communities. I travelled from Winnipeg. One of the women I met was the Lutheran host church's pastor's daughter, and one was the Youth Worker at the host church - both non-Native. Another one was a Native woman, a friend of the pastor's daughter.

After this gathering, I returned to Kenora regularly. My friendships with these women grew and deepened. I had a life in Winnipeg, I went to high school, had a job, participated in our church's youth group, lived with my family. My soul's life, however, was nurtured and fed by these friendships.

On one of my monthly trips, I met the older sister of the Native woman. These two Native sisters had lived for some of their growing-up years in church-run residential schools. I listened to their stories, of tragic loss in these schools, losses of innocence and of family life. At that time, I didn't connect their stories with my story. I myself wasn't yet connected to my own story.

We all lived together in the summer of 1974 in a church-sponsored cross-cultural house near the town of Kenora. It was quite a summer. The United States civil rights movement of the 1960s inspired the dormant struggles for self-determination for Aboriginal peoples around the world. In Canada, the assimilationist policies of the Canadian Government threatened to destroy the collective identities of First Nation's, including the Ojibwa of northwestern Ontario (Walsh, 1971, p. 133).

Fueled by their awakened sense of injustice and self-determination, the Ojibwa Warriors Society took over the town-park after a weekend gathering, claiming it as land appropriated from their treaty entitlement. As the occupation dragged on, the Canadian government responded by bringing in the military: tanks rolled down main street and snipers lay on the roof tops of downtown Kenora, their guns aimed towards the park (Lee, 1974, p.4). Whenever I went downtown, I felt like I had walked into pictures of Northern Ireland.

The Ojibwa Warriors would only negotiate with Dennis Banks, of the American Indian Movement and Wounded Knee, South Dakota fame. So the Canadian government
Visiting together, near Kenora, 1985 (Lois on far left).

My friends participate in my wedding (Lois in centre).
eventually brought him to Kenora. He came with Douglas Durham, who later turned out to be an FBI informant (Burton, 1995, p.215). Because we were a church-sponsored cross-cultural house, like a 'safe' house, these two men stayed with us. We fed them breakfast. I was very indignant later to find out that I had gotten up early to make pancakes for an FBI informer.

Because our house was this intentional community of women attempting to model race relations in a town rife with racism, we were asked to help the town understand the dynamics of the park situation. There we were, the oldest of us a mere twenty-one, talking about race relations at acrimonious and divisive town hall meetings.

We hadn't planned on the occupation. Our plan for the summer was to play baseball inter-culturally and bake pies for charity; do some public awareness about the mercury pollution at Grassy Narrows First Nation; and learn to know each other and live in community.

We found ourselves struggling to maintain our community in the midst of this tension, where everything had split so blatantly into Native and White. Some days we didn't know how to live together, nor why. Being face to face with collective self-determination stirs one's own psychic pot. So it was for each of us.

We argued, fought, baked pies and hung in there. We made food to send clandestinely into the park after the Federal Government had imposed a blockade. Some of us canoed it in there, ducking among the trees while the helicopters whirred overhead. We took turns maintaining a peaceful presence in a mutually declared 'no man's land', spending our shift in the park attendant's booth. Some nights, white vigilantes would drive by and throw bottles or shoot real guns into the dark of the trees.

One day we played Scrabble while we waited out the minutes until the 'Feds' said they would storm the park. I wish we had taken a picture of the board. All our words expressed our tension: red, white, canoe, gun, war, et cetera.

The occupation ended with no loss of physical life and we did play baseball. We baked more pies. We laughed and argued and learned to love each other. The tentative love has become less tentative over these twenty-seven years. I feel bound up with these women like I do with my own sisters. I belong to each one of them and each of them belongs to me.

In the writing of this reflexive account, I was telling a colleague, a Jungian informed psychologist, about my dolls and then about these women. She exclaimed, "Lois, these are your dolls made flesh! These are your dolls into adulthood. Your connection with these women is transpersonal."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992), in her book, Women Who Run With the Wolves, writes this about dolls:
For centuries humans have felt that dolls emanate both a holiness and mana - an awesome and compelling prescience which acts upon persons, changing them spiritually... Dolls are believed to be infused with life by their makers. They are used in rites, rituals, hoodoo, love spells, and mischief. They are used as markers of authority and talismans to remind one of one's own power.

The doll is the symbolic homunculi, little life. It is the symbol of what lies buried in humans that is numinous. It is a small and glowing facsimile of the original Self. Superficially, it is just a doll. But inversely,
there is a little piece of soul that carries all the knowledge of the larger soul-Self...In this way the doll represents the inner spirit of us as women; the voice of inner reason, inner knowing, and inner consciousness...

The dolls serve as talismans. Talismans are reminders of what is felt but not seen, what is so, but is not immediately obvious. The talismanic numen of the doll is that it reminds us, tells us, sees ahead for us. This intuitive function belongs to all women. It is a massive and fundamental receptivity. Not receptivity as once touted in classical psychology, that is as a passive vessel. But receptivity as in possessing immediate access to a profound wisdom that reaches to women's very bones (pp. 89-91).

My psychologist colleague's comments hum within me. I housed my Self in my dolls for safe keeping and probably each one represented some part of me. This I did, of course, without knowing it. I simply loved my dolls. This I did, in the land of Ananse, in the boarding school of my MK world. My dolls, and in particular my doll Ruth, were transitional objects for this part of my life's journey from Canada to Africa.

How clever of my child's spirit to invent Mrs. Vincent! I believe that I became Mrs. Vincent after the abuse, when I no longer remembered it in my conscious brain. My role, as Mrs. Vincent, was to protect and care for my dolls. I wove a silk cocoon around my young, like a spider weaves a silk sac around her eggs. "Because spiders are so closely identified with the use of silk, it is not surprising that the first action any female takes with her eggs is to swathe them in silk" (Mason, 1999, p. 59). This was one of the gifts that Ananse gave me, one of the tricks that he played on me: I thought they were dolls and they were me.

Estes (1992) also writes,

While socialization for children is an important thing, to kill the interior criatura is to kill the child. The West Africans recognize that to be harsh with a child is to cause its soul to retreat from its body, sometimes just a few feet away, other times many days' walk away.

While the needs of the child's soul must be balanced with her need for safety and physical care and with carefully examined notions about 'civilized behavior', I always worry for those who are too well behaved; they often have that 'faint soul' look in their eyes. Something is not right. A healthy soul shines through the persona on most days and blazes through on others. Where there is gross injury, the soul flees.

Sometimes it drifts or bolts so far away that it takes masterful propitiation to coax it back. A long time must pass before such a soul will
trust enough to return, but it can be accomplished. The retrieval requires several ingredients: naked honesty, stamina, tenderness, sweetness, ventilation of rage, and humor. Combined, these make a song that calls the soul back home.

What are soul needs? They lie in the two realms of nature and creativity. In these realms lives...Spider Woman, the Navajo creation Goddess who gives psyche protection to those who seek her. She is in charge of teaching the soul both protection and the love of beauty (pp. 195-196).

When I returned to Canada and met these four women in Kenora, I entered the cosmos of Spider Woman. Allen (1986) describes her as “Grandmother Spider, who brought us light, who gave us weaving and medicine, who gave us life” (p. 45). She brought light to the parts of me that were dis-re-Membered or atomized by connecting me with her spinning to a community of women. By the simple fact of their loving me, they helped me begin to bind up the hidden and hurt places within me. I began to be returned to my life. I ate up the torn threads of my old web and began to spin with new silk.

I projected onto my four women friends the parts of me that I had kept safe in my dolls. My friends carried these projections for a while, and lovingly, although not always without conflict, returned them to me and thus me to myself. Each relationship carried different projections and each one was returned or withdrawn with its own dynamics and in its own time. I feel very moved to come to this understanding now, in the writing of this inquiry. I feel very moved by their tenderness with me. They saw in me what I could not yet see or know or believe but perhaps I desired and longed for, and wanted to believe was true. I am sure this still goes on and that we do this now for each other.

It was late at night, in the twilight between sleep and wakefulness, that the words of this story wandered across the screen of my dimming consciousness. I made myself get up to write it. Earlier on this day, one of my friends had responded to an e-mail message I had sent her. It was a loving exchange that lingered with me through the day. Grandmother Spider Woman, ever with the times, now helps us connect with and through the world-wide web!
Now the spider crawls to the center of the web and begins to spin in a circular pattern, working from the inside out to the largest circumference, using its legs to measure the spaces between each turn. The initial spiral is spun with dry silk (Kunkel, p. 28 of this manuscript).
After gathering the Python, the Bees, the Leopard, and the Dwarf, Kwaku Ananse spun a majestic web around his catch. He threw his silk web up, up, high up to the sky.

When Kwaku Ananse reached the court of Nana Nyame, the great Sky God, he bowed low to the ground. “O God of All Things great and small, here are Onini the Python, Mmoboro the Bees, Osebo the Leopard, and Mmoatia the Dwarf. All are payment for your stories.”

Then Nana Nyame called together his retinue of elders. He put the matter before them. “Great kings have come and gone, unable to pay the price for my stories. But here before us is Kwaku Anans, a tiny, insignificant fellow. He has given me Onini the Python, Mmoboro the Bees, Osebo the Leopard, and Mmoatia the Dwarf. Let us sing praise to Kwaku Ananse. He has paid the price for my stories.”

“EEEE!” shouted the elders.

“Kwaku Ananse,” said Nana Nyame, the Sky God, “from now on and forever, I give all my stories to you. Kose! Kose! Kose! Bless you! Bless you! Bless you! No more shall they be known as the stories of Nana Nyame, but from now on we shall call them “ananseem” or Spider Stories.”

And so it came to be that Kwaku Ananse travelled from town to town, spinning his splendid Spider tales. Sometimes he told the stories with drama and dance. Always the stories lived on in the listeners’ memories.
...Externally, we look great, but internally we've wrestled – often not understanding our struggles until midlife (Van Reken, 1995, p. 429).

Bruising takes place in everybody's life, because we all have needs which are never perfectly met. Missionary kids have no more difficulties than other people, but they have specific areas of vulnerability unique to their experience (Wickstrom, 1998, p. 164).

Missionary children, in many instances, have successfully repressed the separation traumas, and, in adulthood content that their separations were 'managed', 'lived through', or 'of no consequence.' White's studies (1963) focus our awareness to the conscious resignation that is developed by children when they are separated from their parents. White found strong resignation to the separations in his group of children but no acceptance of them. The difficulty with repression and resignation is that the pain is hidden or buried from consciousness which makes it appear to the individual as if there was in fact no trauma. Discontinuity in security and emotional nourishment is not easily withstood by children and does constitute trauma. Children do experience anger, sadness, and fear when they are separated from their parents. For most missionary children, there are no opportunities to deal with or express their feelings (Griffen, 1983, p. 4).
Loving you Goodbye

Losing Elsie, my son’s nanny, has depressed me. My chest feels numb and thick with sadness and my body is lethargic. Nothing inspires me, not even gardening. This feeling lifts from time to time, mostly when I am with my son Matthew and I allow myself to be with him. To really be with him!

I have just completed some psychotherapeutic bodywork with Kristi, a colleague who trains me in the McGraw Method, a form of psychodynamic bodywork. I feel the reverberations of all that my being has released and revealed. I feel, especially, all the losses of people and how they are ‘stuck’ in me. Losing Elsie has released them and they drop down on draglines around me: these old friends and companions. With my tears, I brush away the silken cobweb their draglines have made around my face. I didn’t realise until today that this inquiry is about this - about my hostel friends and letting them go. Letting them release from my body where I had fiercely ensnared them to prove to myself that they really did love me, or that I really did love them. I want to acknowledge them
and claim the connection. I want to really believe that it existed. Then I want to say “Goodbye.”

All these familiar faces who people up my being. I hang onto them from fear. What is this fear? It has something to do with not being able to truly believe I was really loved; it has something to do with belonging, with trusting our connection. I see them in my mind’s eye. I can name them. Many of them belong to the hostel or the mission life, the places I have lived in and left.

