(EN)COMPASSING HEART:
A GRASSROOTS NGO'S NAVIGATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

By

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Abstract

Rachel Larabee
(En)Compassing Heart: A Grassroots NGO’s Navigation Towards Sustainability
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(En)Compassing Heart explores and documents the organizational journey of POR AMOR Community Enhancement Initiatives. POR AMOR is a current, Toronto based, youth-led, non-profit organization I co-founded with three other young women in 2003. POR AMOR initiatives focus on youth empowerment and specifically helping young people to make responsible transitions into adulthood and become active leaders in their communities.

Through the use of arts-informed methodological practices, this project is constructed as a modern narrative, infused with spoken-word poetry, to track the journey of a young girl from her passion for the arts to becoming an empowered individual within her community. The young protagonist is representative of the journey of POR AMOR, our journey as young people navigating our way to meaningful work in communities. The mission of POR AMOR is to promote and facilitate art-based youth empowerment initiatives in local and international community contexts.
Dedications (Intentions)

I dedicate this story to the ancestors who have guided its purpose and passion. To the four winds, south, west, north and east, from the end to the beginning, through the archetypal powers—may we learn the ways of our ancient ones and re-member the wisdom they transpire. May we honour them and receive their gentle awakening.

I dedicate this story to the wisdom, traditions, teachings, kindness and inspiration of the indigenous people of Turtle Island. I particularly dedicate it to those of the Six Nations whose paths and teachings I have had the honour of crossing and whose medicine I have had the honour of receiving.

I dedicate this story to youth and our dreams for them: that they receive the guidance that leads them to their quest of Self discovery; that they become empowered through the recognition of who they are and what they are worth; that they realize their inner strengths, creative powers and carry their light forward like shining medicine on the open wounds of our past, like shining compasses on the dark tunnels of our present, like fierce, fire blazing torches paving trails for the next seven generations.

I dedicate this story to parents, grandparents, teachers, guidance councillors, therapists, social workers, and all people who interact with young people: that they may see the value in training, investing and valuing young people as keepers of the Earth and family ties (human bonds); that they recognize the glowing heart in every young person and work to keep that glow nourished, guided and supported instead of feared, loathed and misunderstood. Our communities need not be plagued with children of low self esteem who in turn cause destruction and violence out of anger for not being seen, heard and acknowledged, out of frustration because our youth struggle to find their way and we fear them as they struggle, as they cannot locate their dreams, as they feel like they do not belong; that these people direct their attention to the precious resource our youth provide to our communities. That they refrain from looking upon youth as a burden but instead as young, vibrant, resilient and inspired warriors who will carry the torch for those of us naturally beginning to slow
down; that they see the value in young social activists who stand up for virtues of love, justice, peace, and harmony; that they refrain from describing these concepts as unrealistic idealism but instead encourage the awareness of oppositions to these concepts as an assault and abuse to the Self, because we are ONE.

I dedicate this story to my sisters: Erin, Tanika and Melissa; that they may continue to honour their heart and dreams; that we may continue to support each other in the next steps and phase of this dream manifestation and community renewal.

Most importantly, I dedicate this story to the Great Spirit and all manifestations of it; to the life force, the creative force, the ocean, the forests, the gardens, the mountains, the four-legged, two-legged, multiple-legged ones, the winged ones, the stones, the ether and all the blessed energy in motion—LOVE...from my deepest, highest place—Namaste.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract..............................................................................................................................II

Dedications (Intentions)........................................................................................................III

Acknowledgements ..............................................................................................................V

Table of Contents ..................................................................................................................VI

Table of Figures ...................................................................................................................IX

Introduction..........................................................................................................................1

“Butterflies”........................................................................................................................1

Part 1: The Experiential Journey ..........................................................................................6

Chapter One: Dreams that Awaken.....................................................................................7

“Our Way”..........................................................................................................................10

Chapter Two: The Confidence to Begin ............................................................................21

“This Place They Tell Me is Home” ..................................................................................26

Chapter Three: The Law of Manifestation .........................................................................37

“My Time to Rhyme” .........................................................................................................53

VI
“Community Love” ........................................................................................................ 222

Bibliography .................................................................................................................... 232

Appendix: The ‘Ologies’ .................................................................................................. 237

Epistemology of my Methodology Revealed Chronologically: ..................................... 238

“Quest for Questions” .................................................................................................... 241

“Fabric of Life” ............................................................................................................... 259

Piece by Peace: Character Profiles ................................................................................. 287
Table of Figures

*All photos used in this document are property of POR AMOR Community Enhancement Initiatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Soul-R performing spoken word poetry at Spectrum</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>M.C. Insight at Spectrum</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>M.C. Goldilocks at Spectrum</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Raydiance performing spoken word poetry at Spectrum</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Blues Underdog at Spectrum</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Ash of Ubiquitous Synergy Seeker (USS) at Spectrum</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>M.C. Testament</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Rita Gautschi, founder of Gracias</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>The Rouge Valley Forest</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Aerial view of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Mount Isabella (‘La Loma’) Puerto Plata, D.R.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>City streets of Puerto Plata, D.R.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Erin Hahn in the Rouge Forest</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Jully Black performing at POR AMOR benefit concert</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>M.C. Insight (Tanika Riley) POR AMOR benefit concert</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>The crowded audience at a POR AMOR benefit concert</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
youth-empowering community-arts annual project in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough.................................................................180

Figure 37  POR AMOR youth participants painting human rights mural in Youth 4 Human Writes summer project 2008 .................................................................181

Figure 38  POR AMOR youth participants creating arts-based evaluations of the Youth 4 Human Writes summer project 2008.................................................................197

Figure 39  Shykara Beals performing her poem at 1st annual 'Community Love' Event 2008........198

Figure 40  POR AMOR youth participant recording self-composed song in the studio during Youth 4 Human Writes summer project......................................................199

Figure 41  M.C. Dan-e-o working with POR AMOR youth participant during ‘School of Rap’ song-writing workshops in Youth 4 Human Writes summer project.......................199

Figure 42  POR AMOR youth participants of Youth 4 Human Writes summer project at 1st Annual ‘Community Love’ event which they organized and hosted.........................200

Figure 43  First arts-informed representation of data.................................................................................................254

Figure 44  The four POR AMOR Co-founders: (from left to right) Erin Hahn, Melissa Gimousis, Rachel Larabee and Tanika Riley.................................................................254

Figure 45  Erin Hahn representing the South point on the compass and the emotional qualities of the POR AMOR collective..................................................................................255

Figure 46  Erin’s visions of sustainability for herself and POR AMOR.................................................................255

Figure 47  Tanika Riley representing the West point on the compass and the physical qualities of the POR AMOR collective..................................................................................255

Figure 48  Tanika’s vision of sustainability for herself and POR AMOR.................................................................255

Figure 49  Rachel Larabee representing the North point on the compass and the mental qualities of the POR AMOR collective..................................................................................256
Figure 50  My visions of sustainability for myself and POR AMOR...............................................................256

Figure 51  Melissa Gimousis representing the East point on the compass and the spiritual qualities
of the POR AMOR collective.........................................................................................................................256

Figure 52  Melissa’s visions of sustainability for herself and POR AMOR..........................................................256

Figure 53  Tanika’s photo collage......................................................................................................................257

Figure 54  Melissa’s photo collage....................................................................................................................257

Figure 55  My photo Collage............................................................................................................................257

Figure 56  Erin’s photo collage..........................................................................................................................257

Figure 57  The stretched spandex across the heart is representative of the creative tensions
involved with manifesting this dream into reality...............................................................................................258

Figure 58  Displaying the back of the structure to represent the relationships and people that
have sustained me throughout the POR AMOR and thesis journey..............................................................263

Figure 59  The legs that hold the structure standing upright represent the networks of support,
the connections amongst us within POR AMOR as well as the connections that serve
as supportive for our organization within the Canadian non-profit sector........................................................264

Figure 60  The base of the structure represents POR AMOR creating a secure foundation through
the development of a solid organizational/structural framework that supports our
sustainable expansion of effective work in the field of community development........................................264

Figure 61  The heart of POR AMOR represents our organizational vision (the Dream).................................265

Figure 62  A cobblestone path representation of POR AMOR’s organizational past successes and
challenges..............................................................................................................................................................265

Figure 63  A triple-layered representation of the methodological lenses (arts-informed methods,
case study analysis, and appreciative inquiry) I have used to analyse the organization
of POR AMOR in the research......................................................................................................................265
Figure 64  A cobblestone path representational of POR AMOR’s future organizational goals and dreams.................................................................266

Figure 65  The Parabola Model: A model showing the life, growth and decline of groups and projects.................................................................................................................269

Figure 66  POR AMOR Her-story Plot Structure.................................................................................................................................271

Figure 67  POR AMOR Organizational Chronology ..............................................................................................................................275
Introduction

The Birth of POR AMOR

Strawberry was born in a field of dreams. Her grandmother was a dream seamstress—who sewed and stitched the dreams of her people together into beautiful quilts of hope. When Strawberry was born, it was foretold that she would carry forth the dreams of her community for love, peace, and harmony into the Earth world. After her grandmother passed into Skyworld, Strawberry grew up to be a strong dream navigator, full of medicine for her community. Her story is our story. It begins with a poem...

“Butterflies”

Last night I went flying
Stepped right out of my caterpillar fuzz
Colors shining
I was the most beautiful butterfly there ever was
In the buzz of changing frequencies
The sequences of my life took a vast
Departure from the ground
I was overwhelmed with this buzzing sound
And to my profound understanding
The ground on which I had been previously standing
Became merely a platform for my future landing
I felt my wings expanding
As my spirit handed me the most precious piece of my evolution
Flight

Then all of a sudden
It's like--something was trying to snatch me
Almost like something was trying to stop me
Block me
Talk to me about all the reasons why I couldn't fly
I think it was then that I started to cry
Thinking why
Why couldn't I be a free floating butterfly?
Why couldn't I?
Funny--cause this deceptive dream snatcher
Sounded like my own voice
This deceptive dream catcher left me with no choice
But to awake from that dream and start another

Have you ever had a dream that felt so real
You thought you were awake?
That felt so real you thought this must be a mistake
There's no way I could have mistaken the dream life
For faking what seems like
Reality
As we say we experience and know it to be
In many ways I look at life as a dream
What I mean is that sometimes I go to places in my
Dreams that I'm asleep to when I'm awake
I mean sometimes I wait for the dream to end
At the end of the day
At the end of a way of thinking
My subconscious starts blinking
And slowly I fall asleep
Allowing me to awake
To something much deeper than my dreaming
Seeming reality could ever possibly be
I mean I can only speak for me
But dreams don’t seem very separate from reality
From what I see
I’ll tell you honestly
My life is a dream and I make it come true
I’ll tell you honestly
This life is not what it seems
And they’ve made it that way for you
I’ll tell you honestly
The truth about dreams is that this is one
In which your conscience has control
It is your conscience that has been enrolled in this
Earth school of dreaming
This complex swirl of meaning
This temple of soul redeeming
This seeming reality
And all its fatalities
Is a manufactured production
That has been forged into your mind
It’s as real as you believe it is

Now as a spiritual rainbow warrior
I’ve been summoned here to warn you that this
Right here
Right now
Is only a dream
An illusion
To some a grand confusion
To others a brilliant fusion of mind forces
Enforcing mind prison institutions
Get free
Dream with me
See they’ve been using “reality” to keep us asleep
Look deep, deep inside
As I confide to you why
We really all can be butterflies
As words flow from my mouth to your eyes
From your ears to your mind
In these colourful words I describe you will find truth

Now, how would you like it if I told you
You could never be a butterfly
Only a caterpillar
A tiny fuzzy critter of the Earth
Or if I said yeah, maybe you could be a butterfly
But only after you’ve complied with my
Every wish
What if I told you a minnow would never be fish
Or that tonight I’m telling you a poem
That I don’t intend to finish….