This story is about letting go. I feel that so profoundly right now and so physically. Letting it go — the losses, the regrets — it’s not only about making meaning of it all. It is that and yet it is more than that. I am surrendering it all from my Body onto the Page. Releasing It. Releasing Them. Giving Them back to the universe - and back to themselves. With love. In love. I do love them, did love them, and I don’t want to hang onto them so physically anymore from out of this fear. I want to remember them, yes. I see now, how that is different from hanging onto them. I want to remember them, not have them inhabit me, not try to inhabit them.

I realized all of this when I realized that I wanted Elsie to reassure me that she was coming back from her maternity leave, that she wasn’t leaving me forever. I wanted to hang onto her. I wanted to cocoon her in a silken sac like a mother spider does with her eggs. Like a mother wolf spider, I wanted to swath her in silk and lovingly carry her with me attached to my body.

Or is the truth this: I have wanted to be lovingly attached to her. I wanted to be her quiet spiderling. I did not want to have to speak or show my need.

It is so hard for me to make sounds when I cry. Kristi had me making the sounds in order to get the real sounds of crying loosened up. When did I stop making sounds when I cry? In the dorm at night?

Writing this story is like making the sounds of crying. I cry out my fears, my losses, my regrets, and my joys. I am crying with others who were also so silent. Finally, we let the sounds of our sobs release and echo out loud, out of the doors of our rooms and down the long dorm hallways. Our sounds are not bound any longer by the hostel walls nor by the strictures of missionary protocols. We release ourselves with the sounds of our stories. We, the spiderlings of Ananse, have silk to spin and stories to share.
The Convent

It is October 19, 1998 and I arrive at St. John's Anglican Convent, wondering if this is the place for me to write my thesis. I want a place that's separate from my ordinary life. I want a place to work in where I won't distract myself with laundry or cleaning the basement. I want a place where my son Matthew won't find me after his nap. A place where I as a Self, a Soul, will be unfettered, unknown except to myself.

I come up the stairs into the Guest wing and meet Sister Martha Mary. She welcomes me, shows me to my room, and tells me when chapel will be held and when lunch is. I tell her that I don't know my way around. She asks the housekeeper to give me a tour. I am taken on a tour of the convent, long hallways, stairs, opening doors that lead to more hallways. Doors opening into the chapel, the library, the dining room. Doors that say, "For Sisters only." When we reach the library, the housekeeper asks me about myself. I tell her I have come to write; that I have a son and that it's difficult to write at home. She asks me my son's name and I tell her "Matthew". She looks at me and says, "You are in St. Matthew's room. Oh, I have goose-bumps!" and she rubs her arms.

Because it's my first visit, I decide to attend chapel. I decide to enter into what the life of this place is, to see if this is the right place for me. The chapel room smells of incense, a familiar aroma. Breathing it in, I feel it envelop me, grounding me. The words begin and I know them - I have always known them. I find myself responding with the familiar old words "God the Father". I don't quite remember all the words to the Apostle's Creed, even as I know them at a deep level. The chapel is narrow and long, with high walls and windows. I sit, I stand, I kneel. I hold my wondering of who I am and what am I doing here. Somewhere in the midst of this I feel my younger self. I can feel myself in her body, my body. It is a physical remembering and I am in the Phebe Hospital chapel sitting and standing and praying. I am perhaps eight years old. I am moving between her time then and my time now. All the synchronicities of this day wash over me and I ponder them.

In today's chapel, we celebrate Saint Luke the Evangelist's day. I am working in St. Matthew's room. Luke and Matthew. Two long-awaited sons, my sister's and mine. Our children. What does my coming here have to do with our children? What does my thesis have to do with our children? I am writing about us as children. There is something here about children and I will come to learn it. I feel that as I sit there in the chapel.

When I made the arrangement to come to this convent to write, I really wasn't
thinking about it as a religious setting. That I would have a room in a dorm called “the
guest wing.” A room called “Saint Matthew.”

I sit in the chapel listening to the old words of my childhood, wondering about
the irony of it all. The trickster is alive and well. I am writing about the Spider in a con-
vent. My own spider story.

Lois reading in the living room at Phebe Hostel.
Spinning Magic

THE DINING ROOM in St. John's Anglican Convent is quiet except for the sounds of food being moved from the plate to the mouth. Food that is chewed and slurped and crunched. Food that is dished up from the larger serving bowls, the spoon clinking against the container. Otherwise we are all silent. There are more of us than usual, more tables with guests sitting at them. We are a room full of women and one man. One celibate man. He is an old man, a retired bishop. His shoulders are hunched with scoliosis and a life with God. His hand shakes as he drinks his water.

If you are not a guest, you are a Sister of St. John the Divine. They are easy to spot. On most days they tend to wear blue. Blue of all shades, but mostly the shade of royal blue. Some of them wear habits, yards of royal blue topped with white collars. Others wear St. John the Divine royal blue t-shirts or denim dresses. The Sisters sit together, scattered at several tables at one end of the dining room. We guests sit together too, scattered at several tables on the opposite end of the room. Before I came into the dining room for lunch I was reading Wild Mind (1990) by Natalie Goldberg. She is dangerous to read because she delights me. My mind and heart dance with joyful possibilities. I sip some water and look around at the people not talking. People eating or waiting for the Sister to pray us away from the table and back into our day. I wonder if they know that I am making magic in St. Matthew's room. I wonder if they can smell it on me or see it in my aura. Does it surround me, not heavy like a royal blue habit but more like dancing rainbow-coloured northern lights? That's how it feels today. I try and stay inside my own space. I try to sit quiet and contained on my wooden chair. I wish I had brought something to write with. I must remember to do that all the time now that I AM A WRITER.

After we are done eating, it is the custom to sit quietly and read something (there are magazines on the rack underneath each table). I could write then if I had to, if something couldn't wait, like it doesn't want to wait today. I have had to sit here for the last few minutes repeating “making magic in St. Matthew's room” over and over so that I won't lose the possibility.

In St. Matthew's room are my writing things. On the wall are drawings that I have made. On the bed and chair and dresser are books, pieces of writing, my journal, colouring materials, and my purse. By my computer is a white desk light with a black base that has two pencil holder cylinders and a tray for paper clips - things to hold ideas
together. I brought a melon-coloured rose from home. It is stuck in a florist container that holds water and it sits in one of the pencil holders. It is the first rose of its kind in my garden and it was there this morning. Its fragrance is sweet and inspiring.

In the tray I have my precious objects: a yellow-heart ring that my childhood friend Joan gave me on a furlough in 1968, my flat gray rock with a spider engraved on it, a smooth clear crystal rod with a blue topaz attached to it by a silver band and a completely round black and white mottled granite stone that nature created with a white circle embossed on it.

These objects take care of me as I make this journey. They believed before I did that I was a writer. They believed before I did - that I will complete this text. I believed that I was a writer at the end of the afternoon last Tuesday, June 3, 1999. I had just discovered Natalie Goldberg the day before and I had used her writing exercises on that Tuesday and I wrote wildly and magically. It was delicious. At the end of it all I could see, taste, know, the completion of my thesis. I could imagine its size and shape and I could feel its weight in my hands.

All of this is going on in a dorm room that sits above this dining room in the guest wing of the convent.

I am quietly making magic in St. Matthew's room. I am noiselessly, sensuously spinning magic in St. Matthew's room.
After this web is woven, the spider retraces her steps and eats the threads of the initial circular scaffold, replacing the dry silk with glue-like sticky threads. The old becomes the new, and, as each of the sticky threads is attached to one of the spokes, the spider snaps the line to spread the sticky coating into a series of evenly spaced bead-like globules, like a row of translucent pearls (Kunkel, p. 28 of this manuscript).
Pearls are rare, pure and precious.... Their value makes them stand for the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13: 45-6).... In a mystic sense, pearls are also taken as symbols of enlightenment and spiritual birth.... Mystics constantly seek to attain their ideal or their goal, the 'pearl of the ideal'. This quest for the pearl stands for the search for the Sublime Essence hidden in the Self (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 745).

As life proceeds, however, the pain remains until, finally, the day comes when adults decide to face their inner wounds.... This pattern of midlife clarification of the past seems to be common for many ATCKs (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, p. 278-279).

But how does healing occur? Obviously, ATCKs and their parents can't go back and relive their transitional experiences, nor can they undo the separations. The years of family life lost are irretrievable. In fact, most ATCKs can't recover any of their hidden losses. They can't reclaim the sights, sounds, or smells that made home "home" as a child. They can't stop the war that displaced them or the abuser who stole their innocence. What they can do is learn to put words to their past, name their experiences, validate the benefits as well as the losses, and ask for help from their families and others (Ibid, p. 270).
The Synergy of the Spider and Me

In himself, then, the trickster is an anamnesis. He is the riddle that, once posed, brings the healing of the memory and the liberation of the imagination. (Pelton, 1980, p. 275)

Once upon a time... time, a spider wriggled inside me. At the back of my throat it wiggled and jiggled, probably as surprised as I was that it was there.

Maybe that spider came with me, hidden away in my luggage. I come from the Canadian Prairie and I have recently learned that this is where Iktomi, mythical spider of the Dakota Sioux, dwells. When I first found Iktomi, my hypothesis for this inquiry turned upside down. I had planned to write about Ananse in Africa and Grandmother Spider in Canada and liken their characteristics with the life journeys of my participants and me. Then Iktomi dropped into my life, dangling on his dragline, making a mess (or so it seemed initially) of my analysis, but giving it what I unconsciously desired, a conscious metaphor. Tricksters are like that; they like to turn order upside down.

The trickster is wonderful because he is the image of that yearning — that driving energy of inclusion which is itself an image of final boundlessness — which sets the social order in motion and keeps it spinning, which holds heaven and earth in balance, which names the nameless and speaks the unspeakable (Pelton, 1980, p. 283).

Paul Goble, who writes children's books about Iktomi, writes that Iktomi means spider in Lakota (Sioux), and it "is also the name of their mythological Trickster and helper of the Creator when the world was new.... In traditional times he reflected the chaotic element in an otherwise ordered society" (1994, p. 1). Iktomi was "brought constantly into everyday conversation: people's characteristics, their insincerities, ambitions and vulgarities, were humourously likened to the stories of Iktomi” (1990, p. 1). The way the Sioux start to tell Iktomi stories reminds me of the West African way of beginning an Ananse tale. An Ananse story begins with "Once upon a time...time" and the Lakota begin an Iktomi story, "Iktomi was walking along". Somewhere along that walk, all manner of things can happen. This is certainly true of what happened with my inquiry too.

My first encounter with Iktomi now seems serendipitous, even hermeneutical. He came to me in the words of Andrew Suknaski, in his book of poems entitled Octomi (1976). As I read these poems, I realized that this spider was, like Ananse, a trickster.
Perhaps Ananse did not want me to leave him in Africa. So he plucked a thread on his web, sending vibrations to Iktomi. Iktomi, sitting on his web, aware of the poetry of Sukrnaski that is sitting on my office floor, heard the vibrations with his legs and walked into my awareness.\footnote{\textit{Legs are the primary sense organs for most spiders. They "hear" with their legs, using "triply innervated hairs on their legs and their bodies to detect vibrations"} (Mason, 1999, p.36).}

Iktomi was likely there as an emissary for Ananse, when I was trying to write the story of my brother and it wasn’t writing. I wrestled with that story and all I felt were cobwebs. Finally, when I sat quietly and asked the question, “Why isn’t this story writing?” and listened to my still small voice, the voice of Aso inside me, I could hear that it wasn’t the right story to tell. I could hear it vibrate in my legs and in my bones.

Sometime later, as I sat on the floor in a second-hand bookstore, intending to look for something else, an unremarkable old book, \textit{Myths and Legends of the Sioux}, caught my eye. I opened it and discovered several Iktomi stories and this insight from the author Marie L. McLaughlin: “The Sioux are a people that can, without any loss of dignity, gravely consider the simplest things, seeking to fathom their meaning and to learn their lesson...” (1916, p.10). Could it be that my own spider story, though it appeared simple, was where I had to begin?

I knew of another spider too, through the years, from my interest in and work with Aboriginal people. For many First Nation’s peoples on this continent, spider is associated with Grandmother Spider. She comes from the southwest area of the United States and is known by the Hopi, Pueblo, Navajo, and Keres, among others. She is known as the weaver of the web of life, the Sacred Hoop of Being. In \textit{The Sacred Hoop} (1986), Allen writes,

\begin{quote}
In the beginning was thought, and her name was Woman. The Mother, the Grandmother, recognized from earliest times into the present among these peoples of the Americas who kept to the eldest traditions, is celebrated in social structures, architecture, law, custom, and the oral tradition.... She is the Old Woman who tends the fires of life. She is the Old Woman Spider who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection. She is the Eldest God, the one who Remembers and Re-members. (p. 11)

And so I began to consider these spiders, to wonder what their meanings and lessons might be for this inquiry. I began to connect Iktomi the trickster with
\end{quote}
Grandmother Spider, the weaver of memories, and then to see further connections: to anamnesis, to the significance of mid-life, to the theology of my childhood, to the spiritually healing power of my story. Remembering is one of the definitions of anamnesis. One of the qualities of each of these spiders, Ananse, Iktomi, and Grandmother Spider, is the ability to recall things past. This is also one of the tasks at mid-life, to bring the past into consciousness.

The missionary kids I talked with recalled the past to help make sense of their recollections and to explore the past in the present tense. As Gallagher (1992) states, "This past is not past in an objective sense; it is a past that is continually lived" (p. 94). We reminisce in order to make things new. Like a spider who eats the old threads before she spins new silk, we recall our stories to "re-member" ourselves, to recover what has been lost or left behind, to recover the limbs we have autotomized.

The Middle Passage begins when the person is obliged to ask anew the question of meaning which once circumambulated the child's imagination but was effaced over the years. The Middle Passage begins when one is required to face issues which heretofore had been patched over. The question of identity returns and one can no longer evade responsibility for it. (Hollis, 1993, p. 19)

We tell our stories, our 'anansesem' so that our pasts will be healed. This is another definition of anamnesis: a patient's account of his/her medical history. For centuries, spider silk, and even spiders themselves, have been used for medical treatments. Little Miss Muffet's fear of spiders apparently came from the enthusiasm of her physician-father in using spider-based remedies. Scientists continue to study silk for its healing properties (Mason, 1999).

The participants of this inquiry have been wounded by their MK histories. One of the ways in which we bind up our wounds is by giving an account of our suffering and having others bear witness, especially other MKs. This trading of stories is a characteristic of Ananse too. Ananse "has shown that trade is a mode of transformation, of which he is both agent and medium" (Pelton, 1980, p. 60). This making meaning of our individual stories with others lifts us out of the pathologizing of our experience. This was especially true for me with Sam, who lived in that same Liberian boarding school with me. With Jessica and Ruth, it enlarged the context of my lived experience. The stories spun and woven together in this inquiry demonstrate that the MKs represented in these pages have paid the price for the right to tell their stories, their "anansesem".

In our stories, all of us have recounted how we have had to hide away some authentic aspects of ourselves in order to keep them safe. We have wrapped our spider-
ling parts of ourselves in silk and cocooned them in order to keep them alive. Most of the
time, we didn’t even realize we had done this until we began the Middle Passage.

The third definition of anamnesis was revealed to me when I had a direct experience of spider/trickster energy. I was attending the noon chapel service at St. John’s Anglican Convent, where I do most of my writing. The service contained the Eucharist, that ritual in Christian life where Christians participate in the sacrament of creativity. As I listened to the words of Jesus, “Take, eat, this is my body, Do this in remembrance of me” (Matthew 26:26) and put the symbolic bread on my tongue to swallow, I wondered again about this spider that I had ingested so many years before.

In writing about Ananse, Pelton (1980) says, “...the trickster is a symbol of the liminal state itself and of its permanent accessibility as a source of recreative power” (p. 35). That could be a statement about the Eucharist, and, in fact, one of the dictionary definitions of anamnesis is “a prayer in a Eucharist service, recalling the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ” (The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1966, p. 54). The Eucharist is the remembering that kairos intersects with chronos. “Chronos is sequential, linear time; kairos is time revealed in its depth dimension” (Hollis, 1993, p.18). This is the work of the Middle Passage, the mid-life molt.

The Middle Passage occurs when the person is obliged to view his or her life as something more than a linear succession of years... When one is stunned into consciousness, a vertical dimension, kairos, intersects the horizontal plane of life; one’s life span is rendered in a depth perspective:

‘Who am I, then, and whither bound? (Hollis, 1993, p. 18)

Once upon a time...time, a spider wriggled inside me. Maybe it was a spiderling like me, venturing out, ballooning its way into new worlds. Did it enter its new world to teach me about the world within, the journey of the soul? Is that why it has stayed with me so vividly all my life?

For most of my life so far, almost forty years, I have been upset by the memory of that spider in my throat. It symbolized my silencing, my entanglement with my family-of-origin dynamics interwoven with my missionary kid history. I took singing lessons for a while to help clear my throat and to see if I could find my authentic voice. Estes (1992) writes, “To sing means to use the soul-voice. It means to say on the breath the truth of one’s power and one’s need, to breathe soul over the thing that is ailing or in need of restoration” (p. 28).

The spider that I swallowed is not only a teacher for the journey inward but for a heightened awareness of what is around me, what is outward. Ananse has also taught me a lesson about the negative aspects of the missionary culture that I grew up in. Estes
(1992) writes,

While much psychology emphasizes the familial causes of angst in humans, the cultural component carries as much weight, for culture is the family of the family. If the family of the family has various sicknesses, then all families within that culture will have to struggle with the same malaises. (p. 68)

The culture of my family in Africa was the missionary/church culture. It ensnared all of us, as the tarantula stories show. Even while it talked about The Holy Spirit, the church split us off from our own souls. The feminine face of God was not even a topic in those days. My father’s divinity school thesis was about “the doctrine of mariolatry” which my dictionary defines as “excessive and proscribed veneration of the Virgin Mary, especially in forms related to God; veneration of women” (The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1966, p. 877). Lutherans abandoned Mary from the time of Martin Luther on.

Luther was particularly determined to jettison the devotion to Mary. Reasoning that the New Testament never accorded Mary divinity, his new religion expunged any reference to her and banned images of a mother cradling her child (Shlain, 1998, p. 330). Many missionary mothers split off from their own intuition in order to serve God the Father. “Mysticism had no role in the early Protestant Reformation”, writes Shlain (1998, p. 338).

Mysticism is primarily associated with right-brain processes.... The values that typify the right brain include empathy with the plight of one’s companions, generosity towards strangers, tolerance of dissent, love of nature, nurturance of children, laughter, playfulness, mysticism, forgiveness of enemies and nonviolence. These aspects, in both men and women, express the feminine gatherer/nurturer side of human nature (Shlain, 1998, p. 338).

A disembodied church sacrifices children.

Ruth reminded me of this from the first time that I interviewed her. She was worried that I would redeem what for her seemed unredeemable. “Evil things” had happened to her and she did not want me to end up saying “all things work together for the glory of God”. She challenged me to understand the dynamics of the MK church world. My religious upbringing had a lot of “either/ors”: sheep or goats, left or right, Satan or God, black or white. I strove toward the light with great passion. My father remembers that from my earliest time, I liked to talk about “What does it mean?”. I still do. I suffered a lot. “Our
either/or thinking exacerbates our agony because we are trapped with no third possibility to arise unless we can hold the tension of the opposites until they transform” (Bly & Woodman, 1998, p. 186).

All of us in this telling have had to heal the part of us that is described as spiritual. Our spirituality was very wounded in the MK experience, by the sense of being sacrificed to the missionary endeavour, to the value of doing good in the world as called for by God. We feel a kinship with Isaac, placed upon the altar by his father Abraham, his
mother nowhere nearby. Yet the Yahweh of the Old Testament decried human sacrifice and provided a ram. The God of the Protestant Reformation, especially after John Calvin got hold of him, demanded human sacrifice. Calvin wrote,

There is no question here of man’s authority; it is God who speaks, and it is clear what law He would have kept in the Church even to the end of the world. Wherefore does He demand of us so extreme severity if not to show us that due honor is not paid Him so long as we set not His service
above every human consideration, so that we spare not kin nor blood of any, and forget all humanity when the matter is to combat for His glory? (Allen, 1957, p. 87).

As I deepen my understanding of Trickster spider and learn that others have connected him to the Jesus figure, I bring new eyes and understanding to the theology of my childhood. I use different language for my spiritual quest now, wanting to free myself from the either/or theological thinking of my childhood. Like Ruth, the language of my MK childhood doesn't serve me anymore. I need the Goddess, God the Mother, Sophia, as well as God the Father. Shlain writes, “

Goddess worship, feminine values and women’s power depend on the ubiquity of the image. God worship, masculine values, and men’s domination of women are bound to the written word. Word and image, like masculine and feminine, are complementary opposites” (1998, p. 7).

I have been blessed to be riddled with the spider for many years. Marion Woodman (1985) suggests that,

our inherent natures and the individual circumstances of our childhood put us in touch with particular archetypal patterns; these are the tapestries within which our lives are woven. How we relate to them is our choice. (p. 154)

Ananse has riddled me; been a riddle for me. It is not a comfortable process. How do you speak to an archetype? Or, rather, how do you get an archetype to speak to you? One way is experiential: to let the image grow within you as you return to it time and again with the gifts of humble attention and silence. Sometimes you are given a gift in return (Anderson, 1990, p. 18).

Being riddled with the spider has meant that I have had to do the work of healing memory; of exploring the silencing of my childhood as well as enter into my own creative silence. One of the paradoxes of swallowing the spider has been that in order to learn how to speak with my own voice, I have had to learn how to be silent and listen inward to that still small voice of Aso, to follow that spider as it slid down my throat.

Woodman (1985) writes,

It is also possible to approach the authenticity of the body and psyche through the voice. By releasing the body from its chronic conflicts and permitting the breath to reach into the body depths, we allow the voice to come naturally from its own instinctual source with full resonance. Few people hear their own voices because their fear and blocked rage keep the voice in the throat, unrelated to the real energy of their imagination and their emotions. In those brief moments when we do manage to free our own authen-
tic voices, the whole being resonates with that truth, and a marriage of personal and transpersonal is palpable in the environment. (p. 65)

Spiders have a gift for communication. Ananse likes words: “words are what he juggles best” (Pelton, 1980, p. 223). Grandmother Spider is Thought Woman or “Creating-through-Thinking Woman” (Allen, 1986, p. 99) and she is weaving a fabric of interconnection. My encounter with these spider archetypes has been, perhaps, to teach me that Logos meets Eros, kairos intersects with chronos.

As the veils of illusion are stripped away, we recognize the sacred being within. We recognize too that the world cannot be separated into an either/or contradiction. Structuring life that way is infantile. When we can hold the paradox of the totality, the armor that defended us against a world of enemies becomes the full armor of God, the armor of invincibility that protects the inner sacred grove. There God is both he and she—the sunlight that illuminates with clarity, the moonlight that illuminates with love. The energy changes from fighting the enemy to making room for the rose of creation to open in the fire of consciousness. (Woodman, 1985, p. 144)

Juggling words and creating through thought are what I have been doing with the writing of this inquiry story. The heuristic approach allowed me to begin with myself. Spiders spin silk. That is their essential quality. Each spider spins its own unique silk, and “the outstanding fact about a spider’s web is that it belongs to the spider who spun it” (Thomas, p. 217). This healing of my own imagination has allowed me to use my own silk to weave the web of this inquiry, the web of interconnection.

Anger and tenderness: my selves
And now I can believe they breathe in me as angels, not polarities.

Anger and tenderness: the spider’s genius
to spin and weave in the same action from her own body, anywhere - even from a broken web.