Obviously this all sounds ridiculous
But the wickedness of these examples is what’s true
See people for years have been lying to you
Our dreams of butterflies
Have been nullified
Into 6 million reasons why
We must conform to this system
Get comfortable with the feeling
That something is missing
If you closely listen
To your dreams
I guarantee you
You will fly
In the meantime they will petrify you
Into staying on the ground
Teaching you to ignore the profound
You see the profound thing about butterflies
Is that they began on foot
And were then able to ascend
The key
Is to dream yourself around that bend
In the end
Your dreams really are your only friend
Dream with me
Dream to be free
A beautiful butterfly soaring through this so called “Reality”
Spiritual detectives piercing through the fallacy
The truth is
We all exist in many different forms
Throughout the galaxy.
Part 1: The Experiential Journey
Chapter One: Dreams that Awaken

The universe seems to be the fulfillment of something so highly imaginative and so overwhelming that it must have been dreamed into existence.

— Thomas Berry

Strawberry’s journey started in the summer of 2003. It started in the midst of a quiet Toronto suburb, Pickering, Ontario, in fact. It started in the middle of an average strip mall, in the cozy confines of a Second Cup franchise coffee shop nestled between a Blockbuster, Shoppers Drug Mart, Price Chopper and Burger King. It started with her and a group of young people who gathered in celebration of something exquisitely unique: the sound of their own voices. They called it ‘Spectrum’.

‘Spectrum’ was an open mic night that took place Wednesday nights. Strawberry took on the role of weekly host. It was a space created by young people for young people, a platform of expression; a place to work out what was on their minds and, as a community, be heard. Musically, poetically, idealistically they shared their dreams and frustrations, hopes and desires, their beefs and their beliefs in a spontaneous spin of collaborative creativity and support. Their music and poetry spoke of where they were and where they wanted to be. It was the beginning of many things. Mostly a long and winding path, a path leading back to the beginning, forth into the darkness, back into the depths, deep into the heart, and forward on a quest. The rest, as it unfolds, is herstory.

Strawberry was 21 years old; not so young to be a child but then not so old to be a woman. Strawberry was a name chosen by her grandmother. Strawberry’s mother said that by the time Strawberry was born, Grandma’s heart had been sick for many years. It was Grandma’s request that
her first female grandchild be named Strawberry. One night Grandma’s heart stopped suddenly in her sleep. Strawberry was only three years old at the time. And though she was too young to remember times with Grandma, Strawberry would always remember Grandma’s face, a face framed in photos all around the house and a face that often appeared in Strawberry’s dreams. Strawberry had many vivid, detailed, sometimes unbelievable dreams, some she did not remember and some she could never forget.

Strawberry felt quite odd to be named after a fruit. She felt a bit embarrassed. She would have much rather been named Tamara or Chantelle or Jennifer, Katherine, Maria, Jill, Debra, Rosalind, Charleen. But Strawberry? In her own way she grew to love it, it was hers, and it made her unique. How many Strawberry’s do you know?

One particular Wednesday at ‘Spectrum’, as DJ B-Scout brought the music down to the soft hum of a Tribe Called Quest beat, Strawberry gripped the mic and greeted the guests who had arrived. She leaned her shoulder against the mantel piece near the tables set up for the DJ’s equipment.

People curled up in the plush sofa-chairs pushed to the sides of the room, others sat around the small circular coffee tables gathered in the open floor, others stood at the coffee counter and ordered lattes or smoothies, and others, walked in through the front, glass doors. The parking lot
filled up with cars. Some people who trekked all the way from Mississauga, the west side suburbs of Toronto.

The pot lights over the mantel piece served as performance spot light. Strawberry stood under their hot glare, rubbed her damp palms together and waited for the crowd to hush. She looked over the growing group of familiar faces. Each week her voice grew steadier, her hands more relaxed. She noticed the open mic and email sign-up sheets pass from table to table. She took a deep breath, smiled and let her shoulders drop.

“Good evening,” she welcomed the crowd, “And thank you all for making it out to another evening of self expression at Spectrum. Picking back up that theme of freedom we’ve been igniting, this poem I’ve brought tonight is something that’s been pounding my dome lately. It’s about pushing back against the system, or as some call it, the ‘shitstem’, searching for the freedom to become, based on passion rather than what They would prescribe we should be. I don’t know about you, but I strive to keep dreams alive and sometimes,” she shakes her head, “Sometimes it’s just not easy. But we push forward anyway don’t we?” A few heads nod and smile. “So I don’t have a title for this one yet. Maybe y’all could help me out with that.”
She began:

“Our Way”

Pounding like faint heart beats
Trumpets screaming silently of sorrow
Will my heart still beat tomorrow?
Or keep thumping against these walls to be Free
Release me
External influence controlling my voice
Advertisements invading my choice
Memories screaming out from the abyss: Rejoice
I scramble to find my hoist
Straddle the saddle
Set sail
Jump off
Get down
Fly high as we celebrate this precious life.

The longings of my constant restriction
My frustrated breath of repression
Hard lessons in hard times
Sweet pains of the sublime
I cross oceans of people with my mind
Searching for the one to be like
In order to like my life
And on I strive through the hike I climb
To find the true path that is mine

They say “girl get a job—find some security”
I say I’m working hard every day can’t you see
You think it’s easy work taking
All these chains off of me
All these pre-scripted roles they call society
I’m working on building up our humanity
Through my variety
Working on expressing my truth through this poetry
I work every day to seek the core of me
But they don’t want to advertise
What they ignore in me
Then they’d have nothing to sell me

They think we’re too young to see it,
The system too saturated
With mass media to read it
But we do.
Regardless of who
Is hiding behind the TV,
Newsstand, movie camera,
Justice bench, and speech podium,
Police badge
We feel the disconnect they direct
On the ones who neglect to reflect
Even when we can’t name it, we feel it.
Art helps us see it and hear it
Music our language—both frees us and oppresses
Most don’t contemplate their life lessons
Don’t care much—rather play x-box,
Smoke herb, get hot,
Make money.
But some of us care.
Even some of them do.
At least
Some of us
Are starting to

Figure 5
Blues Underdog at Spectrum
It's time to wake up,
We youth are
Hearing the call,
Getting critical
It's not all about hanging out
In the shopping malls
Of this system.
No longer will we comfortably sleep
Or sit when
They covertly sneak our rights away from us.

Born to be free.
Awakening to dreams that inspire me
Really starting to awake
To our dreaming frames pushing higher we
Want to see these structures changed.
Tired of authority claims that
They know what's best for us.
While the major cities reek of disgust
We must uncover the unjust
Lust to conquer us
In our dreams we trust
And will find our way.