Molting At Mid-life

Arthropods don’t have skeletons inside their bodies. Instead, they’re encased in a hard outer shell. Because this outer skeleton doesn’t grow, spiders and other arthropods must shed their skeleton suit from time to time, in order to increase their size. This process is called “molting”.... Although molting is risky and dangerous for spiders, they have no say in the matter. It’s part of their natural behavior. (Lovett, 1991, p. 12)

There is a wonderful old tale — a piece of European folklore — about the Holy Family and a spider. When Mary, Jesus and Joseph were fleeing into Egypt, they took refuge in a cave. There they were protected by a spider who wove a thick web across the mouth of the cave. Some versions also have a dove descending and laying an egg in the web. When the pursuing soldiers came by, they saw the undisturbed web and did not investigate the cave (de Vries, 1984, p. 435). There are actual spiders that can weave webs like these. For example, the wolf spider Arctosa seals the entrance to its burrow with a silken curtain that hangs, ready to be drawn in a flash, effectively sealing the burrow from further penetration (Mason, 1999, p. 92). The female orb-weaver Nephila can weave a web a meter or more wide. Her webs are strong enough to catch prey like birds and bats (Mason, 1999, p. 22).

Like spiders going through the molting process, Mary and Joseph didn’t have a choice. They had to flee and hide in order to protect Jesus. They had to find strength while they were vulnerable, and, paradoxically, found safety behind a delicate spider’s web. Spiders too, when they molt, find a safe and hidden place, so that they are not so vulnerable to their enemies.

I have found this tale helpful in my inquiry. With the MKs I have interviewed and talked with, I realize now that we, too, have metaphorically hidden in caves, protected physically, spiritually, and psychologically by webs we have woven all our lives. For all of us, mid-life is a time when we don’t want to be so cloistered anymore, when we have outgrown our old exoskeleton when our old definitions of ourselves no longer work.

The spider’s task of molting is analogous to a human being’s developmental tasks and stages throughout life, and certainly to the stage often called mid-life. The mid-life crisis is a much maligned process, yet it is of the utmost importance for all adults. Hollis (1993) calls it “the Middle Passage”, and points out that it “presents us with an opportu-
nity to reexamine our lives” (p. 7). For Brehony (1996):

Knowing the Self requires looking deeply inside and making that which is unconscious conscious. But this process requires letting go of many beliefs that appear to have served us well. It is necessary to look honestly inside and understand ourselves in new ways. This includes knowing our own dark, shadow side. Consciousness depends upon knowing what has been unknown. Within the darkness lies the rest of humanity, wisdom, compassion, an understanding of the meaning of our life, and our connection to spirit. Jesus said, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will kill you” (p. 41).

Molting is an inevitable process for spiders. It is the only way that spiders grow. The protective and effective exoskeleton eventually becomes a straitjacket for a growing spider, one that must be shed in order to make space for new growth, for a new exoskeleton. In some cases, a spider will get stuck inside its old exoskeleton, without the strength to shed it, and in that case, it will die.

Spiders do most of their growing immediately after shedding the old exoskeleton, when the new exoskeleton is still pliable and soft. They lengthen their eight legs as they pull them from the old skeleton, doing a “series of calisthenics, once the new legs are free. These exercises keep their joints from stiffening” (Lovett, 1991, p. 26). Young spiders molt and lengthen their legs in less time than older spiders.

Molting is dangerous for spiders. That is why molting spiders are hard to find. They try to molt in private, very protected spaces. Tarantulas spin a thick silk mat to lie on and molt in their burrows. Other spiders hang from a silken thread.

Part of any mid-life molt includes sifting and sorting through the past, to come to terms with it and to find self-acceptance. That is what this inquiry, this story-making, has done and is doing for me. It is about finding a place for my MK past in my life.

Everyday in our daily lives, we bump up against our boarding school experience and our MK history. Ruth, Sam and Jessica talk about this in how they relate both to their families-of-origin, and to the families they have made, in how they relate to others and to themselves. Pelton in his seminal work on tricksters, writes, “Often this pastness is obvious, for many of the stories tell of events that have shaped the present. They say that things have not always been as they are and explain how what is now has come into being” (1980, p. 68).

I believe that as we give voice to our experiences, telling the truths of our lives, and finding others who share these similar histories, we participate in this mid-life molt. The
telling of our personal Ananse stories are like all Ananse stories in that they "are a passage enabling structure to enfold chaos and become again communitas" (Pelton, 1980, p. 70).

For each of us, this act of telling is profound. When I first realized that I had to write this MK story and not the story of my adopted brother, I was very worried about hurting my parents. There are things I have learned in my interviews that these MKs still don’t want their parents to know. Whether or not I remember all the ‘facts’ in the same way that someone else in my family might, like my tarantula stories, I am the one who lives with my recollections. I am the one who ingested them. They are inside me and their emotional residue is what I deal with in my daily life. One of the rewards of this mid-life molt has been that I trust my own story. I don’t lose it when others disagree with me. Instead, I understand now that other versions enlarge my understanding of my experience.

Another characteristic of the mid-life molt is coming to terms with the dynamic of paradox or the tension of opposites. Ananse is a good teacher for this!

Ananse creates social intercourse by disclosing, plunging into, heightening, or even embodying the raw forces out of which human life is made. He renews by the power of antistructure.... Ananse transforms disruption from a destructive into a creative force. (Pelton, 1980, p. 51)

The vertical time dimension, kairos, penetrates our ordinary time, our chronos, in the mid-life molt, “when divine and human paths meet at the crossroads…. Our task is to hold the tension of the opposites, allowing the transformation to happen” (Bly & Woodman, 1998, p. 193).

It is as inevitable that we have to grow as it is for spiders, and it is harder and more dangerous to grow if you have a hard outer shell. Kairos is an inner process, a time when we molt by going to a quiet and safe place. Once we have accomplished this molt, we return to chronos and spin again the silk of connection.

When I first began this reflexive inquiry, I wanted to take my MK life out of the trunk I had packed it away in and consciously place it back into the context of my life, to place it in a linear historical position in the story of my past. What I have learned by placing my own self into the time of my MK experience, is that my history made sense only when I could see it as a part of my mid-life whole, the ahistorical. At first, I thought I would order this inquiry in a chronological way: pre-MK, MK, re-entry, mid-life. But Ananse had other plans and this inquiry does make more sense ordered in another way, a non-chronological way. Coming to terms with the quality of ahistorical is a characteristic of the mid-life molt.

One of the lessons of molting is that it becomes necessary to trust in the integrity
of our own inner process, in the wisdom of the Self and our own strength. We separate who we are from the sum of experiences we have internalized.

It is tough to spend years among those who cannot help you to flourish. Being able to say that one is a survivor is an accomplishment. For many, the power is in the name itself. And yet comes a time in the individuation process when the threat or trauma is significantly past. Then is the time to go on to the next stage after survivorship, to healing and thriving.... If we stay as survivors only without moving to thriving, we limit ourselves and cut our energy to ourselves, and our power in the world to less than half...it becomes a hazard to further creative development. (Estes, 1992, p. 197)

When we move into thriving, we have successfully shed our old exoskeleton.

By engaging with the trickster-like quality of our lives, we learn from Ananse that the human mind and heart are themselves epiphanies of a calmly transcendent sacredness so boldly engaged with this world that it encompasses both nobility and messiness – feces, lies, and even death (Pelton, 1980, p. 4).

By telling our mid-life MK stories, our anansesem, we provide a gift to those who are still involved in the missionary endeavour, a gift to those who may even decry our experience. There is a lively debate in the current missionary literature about the value of boarding schools for MKs. I believe that by revealing a little of our lives at mid-life, we add depth to the discussion which can so easily dismiss the lingering and long term impacts of separating MK children from their families and sending them away to live. The sacrifice and the suffering of the children, even at mid-life, is real. Our lives are our testimony. We speak not to prove, but to witness.
Methodology

Spinning this Web
As I went back and forth, back and forth, dialogically spinning circles of meaning across the framework of the MK's stories, securely attached to and informed by the Ananse story/attachment disks of python, bees, leopard, dwarf, I was able to see the structure of the whole inquiry, and to create a "hermeneutical circle" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 58) (Kunkel, pp. 29-30 of this manuscript).

Hermes is, consequently, the fourfold god, tetramorphic, god of the four winds of Heaven, god with four faces. These attributes carry a twofold meaning. Objectively they stand for the whole body of knowledge garnered from the four quarters of the Earth and from all levels of existence (a world information bureau). Subjectively, he also stands for the innumerable ways in which his messages are received, for the many different faces or interpretations given to his words in the minds of the individuals all equally convinced that they alone have heard him correctly. He is simultaneously the god of hermetics and hermeneutics, of the mystery and of its unravelling (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 501).
The Writing of My Anansesem

The way a web looks depends on the spider that has spun it. In this inquiry, I first had to figure out what kind of spider I was and then, what kind of web to weave.

A number of factors influenced my writing of this inquiry: my search for self-understanding and for honouring my own proprioceptive learning style, my growing sense of the power of story as testimony, and my quest to contribute to a communal understanding.

Charlotte is the best storyteller I ever heard," said Fern, poking her dish towel into a cereal bowl. "Fern," said her mother sternly, "you must not invent things. You know spiders don’t tell stories. Spiders can’t talk."

“Charlotte can,” replied Fern. “She doesn’t talk very loud, but she talks” (White, 1952, p. 105).

The simple beginning of how I came to write this particular story is that I swallowed a spider in West Africa. For years I wondered about this coincidence, this silken synchronicity. I knew that this part of Africa, specifically southern Ghana, was where spider stories were born, among the Asante-Twi. By ballooning, spider stories have spread all over English West Africa. Spider stories appear to be simple stories, yet they have a cultural, geographical and historical context. “The Asanti identify so strongly with their folklore that all of the stories, even those in which he does not appear, are called anansesem or ‘spider stories’ (Pelton, 1980, p. 20).

Though there are many Ananse stories, one particular Asante-Twi Ananse story seems to be the beginning story. It is Ananse’s genesis as a storyteller. It seems a fitting story for my own beginning as a storyteller in the writing of this reflexive inquiry. What seems clear to me now is that Ananse chose me. It was through my own “tacit knowing” (Polanyi, 1983), because I trust what I call “my bones”, that I was able to imagine using this Ananse story as the frame for my own inquiry.

What are “my bones?” They are the foundation of my learning style, inherent to my way of being in and with the world. In the writing of this inquiry, I have come to trust my bones even more. One way of describing “my bones” is in spider language. “Spiders have tiny slits in their exoskeletons that are sensitive to vibrations. Web-weaving spiders use these sense organs to know if something is in their webs.” (Robertson, 2000, p. 52).

Another way of describing “my bones” is with the concept “tacit knowing”. Tacit knowing has been elucidated in the work of Michael Polanyi (1983) and is described by
Douglass and Moustakas as the subliminal, archetypal and preconscious perceptions that undergird all that is in our immediate awareness, giving energy, distinctiveness, form and direction to all that we know. Because we are unable to draw upon these sources directly or give them voice, they are called tacit (1985, p. 49).

I experience this tacit knowing in “my bones”, in my body and in this way, it has the quality of a “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1981), or a proprioceptive sense. Gendlin describes a felt sense as “an internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time — encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail” (1981, pp. 32-33). When I listen inward to the vibrations in my bones, I hear the voice of Aso, the one who answers my questions.

Writing about “my bones” reminds me of the “personality vehicles” of body, mind, and emotions, one of the dimensions of personality found in Psychosynthesis, a psychological theory developed by Roberto Assagioli. He believed that “these three components, which make up the personality, are like ‘vehicles’ for the Self because they are the media of manifestation on the material plane” (Crampton, 1983, p. 11).

Each of us has all three components or vehicles and we use all three, although most of us are more identified with or have a preference for one component and use it more easily. It is like being right or left-handed. We meet the world with one ‘vehicle’ more easily than another. In my study of Psychosynthesis, I discovered that my leading or preferred vehicle was my body. I meet the world first with my body, followed by my emotions and then my mind. This means that I use my bodily-knowing, my proprioceptive sense as my familiar way of meeting and experiencing the world. That is how I first take in knowledge and make sense of the world around me.

Several years ago I was tested on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1989) and I was scored an “INFP” (Introverted feeling supported by Intuition). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), based on Carl Jung’s theory of psychological types also reports on a person’s preferences but uses four scales rather than three vehicles. Each scale represents two opposite preferences, thus allowing a selection from eight possible choices. Preferences are what we do naturally. The MBTI defines four questions: Where do you prefer to focus your attention?, How do you acquire information?: How do you make decisions?; and How do you orient toward the outer world? Each person has the ability to use all eight choices and the scores show how consistently a person makes one choice over another.