Applause, whistles, and snaps. Blood rushed to Strawberry’s cheeks and her stomach softly expanded. She scanned the room from face to face, looking into eyes that looked at her. “Thank you.” She bowed her head, looked back up and smiled. “Please don’t forget about the collection going around tonight to raise funds for my trip to Puerto Plata, in the Dominican Republic. For those
of you who haven’t heard yet, I will be going there in February to volunteer for six months at an after-school, vocational centre for youth ‘in-need’. I will be working with them in a series of workshops about nutrition and sexual education, environmental conservation and creative expression. I’ve called the project POR AMOR, which means ‘for love’ in Spanish. Spanish is the language they speak in the Dominican although many Haitians live there too and they speak Creole. I am happy to answer any questions you have about this trip and ways you can support. I’ll be coordinating various fundraising initiatives leading up to my departure so please support this cause with any little amount that you can. Every bit helps.” Strawberry passed a black metal cookie tin for donations to a table of people who sat closest to her. They dropped some coins into the tin and passed it along. She took the clip board with the sign-up sheet from under her arm, squinted at the name written and called ‘Testament’ to the mic as she walked to the back of the room to stand behind the chairs of seated guests. Testament approached the mic, tested his voice sound, “testing, testing,” and handed B-Scout his CD of beats.

“Number 5,” Testament told B-Scout, “What up my people! How’s everybody feelin’ tonight?” His friends whistled and snapped. The beat began. He took the mic off its stand and walked closer to the crowd.

“Me?” he called out, “I’m feelin’ blessed so let me TEST these skills.”
He followed his intro with a freestyle and then got into his first track.

Strawberry leaned against the coffee bar and looked over the sign-up sheet for who was next in the performance line-up. She saw new and familiar names: Blakchild, Faeghan, Soul-R, Phil, and Asim. She put the list down and gave her full attention to Testament.

***

Tucked into the covers of her duvet that night, Strawberry imagined ways to raise the funds for her trip to Puerto Plata, ways to learn how to speak Spanish, ways to put together her workshop curriculum, and how she would learn to teach it, in Spanish, to youth ‘in-need’ in a foreign country. She closed her eyes and as she drifted, her imagination continued to work. How much money would she need to raise? How much would an apartment cost? Would she be safe living amongst the locals as a young, single woman? What were flight costs in February? She yawned. Would Rita come and visit her? None of this would have been possible if she hadn’t met Rita.

Strawberry’s thoughts drifted to the day she found Rita’s website on the Internet. She had always wanted to do volunteer work on the island of the Dominican Republic. Strawberry and her family had vacationed on the island several times throughout her life. While she surfed the net one afternoon and searched for volunteer opportunities on the island, she came across Gracias, Rita’s charitable organization, and decided to send Rita an email. Gracias is a Canadian charity that supports a children’s centre in Puerto Plata called Integracion Juvenil, I.J. Through correspondences with Rita, Strawberry learned that I.J. was in great need of volunteers. Rita offered to help Strawberry put ideas together for a volunteer project she could propose to offer at the centre. She invited
Strawberry over for tea at her home in Brampton to discuss the ideas and share more details about I.J.

Strawberry recalled the first time she met Rita, two weeks later, on a humid summer day in August, when she pulled into the complex of townhouses where Rita lived with her husband, Hans. A large magnolia tree dropped its petals onto her front lawn, a fuchsia rose bush bloomed below her front window and large stone squares of cement formed the walkway to Rita’s front door. A garden patch full of mums, pansies, purple and pink Iris lined the walkway. To the left side of her front window, there stood a small group of thick-stalked and tall sunflowers with plump centre patches full of new seed. A tiny, rusted, gold coloured ‘Gautschi Family’ plaque stuck to a black metal mailbox hung by the door frame. Before Strawberry got a chance to ring the door bell, the door opened and Rita appeared.

“Hiiii!” she exclaimed, stretched her long arms out. She wrapped Strawberry in a warm embrace. Rita was a tall slender woman, with a soft voice, short, gray curls and fluttering blue eyes. She was 77 years old, retired, legally blind, and smelled like a mix of fresh laundry and talcum powder. “So nice to finally meet you,” she said. “Come on in. I was just about to put on the kettle.”

Inside Rita’s home, there were more flowers than outside in her garden. The walls all the way up the stairs into her kitchen, through the hallway into the dining and living room, and especially the living
room, were covered with paintings of flowers. There were oil and acrylic and water colour paintings of bunches of tall baby pink, poppy red and lavender coloured stalks of irises, of cranberry, peach and soft yellow coloured roses, of white daisies and carnations, each stroke of colour a different petal.

“My grandfather was an artist,” Rita told Strawberry as she admired the artwork. Rita led Strawberry to the dining room which was also her office space.

“This is the centre,” Rita pointed to a photo pegged to the wall of herself where she sat on a chair outside the front of a big, school-like building. She was surrounded by children and everyone smiled. “This is Rosa, the Vice-President and my dear, dear friend,” she pointed to a photo of a red-headed woman with soft, smiling eyes behind silver-framed glasses. “And this is the Board of Directors at I.J.,” she pointed to a photo of Rita standing in a row of men and women dressed in formal suits and evening gowns, “That was during a charity event we held together in the capital city, Santo Domingo.”

Papers and pictures plastered the walls of Rita’s office; of her son and his family, of Jesus and Haitian artwork, of children, and little stickers or cut outs of hearts and butterflies. On her desktop lay standard desk supplies, a cup full of pens and pencils, a telephone, a stapler, file baskets.

In the corner of the room, beside her desk, there was a tall, beige filing cabinet and the top was covered in a yellow silk scarf. On the scarf, in the centre of an ensemble, was a gold-framed photo of Jesus. In the picture, He is leaning against the cross and his head is covered in the crown of thorns.
To the left of Jesus was a large white spot, almost like a discolouration in the photo, except it formed a silhouette of a human body.

“I took that picture in a cathedral in Puerto Plata. It was a painting of Jesus carrying up his cross,” said Rita as she noticed Strawberry who stared closer at the photo. “That’s how it developed. Isn’t that amazing?” she asked.

“It looks like you photographed a spirit between you and the painting,” Strawberry commented.

“Yes it does. That’s why it’s so special.”

Surrounding the photo of Jesus was a vase of dried roses. Beside the flower vase and as tall as the framed photo, stood an ivory-coloured, porcelain unicorn with a satin blonde mane, blue sparkling eyes, and a shimmering gold horn that protruded from the top of its head. On the other side of the framed Jesus stood a sculpture of a mahogany snake made of petrified wood; its scales speckled in beige, white, black and gold. Half of its body perched up as high as the photo frame and the other half coiled in a circle on the silk scarf. It was a smiling snake with an agile and relaxed demeanour, a sparkle of excitement twinkled through its bright hazel eyes.

Numerous metallic angels with tiny ruby stone hearts inlayed upon their chest hung from the ceiling by fish wire just centimetres over Jesus. Pine cones, sea shells and an array of different stones were placed around the photo frame, unicorn and snake. On the wall to the left was a charcoal drawing, of a curious raccoon poking its head up from behind a fallen tree trunk; its furry black and
white face, with eyebrows raised, a look of intrigue, perhaps surprised at the sight of something interesting.

To the other side of the corner was another large framed picture, this one a large oil painting of an eagle with a bold mustard beak, deep determined eyes, and broad wings spread full, about to swoop up from a mountain top into the heights of a purple and tangerine-streaked sunset sky.

“These are my little helpers,” said Rita with endearance, “They remind me of my guidance and groundedness between the two worlds.”

“You mean between Canada and the Dominican Republic?” asked Strawberry.

“Yeah,” Rita hesitated, “Sometimes,” she added with a wink. Strawberry stared at the altar a few moments longer before Rita called her into the living-room to look at photo albums and videos of her visits and involvement with Integracion Juvenil over the past 12 years. Rita explained how she had gained support for I.J. through her charity, how they were short on staff and resources, and how she felt confident that Strawberry’s educational background and experiences here in Canada would be an effective help for the children there, in addition to the programs already running. By the end of Strawberry’s visit she, she was convinced she wanted to go to the Dominican with Rita for a week to further explore this volunteer opportunity.

“I can’t explain why but it just feels right,” she told Rita. “It feels like I should go.”

“I know what you mean,” Rita replied.
As Strawberry lay in bed and reflected on all that lead up to the project she was about to begin, she thought of Puerto Plata and the week she went with Rita to meet the Board of Directors. She imagined the ocean and children, the poverty and friendliness, the hardships and generosity. Her mind flooded, her heart flooded, her body tired, her spirit ready, she drifted, slowly, softly, out of these thoughts that swirled and into her sleep, into the night, into the land of her dreams...

Rita stands in the doorway of a hallway that leads into an ancient rain forest. The fluorescent, moss-and-needle mirage of green smells like pine, like sap, like musky, morning earth. Rita welcomes her and the energy and oxygen from the forest pulses through the door frame and infuses the exchange between the young girl and the older woman with mystic inspiration. The enormous warmth from Rita’s smile is electric kindness. She extends her thin arms and long fingers towards Strawberry, palms facing up.

“Dream, my child. Dream big. Dream far. Dream wide. Dream the dream of our people, the dream of your purpose. There is help along the way. Accept your helpers. Listen to their wisdom. Follow your heart and there you will find the key that opens doors to the guiding chambers. Dream the dream of remembrance. Remember who you are. Your mission will find its way. When you do it for the right reasons, the entire universe aligns with your vision.”

A blast of sunshine pushes through the doorway, pushes through Rita’s body. Rita’s face becomes Grandma’s face and Grandma waves Strawberry forth through the doorway. Strawberry enters and Grandma fades in the swirl of green foliage.
“Have no fear, Little One,” and her voice continues to fade, “Your youth and strength is your fire. You will be protected and guided in all comings and goings. Fear not the land you know not. Dream big. Go far. Dream wide. Let your heart be your one true guide.” Grandma pulls a tiny bronze box from out of her pocket and hands it to the young woman. The metal is rusted and old, tarnished and cold. Inscribed on the top of the box are the words, ‘Know Thyself’. It has a key hole on each of four sides but will not open. Strawberry holds the box with confusion and raises her eyes to Grandma. Grandma’s soft glow slowly vanishes like the light from a distant star that climbs its way back home. Grandma fades into a backdrop of skyscrapers and briefcases and SUVs, into a backdrop of people, many, many people, so many that she can no longer make out Grandma’s face. When Strawberry looks closer, these people are Strawberry’s friends and family and they crowd in front of Grandma. Grandma continues to speak but Strawberry can no longer hear her. As Grandma fades, the backdrop of people fade with her and Strawberry feels herself zoom backwards away from the door frame, away from the forest that grows smaller and smaller until... POP!

Strawberry blinked open and awake. Sun beamed through her window. Robins chirped outside. She heard the cardinal. The smell of fresh-cut grass breezed through her room. She turned, stretched and tried to remember the details of her last dream.
Chapter Two: The Confidence to Begin

Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it.

Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!

—Goethe

“This is your home, one of the greatest countries in the world. You should be proud to be Canadian,” said Strawberry’s dad. He held buttered toast in one hand and a Leafs coffee mug in the other. He chewed and cut up his eggs with his fork.

“Can you pass me the ketchup please?” he asked Strawberry’s mother.

“There are plenty of poor people in Toronto, Honey. There are lots of places to volunteer in the downtown core,” said her mom, “I just don’t understand why you have to risk your life to help others when you can do the same thing right here in your own country. The government loves to support Canadians helping out Canadians,” said Strawberry’s mother.

“I’m not risking my life Mom. You’re so dramatic. I’ll be careful. Don’t worry,” said Strawberry.

Strawberry watched her mother’s brow crinkle as she put down her cutlery and faced her daughter.

“And what about your loans, your career, your security? Fine, you’re going to volunteer overseas, when there’s plenty volunteering you could do right here, then what? You have to start thinking more long term, Strawberry.”
“Here we go again! Look, Mom,” her voice rose, “I don’t know right now, ok? I just don’t know.” Her mother looked at her father, startled by Strawberry’s tone. Strawberry crumpled her napkin and tossed it onto her plate still full of toast and eggs. She tossed her cutlery onto her plate, gulped the rest of her orange juice, got up and walked to the kitchen.