When I began this particular writing journey, I looked again at my MBTI score and wondered what it might mean for me, for what I wrote, and how I wrote it.
I know that when I write, I need to make time to nest with my ideas, gazing inward to find the words to articulate that which is stirring inside me. This learning style orientation has been borne out in the research of Women's Ways of Knowing by Mary Belenky et al (1986), where the authors note that women tend toward a circular way of knowing. This seems to match my experience of nesting. I need silence and solitude and especially space, both physical and emotional. Having the privilege to write at St. John's Anglican Convent for the duration of this work served me well. My writing style matches an “INFP” type according to the MBTI (The Type Reporter, 1990, pp. 1-6).

Another instrument, the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (1981) scored me as a “diverger”. According to Kolb, divergers are innovative learners, seeking meaning, needing to be involved personally and integrating experience with the Self. They learn by listening and sharing ideas, absorbing reality and functioning through synergy. Divergers perceive information concretely and process it reflectively.

Bernice McCarthy, author of 4-Mat (1983), states that innovative learners are interested in values, and thus often become involved in causes and social justice. They have an ability to look at things from a variety of perspectives and strive for unity and wholeness. They need to work with others, using them as sounding boards for new, innovative and untried ideas.

When I began this writing journey in 1995, searching for what I would write about and how, I read David Hunt's book The Renewal of Personal Energy (1992). I found the chapter “Research as Renewal” particularly helpful and affirming. I had been thinking about changing my focus of inquiry from Native adoptions to the experience of missionary children at midlife. I wondered about writing a doctoral thesis on a topic that seemed selfish. At that time, qualitative research still needed defending and “reflexive inquiry” (Cole & Knowles, 2000) wasn't a term often used. Hunt's “inside-out” approach to doing research gave me at least the permission and validation to think about beginning with myself.

At this same time, I was a participant in a dream workshop where we made masks with Jungian analyst Marion Woodman. In spending time with me on my dreams, she said, "Something is left in Africa and you need to retrieve it" (personal communication). I believed, then, that what I had left there had something to do with my creativity and personal energy. Hunt defines renewal as “the process of connecting with personal energy, of releasing it, and transforming it into action” (Hunt, 1992, p. 2).

Gradually this awareness crystallized and I knew I wanted to write about the lived experiences of missionary kids reflected upon at midlife because I wanted to reclaim what I had packed away and retrieve what I had left behind. Stories provide us with a sense of
meaning and belonging in our lives. "They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with the threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1). My research destination then, became understanding and meaning-making through community.

Hunt also states that “the essence of self-renewal is movement” (1992, p. 135). This was what I hoped my research as renewal would provide: inner movement in my own life, and in that of my participants, and movement in the ways that our experience is understood by others. The process of understanding itself is movement: “Understanding is not embedded in the experience as much as it is achieved through an ongoing and continuous experiencing of the experience” (Ellis & Bochner, 1992, p. 98).

As I studied qualitative research methods, I came upon the heuristic inquiry approach (Moustakas, 1990). This approach appealed to me because it offered an attitude and process with which to begin and contain the entire research journey. It seemed congruent with my learning style and my way of being in the world, as well as my research goals, as it refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process, and while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate self-processes and self-discoveries (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9).

I knew that I would do my research within a feminist framework because feminism is woven into me. A feminist world-view presents certain assumptions about the gathering of knowledge, the involvement and role of participants in the inquiry, and how the knowledge is used and for whom. The Stone Centre (1991) theorists speak of women coming to know, in the context of relationships. Being relational, engaged with my participants, would shape my research model and methodology. Being relational means that I work in collaboration even when I am working alone.

Heuristics gave me an inquiry approach to begin my thesis journey. Because its reflective processes are explicit and concrete, it was a good approach for guiding my inquiry. It freed me to imagine. I have used the reflective processes throughout my research and writing.

Yet, as the spider of this telling, I have needed to spin with more than one kind of silk. Spiders never run out of silk. Silk is the warp and woof of a spider's life. In fact, they spin more than one kind of silk, most spin three or four types and orb-weavers make seven. Each type of silk has its own particular set of properties, depending upon its
final use (Mason, 1999).

Heuristic research culminates in a “creative synthesis” of the learnings from both oneself and others that seems much more phenomenological in destination than what I wanted. I struggled with the concept of creative synthesis. Heuristic research is not contextual or interpretative in a hermeneutic sense. I found that much of the MK literature uses quantitative methods of inquiry, synthesizing the experiences of MKs, often rendering them nameless and faceless. They lose their individuality, their personal story. That is not what I wanted to do. This was not my research destination. I needed another type of silk.

Looking back, I realize that my research, while heuristic in conception, has also been a reflexive inquiry in many of its characteristics, and in particular, in its emergent design. Cole and Knowles write:

Reflexive inquiry is no less systematic than other forms of research; however, the key difference and hallmark of reflexive inquiry is flexibility.... you will have a basic structure or plan to follow but must expect and be prepared to modify your plan as you proceed.... It is not important that you implement the design to get results; it is important that you attend to the process of researching so that you can learn from it.... Trust the process and trust your own judgment as teacher and researcher (2000, p. 104).

I began to spin with the silk of reflexive inquiry.

Attending to the emergent nature of my research, in the context of my learning style, meant that the deadlines that I had imposed on myself had to be changed. Reflexive inquiry is “not a linear, sequential process; it is more spiral or cyclical” (Cole and Knowles, 2000, p. 104). I learned to trust that even if I wasn’t sitting at the computer I was developing my inquiry. There were times when I hung newsprint around the walls of the Convent room and wrote with markers, and danced, and talked to myself, as I imagined the next steps or pieces of writing. Goldberg says that “all good writing comes from the body and is a physical experience” (1990, p. 61).

Initially I created pictures as my first working notes for developing the thesis inquiry. Pictures with a spider entering my world, the world of my family, and me as a spider spinning the words of my participants, as I entered the world of the spider metaphor. Cole and Knowles write:

In everyday life we use analogies and images to help us clarify ideas or make them more meaningful. We try to see one thing as another. The word metaphor is derived from the Greek ‘to carry across.’ Metaphors provide a way of carrying ideas and understandings from one context to
another so that both the ideas and the new context become transformed in the process (2000, p. 67).

Creating the art helped me to find words for my inarticulateness and clarified the thesis journey. Through art, I could visualize my questions. Who was the spider I swallowed? Why did the spider enter my life-story? How did the spider enter the story of my family? How am I the spider with my participant’s stories? In Hermetic activity, there is the act of finding and the act of thieving (Kerenyi, 1992). Kerenyi writes,

Perhaps for this reason Hermes can so convincingly hover before us, lead us on our ways, show us golden treasures in everyone through the split-second timing which is the spirit of finding and thieving – all of this because he creates his reality out of us, or more properly through us (1992, p. 51). Finding and thieving are thus transformed into an Hermetic work of art. Spinning my silk with Ananse would help me weave this artful web.

Slowly, over time, as I deepened my trust in my learning style, I realized that I had to have help from others. That is part of my style. I listened to the learning of my younger self in the story of my dad and me, “A Telling Time”. Developing collaborative relationships is a component of reflexive inquiry. Collaboration has the characteristics of mutual respect and trust as well as a potential for mutual benefit (Cole & Knowles, 2000).

One of my friends and colleagues, Agnes, herself both an educator and psychotherapist specializing in the Expressive Arts, spent time with me from the very beginning as I talked out what I was doing. This was enormously helpful when I was stuck and the knowing in my bones had no language. She would help me find the English. It was as if my spinnerets were plugged and I needed her help to release more silk to spin. She encouraged me to express in art what I could not yet in words. Randall (1995) writes, “We cannot tell what we cannot story, and we cannot story what we lack the words to story” (p. 293). This lack of language was partly due to my learning style and partly due to the fact that I wanted to tell a story from a voiceless/silenced place. The spider was still caught in my throat.

Barbara, my neighbour, an English teacher and the daughter of a clergyman, faithfully read what I wrote. With absolute kindness, she would send things back to be rewritten. Growing up in a similar world to mine, she followed my story with her heart, asking me the right questions and helping me to deepen the metaphors. Many times she was the Aso to my Ananse, telling me how to capture the stories of Nyame. With her, I learned that “writing is the practise of asserting yourself” (Goldberg, 1990, p. 141).
Pictures as "working notes" for developing thesis inquiry: the spider enters my world.
Working notes: the tarantula enters the realm of my family.
Working notes: how am I the spider in spinning this thesis inquiry?
The Power of Story as Testimony

Webs are as varied as the spiders that weave them. Garden spiders create the familiar, circular orb webs, while house spiders are responsible for the filmy cobwebs found in your attic or cellar. Others make the two-tiered webs that cover low bushes or meadow grasses, sheet webs with funnel-shaped retreats where the makers can hide..., or spin simple traps fashioned with a few trip wires outside burrows (Robertson, 2000, p. 56).

Ananse chose me, and like the Hermetic trickster he is, he has shaped the telling of this inquiry all along the way. “The trickster is comic nature in a language game, not a real person or ‘being’ in the ontological sense. Tribal tricksters are embodied in imagination and liberate the mind; an androgyny, she would repudiate translations and imposed representations…” (Vizenor, 1988, p. x).

I had wanted to spin a certain kind of web—a chronological account following the life cycle of a missionary kid. I organized the vignettes in this way and struggled to make them work chronologically inside the Ananse story. Again, Ananse wanted to spin this inquiry differently. He wanted to spin the stories in the thematic sequence of python, bees, leopard and dwarf. I gave in to Ananse.

Ananse’s way strengthens what adult missionary kids in midlife are trying to tell and reveal. “Words, then, are metaphors and the trickster is a comic holotrope, an interior landscape ‘behind what discourse says’ (Vizenor, 1988, p. xi). Anderson describes “trickstering” as one of the processes of research. She writes that trickstering in research is the “auspicious bewilderment [that] may signal the beginning of renewed understanding” (2000, p. 38). Kerenyi calls it “Hermes’ playground” (1992, p. 54).

Ananse, like Hermes, is interested in communication. He wants the research to be a re-searching. Lois the researcher re-searched continuously as the method of inquiry unfolded, so that the process of the inquiry was faithful to the stories told. I asked myself over and over, “what do the stories want?” Glesne and Peshkin state that the “type of tale determines the voice and style of writing” and “shapes text organization” (1992, p. 163). Anderson describes it as “varying magnification” in which “principles of organization may change with different levels of analysis” (2000, p. 38). Thomas writes that “the process of repetition is the way deep learning always is” (1997, p. 200).

Ananesesem are best told in the oral tradition. I had to understand the story tradi-
tion in order to do the interviews.

The stories are already interpretations of reality, and consciously so. They mean to interpret human life and to interpret interpretations puts one at a second remove from reality, and one's reader at a third remove. Those who listen to the stories, on the other hand, are not at a second remove, simply because the oral story exists just at the moment it is being told (Pelton, 1980, p. 21).

In the communities of the Asante-Twi, the story-teller is usually an older person who begins by saying “nse se se sew” or “it’s time for stories”. The listeners, usually children crowded around the story-teller, respond, “nse se sewaa” or “we are ready to listen”. When telling the stories in English, the story-teller says, “Once upon a time...time” and the children reply, “Time” (A. Oppong-Boateng, personal communication, December 1999).

This places the story outside our time now and announces a dislocation in ordinary life.... The very telling of tales proclaims that both teller and listener are now in a different place, another world, whose relationship to the daily world is strange, ambiguous, and mysterious. This relationship is ambiguous and not simply discontinuous because the story...speaks of the past. Often this pastness is obvious, for many of the stories tell of events that have shaped the present. They say that things have not always been as they are and explain how what is now has come into being. In this sense the stories are a form of that sort of “sacred history”.... The stories are told...as a way of imparting tradition and renewing the present world (Pelton, 1980, p. 69).