Strawberry abruptly plunked her dishes in the sink. Her plates clashed into the other dishes.

“Be careful!” belted her mother, “Geez!”

Strawberry bolted out of the kitchen, pulled her shoulder bag off the stair railing on her way towards the front door. She wiggled one foot into a shoe. Her heel slid in after a few tries. She did the same with her other shoe, and opened the front door.

“I’m going for a walk,” she mumbled, closed the door behind her, and stepped out into the fresh autumn morning.

***

Strawberry’s breath deepened the further she walked through the Rouge forest. She walked along the trodden path of many travelers, over rocks and roots and muddy pools of rain. She heard the brook as she approached. She neared her favourite place by the Rouge River. The vibrant mustards, terracotta and reds of leaves, prepared for the fall, flaunted in the breeze, and held their sturdy branches as long as possible before they swung gracefully
down to the forest floor. Scented cedar and maple-glistened limbs reached and tickled each other as the wind whistled through their dressings. The soft bustle of the Rouge River playfully pushed its salmon along upstream. River drops danced, rushed and rolled over grandfather stones perfectly placed and shifted by nature’s rhythm..

Strawberry often came here to clear her mind. She took the folded blue paisley blanket from her shoulder bag, along with her green journal made of recycled paper and her favourite purple pen. She laid them beside the base of her old friend, the maple tree. She spread out the blanket and folded one of the ends as a cushion for her back before she leaned against the tree.

She traced the paisley pattern on her blanket with her finger and listened to the brook. A few weeks earlier, on her first trip to Puerto Plata with Rita, she listened to quite different sounds, sounds of crashing ocean waves and Spanish music. She had sat on this same blanket on the beach.

Rita said it was important for Strawberry to see the Centre, Integracion Juvenil, and meet the Board of Directors before any final decisions were made. That week they sat down with the Project Director, Vice President and Treasurer to discuss how to put Strawberry’s months of volunteering to good use.

Strawberry used her savings from her summer job as a
waitress to pay for her airfare. Rita offered to pay for her accommodations for the week. The Board members were ecstatic about Strawberry’s plans to offer educational workshops full of games and creative art activities.

Puerto Plata was a beautiful coastal city nestled between Mount Isabella, or what the locals called ‘La Loma’, and the Atlantic Ocean. Rita toured Strawberry through the narrow side streets of the city and showed her where the phone centre, Canadian consulate, and post office locations were. Some days Deya, the social worker at the Centre, took Strawberry for rides on the back of her moped.

Deya lived in the community, Padre Granero, where many of the children at the Centre lived. Deya spoke English very well, loved to go dancing and made Strawberry promise she would come over to her house for lunch to eat a traditional Dominican meal of rice, beans, chicken, cabbage salad, potato salad, yucca and fried plantain.

“Trust me. You will love my food. I am a good cook,” Deya enticed, “Everybody tells me.”
That week Deya taught Strawberry many things about the city and the culture of the Dominicans. Strawberry hopped on the back of the moped and Deya talked about Dominican people and culture as they drove to the beach. One day the driver of the school bus at Integracion Juvenil took them through the barrios, urban, mountainous and countryside neighbourhoods that were tucked into pockets around the city.

The city was full of fruit trees: mango, avocado, lime, banana, coconut, guava, and orange. These trees grew everywhere, in backyards, on side streets, main streets, hillsides and by the rivers. On the outskirts of the city many people lived humbly off their land, grew their own fruits and vegetables, and raised their own chickens and pigs. Some even had cows, some only dogs that hung around. The women would bake, cook and sell their goods on the side of the road or right out of their homes. The men would farm or travel into the city for work. The people who lived in the city worked in stores and shops and factories and hotels. There were many different types of jobs in the tourism industry. It seemed like a simple, beautiful and relaxed life.

The beach in Puerto Plata stretched from La Puntia, the historical fort built by Christopher Columbus and his army, along the Malecon and all the way to the Playa Dorado complex, a large complex of hotels and resorts. The Malecon was an ocean front boulevard that stretched half a mile along the edge of the city and was lined with almond and palm trees. The beach suffocated under old
plastic bottles, baby diapers, shoes, old food containers. Every imaginable piece of garbage flooded the beach. People tossed garbage onto the beach and people dumped garbage into the barrio sewers that ran under the streets, past the sidewalks and into the ocean. The garbage then washed back up onto the shoreline and onto the beach. Deya told Strawberry that most of the locals were not educated enough to understand the connection between their health and the health of their natural environment. The people gave little thought to the effects of their garbage once tossed from their possession.

In Canada, under the maple tree, Strawberry sat surrounded by some of her favourite sounds: the running brook, the rustling leaves, and the array of bird calls. Strawberry’s mind drifted from the lush greenery and ocean of Puerto Plata to the spectrum of colours and sounds by the Rouge River. She wished she, too, could live in peace and quiet off the land, surrounded by nature instead of highways and shopping malls and ten-, twelve- and thirty-story cement and glass buildings. She remembered her commute to the city one summer when she landscaped in the west end; the hours she suffered each day to sit in traffic to and from her work place. She picked up her journal and pen and began to write:

“This Place They Tell Me is Home”

Does thick traffic ever flow smooth
In this place they tell me is home
Is there ever the right time for it
The right lane, the ideal speed,
The perfect view to review our life
Or is it all jagged starts and stops
Like a brook unsure of its direction up or down,
Start and stop.
Cars that need highways and parking lots,
Ploughing over roots of ancestor,
Bark beaming wise ones.
Consumption of time in traffic, of wood in forest,
In restaurants, shopping malls, airports, places hosted by concrete.
In this place they tell me is home
Through pursuits of more we are left with less
Clothes that outdate
More style, less friends
More food, less energy
More work, less family
And traffic that is not smooth.
In this place they tell me is home many drive
Driving to jobs in factory plants where light is dim
Machines viciously prodding on
And on
And on
Circuits of production that produce us
We call them plants
We believe they have replaced our need for plants,
Beds of concrete developed
From trampling over plants
We live in comfy homes where we display our plants
Nuclear plants, auto plants,
Industrial plants of black and putrid exhaust
Tarnished liquids run into the lives of water,
Of air, of space.
Relating over timbits and double doubles
Our coffee cups symbolize our civilization
Welcome to planet Starbuck

Bitch, bitch, bitching away
About our boss, the kids, the spouse, the neighbour,
The asshole who cut us off this morning
In traffic on our way to the plant
In this place they tell me is home
Connecting over venting
Venting our reactions to
Connections being prevented
Toxic culture filling our cups
Spewing, venting cultures of people fuming
Like smoke pipes on plants
There’s no more plants outside the plant
There’s no spirit inside the plant
Marginal animals and earth pushed
Into the oily waters full of formaldehyde
Sinking, smothered and stubbornly striving to exist, In spite of plants

Searching myself for the reasons why I feel so alien
In this place they have told me is home all along
Still I am roaming for a place where I belong
Since I love my people
But feel the way we live is wrong...
Reflecting on how I will respond with this one Precious life I have been given.
May my heart continue to be full of giving
Even as I keep living and trying to somehow
Make it make sense.
Slowly this trying is draining my confidence...
Can I ever truly discover who I am in this place
They tell me is my home?

She put the pen down and re-read her words. A squirrel scurried by. She watched it scamper in one direction, stop, turn and charge the other way, stop, and turn around again. Strawberry wanted to go to Teacher’s College, wanted to travel, wanted to teach English overseas, wanted to teach yoga, sometimes she wanted to take her poetry more seriously, maybe publish a book or record a CD. Now she was planning a volunteer project overseas, had to raise funds, had to learn how to speak Spanish, and had to plan a curriculum for six months’ worth of workshops in three different subjects that were all inter-related to personal and communal wellbeing. And where would it lead her? Would she come home knowing what kind of work she would feel fulfilled in doing?

The squirrel ran up the tree and back down, across a branch halfway, back to the trunk, back across the branch further this time, a couple steps back, then fast again to the edge of the branch and leapt to another branch of a neighbouring tree and fast down the bark to the ground scurrying into the leaves and out of sight.
Rita told Strawberry that most children do not have basic school supplies and the classrooms are filled with up to 50 children, one teacher, one text book, and zero supplies. Where would she get her supplies?

She was not ignorant to the fact that education, and especially the arts, took a back seat to survival. Painting was a luxury. Environmental conservation was not a priority. She considered these challenges in the design of her curriculum. She looked again over the poem she had sketched out, considered the backwardness of her own culture, infiltrated by mass media and overconsumption. There were many challenges here as well.

Strawberry’s parents could not understand why she dreamed of doing this work. Rita, who she met only a year ago, was ecstatic about her dream. Rita was inspired to find a young girl who saw past the lustre of North American materialism and sought opportunities to work at something more meaningful and compassionate. Rita encouraged Strawberry to believe in the power of giving. Rita was adamant when she talked of how time, money, love and kindness given to those less fortunate than us were moments when we, the givers, truly received enrichment beyond any money or degree one could buy. How could it be that Rita made her feel so good about her decision and her parents made her feel foolish she wondered.

Strawberry reminded herself that it was normal for parents to fear the well-being of their child and that it was natural for them to want her to become financially secure herself first before she started giving of her time and money to others. Still, Strawberry wished so deep in her heart they would offer her the type of encouragement she needed to feel confident in this decision because she
already decided she was going ahead with it. It simply felt like the right thing to do and she wanted to follow that feeling even through the hesitation. She had the rest of her life to get a job. Her parents would eventually understand. Yet it was their lack of belief and support in her decision that made her hesitate. She picked up her pen to express the situation in her journal. She always felt better after she did and sometimes she found answers as she wrote that did not occur to her when she thought:

Even when we’re excited  
Deer in the spotlight we are  
When it’s time to start we’re not sure we are

Strawberry brought the tip of her pen to her teeth, lightly pressed them into the plastic, and thought of next words. She had already considered calling the whole trip off a number of times. She was afraid of not being able or skilled for such a project. She imagined having to return the funds collected back to donors and the humiliation she would feel. She considered postponing the trip. What if she could not raise the money? What if her Spanish was so bad she could not communicate with the children at all? What if she was putting her life in danger like her mother said? But walking out the front door every day, crossing the street, driving in a car, eating at a restaurant could all be dangerous. Accidents could always happen. Living in fear of everything was no way to live either, she reminded herself. Her head pounded with the tension between indecision and doubt.

Strawberry turned to the water, watched the rhythmic, rippling movement of waves over rocks. She felt soothed by its gentle lullaby. She took a deep breath. And then another. She closed her eyes
to listen to the giggling brook. A symphony of liquid echoes soothed her worrisome thoughts. Her breath deepened further, slower. The wind softly caressed her cheek, her neck, her hair. Her thoughts grew into whispers that grew faint and fainter. She heard the soft sway of leaves descend through the air and fall to the moist soil. She yawned, closed her journal and stretched out on her blanket. She let her body relax and stretch into the earth. She breathed in the surrounding smell and sound. She relaxed, her breath deepened. She relaxed and relaxed and drifted... She was so tired... she drifted... and she drifted... and she drifted into the sound, the deep rhythm. She drifted into the motions of a peaceful rest, of a quiet sleep, of a dreamed enchantment....

Strawberry heads south and feels called to walk ahead, one step at a time, past the brook into a pocket of the forest she had never explored before. Sunshine cascades through the opening of falling leaves and she walks forward, step by step, into rays of light that sparkle the space with warmth. She sees a white horse that gracefully dances amongst the leaves as they descend and she watches the horse come to a swirling halt, look her way and whinny with excitement.

Slowly, gracefully and confidently, the mystical creature masters each step towards the young girl. Stretching each knee forward, extending its hoof, it lands lightly on the cushioning Earth. Its mane falls into soft locks of shimmering silk and its body glows smooth and shiny like porcelain. The closer it gets, Strawberry can see that this isn’t a horse at all. She sights a golden horn that majestically protrudes from the top of its head. This is the porcelain unicorn from Rita’s altar! Strawberry feels her heart pulse and throb and the beautiful green-eyed unicorn stands before her now.
“So good to see you again and fantastic to find you here. Welcome to the land of dreams.”

“I have been here many times,” says Strawberry, “But something is different now.”