The missionary kid (MK) stories in this inquiry were told to me in the oral tradition, in formal interviews and in phone calls, in informal conversations with my family and psychotherapy clients. I as the researcher was primarily a listener, bearing witness to the experiences being recollected. Yet I was no ordinary listener because I, too, had lived this MK experience. My participants knew this and I believe it influenced the stories told and the way of telling. There was an implicit understanding that I understood because I too had lived it.

The listener has to feel the victim's [narrator's] victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony.... The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and himself, that he can become the enabler of the
testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 58).

Sometimes the stories vibrated between teller and listener, especially where there were similar experiences and impact. In as much as I bore witness to the stories of my participants, they also bore witness to mine, even if I did not tell them my own stories. Their stories authenticated my own. In this way, we provided a mutual mirroring, each of us seeing each other into existence.

The story untold is the life unlived. The more un-storied existence we can transform into experience, that is, and the more untold experience we are able to express, then the more powerfully and profoundly can our self-creation proceed: the more author-ity we have over the storytelling and re-storying of our own lives (Randall, 1995, p. 281).

I was present to my participants, as they re-searched their lives in the telling of their stories. Cole and Knowles call it “listening for a story rather than to a story” (2001, p. 275). When participants reveal elements of their life histories they are revealing elements of their identities. In a sense, it is as though the participant engages in the very first level of analysis… This is the nature of retelling experience…. One of our tasks is to understand the thinking or meaning-making — the conceptual framework, as it were — that induced a participant’s analysis of experience and the selection of the stories told (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 273).

My persistence in spinning this orb web led me to explore life history research as I spun the next silk thread of the inquiry process, that of analysis. While my inquiry is not a life history, it has been informed and inspired by the understandings and insights of life history research.

As the researcher, I have the unique position of knowing all the participants. I have had the privilege of listening and receiving their lived experience and their interpretation of their lived experience. I have the responsibility to find ways to give expression to the stories of my participants, to let their individuality show and shine. I have the responsibility to identify and make explicit the themes and connections, to make and render collective meaning. Choosing the attachment disks of python, bees, leopard and dwarf as the thematic sequence for the stories came about as I listened for the themes we held in common as MKs. Oftentimes I made choices and decisions about how to represent the material from ‘my bones’. Later I found the theory that matched my felt sense.

The participants come from a variety of occupations and all of us are in the range of mid-life. Two of the participants, Jessica and Ruth, came to me via people who knew
of my research inquiry. I sought out Sam and one other participant because they had attended the same boarding school as me. This latter participant withdrew, much to my regret, because our initial conversations helped inspire this work.

Jessica and Ruth live nearby and this gave me the opportunity to carry out their interviews in person. I interviewed Sam by phone. With each participant, I held an initial meeting, explaining my inquiry question. The participants signed a consent form giving me permission to audio-tape our sessions, assuring them of anonymity and giving them the freedom to drop out of the study at any time. In this initial meeting, we spent some time getting to know each other and I told them about my personal stake in this inquiry. I explained the process of the interviews and what sort of information would be useful for this inquiry. For Sam, this initial meeting included catching up on our families too.

I conducted two lengthy interviews with each participant. The first interview consisted of finding out the context of their experience: where they lived, when, for how long, what mission, their family's experience, et cetera. I asked them to tell me about their life as a missionary kid in as much detail as they could. I asked open-ended questions, eliciting a conversational style interview. I encouraged each of them to write between our interviews and to bring those thoughts and reflections to the next session. I also asked each one about objects or artifacts that provided metaphors for their experience or that lingered with them over all this time. I asked if they had had an epiphanal moment like my own spider story.

The second interview focused on how the past resonated in their present lives. I wanted to know what it was like when they first re-entered their passport country. I wanted to explore what was important to them and I also wanted to know if and how some of the significant themes raised in the MK literature affected them.

I conducted a third interview with Jessica and Ruth but wasn't able to with Sam as he had moved and it took some time for us to reconnect. This third interview took place after I paused in my research to have a child. The pause itself proved to be significant in that it provided the participants with more time to reflect on how their early MK childhood lingered in their present. There was more opportunity to share in the meaning-making of their experiences.

I transcribed each of the interviews and returned them to the participants for feedback and to help further their reflections. In life history research, the interview is the forum where much of the interpretation takes place. It is important that the participants read their words, clarify their meanings, elaborate on points raised and make sure that I as the researcher have understood their story.

I tried to attune each interview to the needs of each participant, providing some
with more structure than others. The mutuality in the research process was enhanced by the perceived mutuality in the research purpose. I felt that we had good rapport, even on the telephone. Because I was a participant researcher, my subjectivity facilitated the participants' sense that I understood their experiences.

In some cases, the bartering story for story helped the participant to recollect or enlarge on their experience, as was the case with Sam, for example. It enhanced the sense of joint venture and the belief for the participants that their story would have a larger purpose. I did not search out abuse of any kind. The stories of sexual, emotional and physical abuse were told in the course of these interviews. I believe that I was told the unspeakable because I was a participant researcher. I enabled the participants to tell their stories, “and be heard, to in fact address the significance of their biography – to address, that is the suffering, the truth…. to a hearing ‘you’; and to a listening community” (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 41).

I believe that my listening helped Sam to validate his experience, to say, “this is for real”, “you can’t walk in the rain and not get wet”. For Ruth, I provided a sense of validation that allowed her to have more agency in her life, a sense that she’s okay and on the right path. This research also gave her a sense that she is not alone. I believe that I provided for Jessica the courage to speak her truth, to herself and, for the first time, to her family. I think I was successful in providing a sense of normalizing our experiences, taking them out of a personal sense of pathology. My research gave them a right to claim their childhood experiences as missionary children.

Yet throughout the course of the interview process, I had to be vigilant of my subjectivity so that I didn’t make assumptions about the meanings of what I was listening to. I monitored my subjectivity even while I used it.

One of the ways that I used my subjectivity was by continuing my own process of reflection, by using my dreams and by bearing witness to myself, my self, and to how what I was hearing reverberated in me. It gave me an understanding of the significance and ramifications of the telling and a sense of the sub-text of stories. I know personally how deeply the testimony of a life history reverberates and how it also liberates. “The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to – and heard – is, therefore, the process and place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to” (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 57).

While my participants’ felt heard and seen in new ways, I also saw and heard myself in new ways. “Mirrored in the actions of others, the survivor recognizes and reclaims a lost part of herself” (Herman, 1992, p. 214). Through listening to my participants’ stories, by reading and re-reading the transcripts, I claimed in a way I never had
before, the trauma and sadness in my MK childhood. Sam's words were correct: you really can't walk under the rain and not get wet.

Jessica, Ruth and I had the privilege of working together using the expressive arts. I initiated this because I was hoping to provide another vehicle of expression for their MK experience. I knew from my interviews that the theme of silence and aloneness was present in their experience. The art day provided for individual space in the context of community. The opportunity to share helped release some of the internalized and silenced pain. Together we bore witness to the silent tears of our dorm rooms.

Douglas and Moustakas (1985) state that in actually obtaining data, the tacit dimension is the forerunner of inference and intuition, guiding the person to untapped aspects of awareness in nonlinear ways that elude analysis or explanation. In this sense, tacit is visionary: it incorporates the aesthetic and artistic aspects of consciousness without neglecting the clues of cognition (p. 49).

Art has a fascinating way of facilitating “ah-ha’s”. For Jessica, the art day recovered her creativity. She used the paintings she made to facilitate the truth-telling conversation she had with her parents. Painting allowed Ruth to feel her trauma deeply in her body and to release it through sound and image onto the paper. It is no longer only inside her. The art helped me name and claim my experience as trauma. Not only the abuse, but also all the losses that came from an early life lived away from my family in a boarding school. We all talked about our children as we introduced each other in the art day and our art was all about ourselves as children. Our children have provided us with the mid-life entrance to dealing with our MK childhoods. This art day was another way that I brought collaborative meaning-making to the research.

Analysis and interpretation begins with the first interview, in how the researcher presents her inquiry, in how she frames her questions and listens to her participants. In transcribing the interviews, I began the process formally. I read and re-read the interviews, listening for the themes that we had in common and for the parts of each story that was unique to the teller. I wanted their stories to inform me and so I was careful to not be hasty in making assumptions about the data. I read the interviews from the “sense-scape” of my body (Anderson, 2000, p.35) wanting to receive their stories respectfully and as fully as I could. “Bearing witness to the other in the sense of testifying to that which cannot be known, observed, or completely understood requires a vigilance toward the other and a constant awareness of one's own limitations in recognizing the other” (Oliver, 1998, p. 175).

I initially struggled with how to present this material. I hesitated to write participant profiles, anxious about appropriating voice. I hadn't found my writing style yet.
Writing the testimony of others is an awesome task and a solitary one. “To bear witness is to bear the solitude of a responsibility, and to bear the responsibility, precisely of that solitude” (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 3). Cole and Knowles write,

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 most 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 (2001, p. 228).

So I began by finding the common themes. They were like the spider’s dragline that led to the creation of vignettes. I began by writing exemplary vignettes from my own story that reflected the common themes. Glesne and Peshkin write, “By means of my subjectivity, I construct a narrative, but it must be imaginable by others, and it must be verifiable by others” (1992, p. 104). Managing two or more subjectivities is one of the challenges of life history research.

I found that I write best, easiest, from the inside, and the inside that I could begin to write from was my own. I wrote best when the voices of my participants, their inflections, their silences, were felt in me and I was in alignment with them. I found I write from an embodied place to attempt to convey the resonance of experience. This made the writing not a plodding but a dancing activity. Sometimes I felt as if I were simply the secretary for my thoughts. Cole and Knowles write, “The voice of the poetic transcription is neither the researcher’s nor the participants’ but a third voice which emerges through creative dialogue between words and structures” (2001, p. 271).

As I gained confidence as a writer, I was able to write more easily as if I were Sam or Jessica or Ruth. The vignettes were created from the words of the participants’ transcripts and I created the context so that the vignettes became stories. After I began writing the vignettes, the short participant profiles that appear in the “Spiderlings of Ananse and Aso” chapter came more easily. Over time some vignettes were, in a sense, composites, as I drew together the emotional tone of the stories told. Playwright Tennessee Williams said: “If I try to make a universal character, it becomes boring. It doesn’t exist. If I make the character specific and concrete, it becomes universal” (Anderson, 2000, p. 35). It mattered a lot to me to write the stories in such a way that the reader could enter into the skin of our experience as children.

“To craft a life is to engage in art-making” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 227). Choosing a representational form for my inquiry emerged as the inquiry evolved. It
came through listening for a story as I read the transcripts, through the heuristic returns as I listened to myself and followed the intuitive impulse.

In my role as participant-researcher, I knew how I wanted to frame this inquiry; using the Ananse story in itself is a choice of an interpretation of the experience. I did not set out to use an arts-informed style. I basically wrote this thesis in the only way I could, in the way that worked for me, as the spider spinning this particular telling. Guiding all my decisions was the desire to communicate as fully as possible with the readers.

A life history account is also written or revealed with the express purpose of connecting, in a holistic way, with the hearts, souls, and minds of the readers. It is intended to have an evocative quality and a high level of resonance for audiences of all kinds (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 283).

The choice to use photographs came from this impulse to communicate with the readers. Photographs and artifacts have the “capacity to illuminate a life in unanticipated ways” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 175). I thought that if the reader could see what we looked like and sounded like, that this would help them to get inside the ages we were at the time and it might help them to put themselves inside the story too. As Jessica and Ruth see themselves in their children, perhaps the reader will see her/his self in the photographs. Life history inquiry is a representation of human experience that draws in viewers or readers to the interpretive process and invites them to make meaning and judgments based on their own reading of the ‘text’ as it is viewed through the lenses of their own realities (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 11).

The readers themselves are thus involved in the process of analysis and interpretation. There is ‘no single role that the reader is called upon to play,’ and therefore an interpretation of a work thus comes to be an account of what happens to the reader: how various conventions or hypotheses are posited, how expectations are defeated or confirmed. To speak of the meaning of the work is to tell a story of reading’ (The Bible & Culture Collective, 1995, p. 63).

I made an ethical decision to use only my own photographs and artifacts in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of my participants. In that sense they are exemplary portraits. The vignettes, in a similar way, are like written photographs. They are “snapshots” in time.

Another way the artifacts serve this inquiry is as a form of validity, corroborating my research and contributing to its trustworthiness. They are Art-i-Facts. Anderson describes validity as “the principle of sympathetic resonance” (2000, p. 33). She describes sympathetic resonance with an analogy: “striking a tuning fork will vibrate another tun-
ing fork some distance away” (2000, p. 33). In ethnographic research, this is called triangulating the data. Cole and Knowles state that in life history research, validity has the qualities of “resonance, authenticity, and coherence” (2001, p. 281). Several times I have written a vignette based on an epiphanal story and later came across the photograph or letter that matched the vignette. I was amazed at the match between the emotional tone of the vignette with the tone of the letters, for example. Kerenyi called this ‘hermaion’, an unexpected gift of Hermes (1992, p. v.). For me, this gift from Ananse was a silken treasure caught on the web for me to taste and enjoy.

A Communal Understanding

Throughout this inquiry, I asked myself “what was the meaning that I wanted the reader to take away from this work?” I had to continually clarify who my audience was. In the final analysis, my primary loyalty in writing this inquiry is to the other adult MKs like me who have felt silenced and alone and knowing my audience also governed my decisions of representation.

In the process of data analysis, I have had to take an eagle view of all the gathered information, offering a broader and more contextualized interpretation. That meant stepping outside my participant role which was difficult at times.

One primary purpose of life history research is to provide insight into human lives, and, more generally, into the human condition. Randall writes,

The importance of the untold stories in the life of an individual is paralleled by their importance in the world as a whole.... As the inside story of a given civilization – that is, the history of it written (inside-out) by its own interpreters – is able to accommodate, account for, and consider more and more of its own outside story, then the self-concept of that civilization must change, however gradual the process and great the cost. Specifically, as the overall self-story of Western society is opened to include the previously untold stories.... told of course from their respective points of view.... then that same society self-creates in new ways (1995, p. 298).

Hopefully this inquiry will enable the missionaries of the “given civilization” of the Christian world an ability to understand their mission with new eyes.

A life history approach emphasizes in-depth interviewing and the contextualization of people’s lives. The raw material of life history research is experiential narrative,
people's stories. Life history research aims to understand life as lived in the present and as influenced by personal and social histories (Cole, 1994). There are three assumptions implicit in life history research. They are: that the stories that people tell about their lives are embedded in a social context; that life stories are in need of interpretation; and that the events of people's present lives are linked to their histories (Aston, 2000). In life history research, the researcher and the research participants work together to co-create meanings. In this inquiry, the Christian mission run boarding schools are the social context that bind together the individual stories. The experience of being raised in a mission-run boarding school was the defining element of selecting the participants for this inquiry.

Reflexive inquiry, like life history research is "up close and personal". It is intrusive, with a potential for harm as well as benefit. In selecting my participants, one of my criteria was that I wanted to talk with MK's who had already had some process of reflection in their lives, preferably therapy. I wanted to talk with people who were capable of exploring themselves and reflecting on their lives in the kind of way that would be helpful for this inquiry. If they were in therapy now, I encouraged them to continue with this support during the course of the inquiry in case some of the stories raised reverberated in unforeseen ways in their present lives. "The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is re-living; not relief, but further retraumatization" (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 67). Sometimes there were painful moments in the course of an interview and I had to hold steady to my sense of researcher, restraining my psychotherapist self.

For this inquiry, writing in the genre of testimony has been a way to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future. "To bear witness has connotations of testifying but also of listening to the testimony of others. To bear witness can mean telling about an experience in order to make sense out of it for yourself and/or for another" (Oliver, 1998, p. 174). For the participants of this inquiry, it has been a way to restore connections and to recover commonalities.

Writing testimony has been a way to listen to the stories in context. Writing about lives in context is an important characteristic of life history research.

To be a human being is to have connections with others and the collective societal influences and institutions, be they historical, political, economic, educational, religious, or even environmental. To be human is to experience 'the relational', no matter how it is defined and, at the same time, to be shaped by 'the institutional', the structural expressions of community and society. To be human is to be molded by context" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 23).
Speaking and writing testimony, bearing witness to the testimony of one's self and others has become an important activity for trauma survivors (Herman, 1992; Terr, 1990), for survivors of the Holocaust (Felman & Laub, 1992), for Aboriginal survivors of the residential school experience (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Jaine, 1993), for writers (Allende, 1995; De Salvo, 1999; Lorde, 1980; Walker, 1983). De Salvo writes,

Writing our story and keeping it locked away where no one can read it repeats the lethal pattern of silencing and tyranny and shame that so often accompanies trauma. And the deadliest feature of trauma is that its aftereffects are suffered solitarily and in silence (1999, p. 209).

The fear of reprisals, the fear of being perceived as disloyal to one’s family or church or the fear of being misunderstood often contributes to keeping silent, to keeping our stories to ourselves. Missionary kids know about the commandment that says, “Thou shalt not bear false witness”. I grappled with this as a participant-researcher and talked about it with Ruth, Jessica and Sam. However in keeping silent, we bear false witness against ourselves. In the testimony of this inquiry, we no longer allow ourselves to be silenced or allow others to speak for our experiences.

One of the roots of writing and speaking testimony is in liberation theology. Liberation theology emerged in the Christian community after Pope John the Twenty-third made the Bible available for the first time to the laity of the Roman Catholic Church. When the people of Latin America, Africa and Asia, read the Bible for themselves in the context of their lives, they discovered a God quite different from the one traditionally presented to them. From their life and death struggles against political oppression, economic inequality and poverty, they started to see the Bible as “good news for the poor”. They read “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to preach release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed…” (Luke 4: 18 & 19). Bishop Tutu of South Africa stated, “The Bible is the most revolutionary thing around. Maybe the missionaries should not have brought it here because, quite frankly, we are taking it seriously” (Neehall, n.d., p. 13). This is the power of story.

The missionary literature continues to define adults who spent their childhood’s in the mission world as MKs or adult MKs (AMKs) or TCKs. Somehow we are never released from this distinction into the adulthood’s of our present lives. As a society, we no longer say disabled people, we say people with disabilities. We are never former MK’s. We are held captive by the missionary endeavour of our pasts.

For many years, I perceived my MK years as a blessing and in many ways I still do. Yet this perception is also a lie. It is a lie because it prevents me from feeling the full story
of my experience. "The witness offers testimony to a truth that is generally unrecognized or suppressed" (De Salvo, 1999, p. 216). When I read and re-read the transcripts and when I read the vignettes that emerged, what I could no longer deny was the profound sadness and loss that I felt. These feelings of sadness and loss were the essential texture of my experience as an MK raised away from my family in a boarding school.

It is profoundly moving to realize now that my sister Ann who went blind, was, in fact, the only one of us with vision. A vision repressed because it was denied by the adults around her. Felman and Laub write,

Repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation. The event must be reclaimed because even if successfully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one's life (1992, p. 85 & 86).

Through our testimony, Sam, Jessica, Ruth and I have recovered our sight; we are no longer blind. The mid-life experience has unshackled us and we are no longer captive to our MK myth.

The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal 'thou', and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 85).

I had hoped and wanted my thesis to be a vehicle of change and challenge. Understanding research as a political activity which aims to create social change is a principle of feminist research as articulated by Cook & Fonow (1986) among others (Jayaratne & Steward, 1991; Neilson, 1990, Reinharz, 1992). I originally thought this would be my gift back to my participants.

But Ananse the trickster intervened and taught me that the gift of sharing one's story is a radical revolutionary act. "The spider's thread is the means and support of spiritual self-actualization" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 906).

For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other – in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to somebody: to somebody they have been waiting for for a long time (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 71).

I imagine Nyame, the Sky God calling together his court of elders and telling them, "These adult missionary kids have given us Onini the python, Osebo the leopard,
Mmotia the dwarf, and Mmboro the bees. We acknowledge their struggle. To them we say Kose! Kose! Kose! Bless you! Bless you! Bless you!

This inquiry represents my anansesem, the web of my weaving, the silk of my spinning. In another telling by Sam or Jessica or Ruth, they may spin their silk in another way. In the end, my process has been a spider process of spinning, weaving, molting, eating the old silk of old webs and weaving anew.

To the readers of this inquiry, I say “nse se se sew”, “it is time for stories”. I hope you will reply, “nse se sewaa”, “we are ready to listen”.

[ 174 ]
Barbados, May 1999

The wind rustles the palm tree leaves above my head. My heart delights in the familiar sound they make. I close my eyes and listen. I am energized by the rhythm of the waves as they swoosh up the sand and drift away. I am aware of the sounds of birds. Vaguely I hear the cadence of speech but I’m not listening to the words, only the tones of the speakers. I open my eyes and I can see the ocean from where I am sitting under these palm trees. I feast on the sensual banquet of sights and sounds and the old and new feelings that they evoke in me.

I read the words of one of my participants. I read a sentence, a paragraph, a page. How much I read depends upon what the words evoke in me. I look up. I look around me. I have read her words many times. The wind rustles through me, creating spaces in my brain. The words I am reading, the wind, the spaces in my brain. The wind unfetters my brain. I let the words flow in and out of me like the dancing palm leaves, the dancing waves. They settle again and I make notes. I find things that I will use in my writing or that I am surprised to see, like I’ve never read it before today. Her words feel alive in me. I delight in my research as it dances around me in the warm tropical breeze.
Appendix
The title of my thesis is Spiders Spin Silk: Reflections of Missionary Kids at Midlife. In preparing these remarks for this presentation, I held myself inside these two dynamics: how to honour the integrity of the thesis, and how to make space for the spirit of Ananse to be alive and present with us here in this room. I probably needn’t have concerned myself about the second dynamic since Ananse never worried for an invitation throughout my thesis journey!

When I began this inquiry, I was like Ananse in the court of Nyame, the Sky God. I wanted to write about what can happen in midlife to people who were missionary children, MKs as we are called. That is the bridging line for the web that I want to spin with you today. As I said in my thesis, I wanted to see how our MK child-hoods resonated in our lives now, our lives at early midlife, since that is my stage now. Nyame just laughed at my boldness. “You can’t speak,” he said, “how are you going to tell this story?”

One of the first things that I learned was that Nyame is the God of small things. It was through small and simple things, like old photographs, old diaries and letters, old school reports, that I found the doorway to my voice. I used them to begin to tell the story of my MK childhood. It was through them that I became both the storyteller and the witness to my story and the stories of my inquiry participants, adult MKs like me. What is epiphanal for me in this thesis journey is that I found my voice and I used it to write and to speak. I am very grateful to Dr. J. Gary Knowles, my supervisor, for his support and guidance in encouraging me to use these artifacts and to have faith that these artifacts would enhance and not detract from a scholarly work. It is through telling this story that I received the blessing of Nyame to go forward and continue to spin stories.

Show and Tell

When we would come “home” from the mission field – from Liberia – my parents were given an “itinerary”; a list of dates and places that they/we would go to tell about my dad’s work. This was - and still is - a very familiar thing for missionaries to do when they came home on furlough. Some denominations called it “deputization”. It was a way of spreading the Good News and soliciting support for the world missions work of the church. Mostly we did this in Canada, although on one furlough, we travelled in West Germany as well. We girls often would dress up in our Liberian finery and stand beside the table of artifacts and pho-
tographs, sometimes serving the Liberian cake or goodie we would have brought. My dad called it “show and tell” and liked people to have a full sensory experience. When we still could do this, we would even speak a little pidgin English or Liberian English as it is called.

This is the story that I came home from Liberia with. This is the story that I believed for many years. This is the story that led me to experience depression and to attempt suicide in my early twenties. This is the story that led me into my own personal psychotherapy. In my early midlife, it was the symptoms of this kind of persona storytelling that led me to want to tell the real story or the other story of my MK experience. The impetus for searching for the real story came out of my own decision to confront the Lutheran Church with my childhood sexual abuse, abuse that took place at the hostel. I undertook a formal process that resulted in financial compensation for the therapy costs that I had incurred.

This is the “Show and Tell” that wasn’t told. This is the story that went underground until midlife. This is the story that was revealed to me when I immersed myself in the old letters and diaries and heard our words as children: “Mummy aren’t you glad that I’m not homesick anymore.”

I want to show you Ruth’s art. Ruth was a missionary kid and a participant in my inquiry. In her drawings, she encompassed the old and new story. She said,

When I participated in the day of art therapy, my daughter had been in Grade One for three months. My abuse began in Grade One. I felt abandoned by my parents to dorm parents who were cruel. My Grade One teacher was sadistic. I was enveloped in a fog of pain.

I drew my teacher with her wide mouth. My thinking began to have focus and I began to feel the rage and hate of the very young child that I had been. I stabbed my teacher. And I stabbed her. And I stabbed her. Almost without shame, I stabbed her. And then the fog was gone. I began to draw what I would have liked for the young Grade One student that I was. But I could not fill in the picture. I still have not been able to. But for now, I am all right about not knowing. It is enough that my Grade One teacher is out of my head. (Thesis, p. 63).

After Ruth completed the drawings of her experience, she was able to draw a picture of her daughter at school, separating her experience from her daughter’s, thus giving room for her daughter to have her own experience of Grade One.

For Jessica, another thesis participant, the medium of art allowed her to tell her other story in a more embodied way. She wrote, “I really felt energized and very excited when I came home that day we did the art session. It was like opening a door to my soul, to be able to express my feelings in that way.”
Ruth’s Art

I stabbed my teacher.

What I would have liked.

My daughter at her school.
First Attachment Disc

Telling stories, giving testimony, having stories witnessed so that the tellers can receive themselves in a new way is a form of arts-informed research inquiry. The confessional nature of testimony makes it unique as a life history form. "Context is everything" in life history inquiry and testimony as a genre provides another form of context — it is the context of the telling — the context of the "I", "Thou". It is the context of the telling in the presence of a witness. It is the context of how the story is told — released from the teller and returned to the teller. Bruce Moon in his book Existential Art Therapy writes, "The creative act is not an end in itself. It is not enough to simply paint, dance or sing in solitude. There must be someone who can see the drawing, watch the dance or listen to the song" (1990, p. 38). In their confessing and in hearing themselves telling, I know that my participants redeemed themselves from life events they experienced as unredeemable. Moon also writes,

The more the story is told whether through drawing, painting, poetry, or song, the more it is owned and understood. The painting of one's own life establishes the artist/painter as creator of the story. It puts the patient in a position of power — power to accept, to internalize or externalize, to alter or even to paint over the story... to grasp fully the meaning of the story (Existential Art Therapy, 1990, p. 37).

In writing my thesis in this way, not only have I added to the MK literature as a whole, but I have added to what is, unfortunately, only a small body of MK literature that could be described as testimonial. As I have indicated, most MK literature has breadth rather than depth. My inquiry "showed off" (show and tell) just a few lives because I wanted to work in-depth with my participants. Isolation is one of the themes for MKs raised in boarding schools, both in childhood and as a dynamic of adulthood. I didn't want my thesis to be another form of isolation - the isolation inherent in a larger participant size, of questionnaires and generalizing themes. I wanted my research to ameliorate this isolation. I wanted the reader to see their faces and to experience their person-hood, to "walk a mile in their moccasins" as First Nations' people say.

Second Attachment Disc

The use of story as a psychotherapeutic tool is another attachment disc for today's
spinning. Story telling is an ancient art form of healing. In many cultures, it is a shamanic healing practice. Dion Buffalo, a Plains Cree storyteller writes, “The storyteller is a healer or synergizer within an Indian community whose function is to produce sound-words for the listeners so that constricted energy can be released” (Healine Voices, 1990, p. 120). An ancient story would be used to help with a personal story. Anansesem are often stories of how or why something came to be. These stories were used to teach children valuable lessons about life. The storyteller, would say prayers before telling the stories and many of the stories would speak about the relationship between people and God, Nyame. Trickster stories in particular, are marked by a sharp sense of humour that exposes human nature. Dion Buffalo writes that trickster tales relate a recognition that the sacred dimension in nature has intrinsic meaning and importance. They also demonstrate the law of polarity, teaching that we learn things by experiencing their opposite. Trickster tales provide a cathartic experience for the listener. Moreover, a shift or transcendence takes place when the listener understands that change does not occur when people try to be what they are not but does occur when they try to be more of what they are (Healine Voices, 1990, p. 124).

In psychotherapy one of the things we want to do is understand and alleviate symptoms. We encourage our clients to “show and tell” their other story in our presence – we are the witness to their story. We want them to tell their stories attentive to the messages that their imagination has for them. “To be attentive to” best translates the Greek root word for therapy. With them, we vigilantly look for meaning in life’s everyday events. Traditional peoples believe the imagination to be a great source of power that can be used to help and aid us in our daily life. In her book, The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine, Downing speaks about the importance of myth in personal healing and growth. She writes,

The discovery of a mythical pattern that in some way one feels is connected to one’s own life deepens one’s self understanding.... Appreciation of the connection between the myth and my life seems simultaneously to make me more attuned to the myth’s unity and to help me understand how moments in my life which otherwise might seem accidental or fragmentary belong to the whole. Indeed, we may thus come to recognize the mythos, the plot, the connecting thread, the story of our life” (1984, p. 26).

James Hillman, the founder of Archetypal Psychology, introduced the idea that soul is what turns random events into meaningful experiences. In therapy, client and therapist together collect up the stories, not necessarily to diagnose pathology, but rather
as an expression of 'pathos', the element in experience or in artistic representation that evokes compassion. We want our client to begin to hold his/herself with compassion, with loving kindness and in so doing, the symptoms are understood, are alleviated, transformed. Alleviation of symptoms is one of the measures of change used in many forms of psychology. As symptoms disappear or shape-shift through the telling of the other story and witnessed by the therapist, clients return to themselves their whole story. Some symptoms can be gifts from the soul, meant to shake us into life.

Storytelling is a vehicle for recovering our authentic life. The purpose of therapy is not to get rid of our story. The purpose of therapy is to ease the cognitive and affective disturbance of the old story. Like Jung, I believe that life is a spiraling progression rather than a linear line. We come round to our themes again and again. They echo in our lives over and over, and the task of therapy is to bring these echoing themes to consciousness. Like Ananse, clients, through telling the other story and bringing their themes to consciousness, receive the blessing to go forward and tell their whole story, and find the courage to live from their own authentic story.

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Third Attachment Disc

In addition to contributing to the MK literature, I believe that I also contribute to the literature on midlife. There is very little written about the developmental stages of midlife. It is often written about as if it were one event. Yet midlife spans quite a number of years and it is my supposition that early midlife is very different from middle or late midlife. The participants in my thesis, including myself, are in early midlife. The vignettes of my inquiry illustrate the numerous individuation's we have made in this stage and perhaps also highlight the ones we will still have to make in this spiraling process we call life.

Individuation in the midlife process is when the Ego and the Self line up and the Ego become relativized in relation to the Self. This means that the Ego relates to the world through the values and the meanings of the Self rather than simply responding to the external world. Hollis, in his book The Middle Passage, describes individuation as "the developmental imperative of each of us to become ourselves as fully as we are able, within the limits imposed on us by fate" (1993, p. 97).

I spent ten days in my parent's home this past August. It is the largest number of days that I have spent with them and my siblings in many years. One morning, near the end of the visit, as I was being attentive to myself through writing in my journal, I wrote,
"If I stayed in this house too long, I will loose my nerve. If I stayed in this house, I wouldn't write this thesis. If I lived in this city, I wouldn't have written the thesis that I have written. Not speaking. Not speaking so that we don't hurt each other is such a strong family value!" (August 18/00, journal entry).

Why am I telling you this? I am telling you this because another gift of story telling is about finding one's own voice. Sometimes I have clients' who want to find the One trauma that will explain their distress, their "existential vacuum" as Viktor Frankl described it in 1953. More often than not, there is not one trauma. It is the accumulation of many little traumatic life events that I call the "drip-drip" factor. The drip-drips erode the soul and the spirit. Even while there were many lovely things about my days with my family, the drip-drip of my family system affected me and I am grateful that I was able to see how that was silencing me, to know the truth of that silencing, the power of that silencing. I didn't make up this dynamic of silencing, it is not a figment of my imagination. One of the gifts for me of psychotherapy, and one that I hope my clients also encounter, is the discerning of how long I/we can stay true to myself/ourselves in my/our new story, when I go to my family home and live in the old story, surrounded by the artifacts of the old story, of the old "Show and Tell".

Jessica writes about this kind of silencing too in her e-mail about the art day. She shared a piece of her art with her parents and even "had the guts to be honest and tell them that the black hands represented them sending me away to school." Yet she has seen them since and they do not talk about it.

In preparing these remarks, I have been reflecting again on midlife and MKs. I wonder about my visit home and the clenched teeth of my artwork, the visible reminder of the silencing that happened so long ago. In midlife, we have to complete what was unfinished for us in our earlier life. Hollis states, "The more traumatic the childhood, the more infantile our sense of reality. It is very hard to know our reality and to operate from its baseline" (The Middle Passage, 1993, p. 102).

I wonder if we MKs raised in boarding schools were interrupted in some of our processes of childhood individuation because we were managing trauma. Instead of being involved in the developmental tasks of differentiation, we were involved in the tasks of managing the traumas of continuous separations and losses, of various abuses and so on.

The energy we would have directed towards ourselves and within ourselves instead was spent on keeping the old story in tact, in holding the old story at bay. Therefore we don't navigate effectively and efficiently the developmental tasks of earlier life, that of attaining sufficient ego strength to leave our parents and enter the world. I wonder if more MKs are thus delayed in their developmental tasks of early adulthood, in
The clenched teeth of my smile.

having their children, finding their careers, etc. Is this a dynamic of MKs at midlife? I hope my inquiry sparks more research interest in this area.

First Spiral: My Learning

I am spinning my first spiral today with the gifts that this inquiry has brought me. The process of writing this thesis with its many personal lessons, is helping me in my work as a psychotherapist. As I struggle with the metaphor of the spider and let it disturb me and teach me, I am learning how to be more metaphorical in my therapy work. It is becoming easier for me to listen for the under story or subtext of the old story. I hear the literal, concrete words and I let them resonate metaphorically. I believe this deepens my psychotherapeutic work. Moon writes, “Soul is found wherever imaginative work is underway. It has to do with meaning and authenticity, the deep regions of shadow and light. It is easiest to see in love, creative work, intimacy and community” (Art and Soul, 1997, p. 6).

I trust my own process more, even if I can’t always articulate it. I have more faith
in myself. I am more at home in my learning style and more often that not, I can affirm the results of my meandering, circular, style as scholarly. I am realizing that my leftist politics of my early adult years – what I see as my subversive period – continues even now. There is a rebellious quality to me that I like and that serves me academically. This part of me helped me to take and make the space that I needed to honour my own way of researching and writing.

Second Spiral: The Pearls

Discovering writing and claiming myself as a writer is the greatest gift this inquiry has given me. A luminous, numinous pearl strung on the second spiral of this web.

Another pearl of this second spiral is the delight I have in my scholar self. I have always loved those periods in my life when I have studied. Yet I often cheated myself of them by not believing in myself. Engaging in this inquiry while inside my early midlife process has convinced me not to cheat myself again and to find some way to include writing and scholarly work in my professional life.

I want to do post-doctoral work. In addition to more work on MKs at midlife, I am very interested in interviewing and writing about the fathers and mothers of MKs. What are their spider stories?

I am curious about our fathers. How did they think about their children as they responded to their “call” to be a missionary? I do not believe that my father thought he would sacrifice his children. What are the fathers’ stories? I am curious about our mothers. How did they understand themselves as missionaries? They had to leave their children among strangers in a foreign land. What are the mothers’ stories?

My thesis has been a reflexive inquiry. I began with self-exploration and then broadened my search out to include others, and then came home again to myself. It is the way that I spin silk, the way that I weave webs. I hope that others will use this enriching, scholarly path to spin their silk.

I wrote these remarks as a warm-up to a conversation, the conversation that I look forward to having with you now.

September 26, 2000
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