“Yes you have. And yes, it is. This is a new path for you because you are ready,” the Unicorn giggles, “I wonder if Rita sent you to me or me to you?” Again, she chuckles, “Whichever way, I feel happy for your visit. So now tell me, how do you feel?”

Strawberry shrugs, “I’m not sure. I feel confused—mostly because I’m in the forest talking to a porcelain unicorn and I don’t know which way to go or what to do and some people say I’m not facing reality and that I can’t live on dreams.”

“Yes, I imagine it is a bit confusing for you. But all is real in dream world. Most of humanity has forgotten. Many things that humans call ‘reality’ have become all mixed up. What is real seems unreal and what is unreal sometimes seems real. You probably think ‘real’ is the science you read or the ideas you have about love and marriage or that real is only what you can see with the eyes. But really,” she giggles, “real is how you feel. Confused huh? Now that is a good place to be—it means you are open to direction. And since your purpose is so important you’ve been directed south first, to the land of feeling and emotion, to the land of love in motion. This is a great place to move from; a great place to begin.”

“My name is Erina. I come from the south wind and represent the spirit of fire. As we move into the spaces and places of beauty and vitality I will help you realize the confidence to begin your next step in the quest. That is the guidance I have for you. You are headed in the right direction. So tell me more about this confusion. Maybe I can help you feel better.”
“I worry that I am following my heart to help others when I still haven’t learned how to help myself. I want to travel and volunteer and serve marginalized people and places in the name of love and social justice—yet, I don’t have my own two feet on the ground.”

Erina whinnies her loudest chuckle yet, “Well what are you standing on?” They glance at Strawberry’s two feet firmly planted on the ground. “By helping others, you help yourself. You sound like a dreamer who knows not the power of her dreams. All great adventurers, and you sound like one of them, are heart-followers. All dreamers are called to great tasks. Following your heart is the essence of dreaming since all dreams originate in the heart of the Great Spirit. All service begins and ends in the heart. So who will you serve? And what, my dear, do you envision?”

Strawberry explains her plans to begin volunteer work with a group of youth at the youth centre in a beautiful land tormented with economic deprivation and oppressive governmental structures. She wants to work with them in exploring personal and communal health through self discovery, creative expression and environmental awareness. She envisions a world where vibrant communities flourish to manifest positive social change, a place where love prevails and people are connected to each other and the Earth through love.

“What an honourable vision. So you’re a healer?”

“Hardly,” Strawberry screws up her face, “I just want to share blessings. We all have blessings to share. In North America we often take our blessings for granted until we realize how many suffer and go without while we waste and over consume. I don’t want to waste. I want to share and grow and dream.”
“I see,” the unicorn pauses and furrows her brow. “Where is the box Rita gave you?”

Strawberry pulls the metal box from her shoulder bag.

Erina continues, “The Great Spirit has asked me to tell you to open your heart in order to discover all dimensions of your Self. There will you become acquainted with the healer within. I have a gift for you to help you on your way in the right direction,” she says. She hands Strawberry a tarnished bronze key. The word ‘south’ was inscribed into it.

Strawberry fits the key into the bottom of the box. It locks in place.

“In journeys to the heart you will experience the magic of purpose. Here is your beginning. Good feelings will guide you. Be mindful of how you feel. Feel confident that you have been called to a great quest and trust in the ways of the heart. Take the next step, Darling, the bridge will be there¹. May the Great Spirit bless you on your way.”

Erina rears her body onto her hind legs, twirls three times, giggles and spins charm all around her. Then she gallops away through the opening of light. Leaves fall in her wake like a shower of inspiration and all that remains are colours that trickle down, colours of autumn that sprinkle through the breeze...

¹ This is a direct quote in reference to Grace Cirocco’s transformational work: Take the Step—The Bridge Will Be There, 2001.
Rain trickled gently over Strawberry’s face. It rolled down her nose and tickled her upper lip as she awoke to a gentle sensation of autumn mist. Surprised she had fallen asleep, she silently thanked her special place. She felt mystified by her dream and energized in her body. She started to make a list of her ideas for fundraising:

- selling jewellery
- throwing a party—more like parties
- bus trip to a club or downtown for an evening of events
- 50/50 and raffle draws

The rain transformed from a light mist to a gentle patter through the woods. The pages of Strawberry's journal dampened, ink bled and she closed her book, packed her belongings and headed home.
Chapter Three: The Law of Manifestation

That which you think of, but thereafter never speak of, creates at one level.
That which you think of and speak of creates at another level.
That which you think, speak and do becomes made manifest in your reality.

--Neale Donald Walsch

On a cold and snowy December night, near the corner of Bathurst and Queen Street, downtown Toronto, Strawberry shivered outside the Reverb. She waited for the concert to end and for Hip Hop heads to flock out of the building. She waited with flyers to pass out for the two POR AMOR benefit concerts she organized for January. Her last two major fundraisers were only three weeks away. She was hoping to leave for the Dominican Republic in February to start her work.

Promotions were the single most important element to any successful event. From talking to other promoters, she heard that only 3% of the people who received flyers actually show up—and that was under good promotional circumstances. And flyers were anything but cheap to print.

Strawberry’s first fundraising endeavour was a small jewellery sale. Rita donated pieces of jewellery to sell. It was jewellery Rita had left over and stored away from a store she used to own before she began her charity, Gracias. Rita and Strawberry made a deal that half of the profit from the sales could go to project POR AMOR and the other half to Gracias.

Next, Strawberry planned a bus trip to a night club. She sold tickets to friends and acquaintances in the Pickering area. It entailed renting a bus for a group of people to get driven to and from the
‘Docks’ night club in downtown Toronto. The idea was that all the guests could enjoy a jam with their friends without having to worry about designated drivers. People who bought tickets knew that the profit would be put directly into the POR AMOR project funds.

These first two smaller events, plus the money she collected in donation at Spectrum, and the money collected from the 50/50 draw tickets accounted for the first $700 Strawberry raised in funds prior to the two benefit concerts. Still, Strawberry relied on the concerts to provide the majority of funds she needed to finance the 6 six month trip.

The number of people to attend her benefit concerts would be the most important element to its success. But she had to dedicate her time to many other components aside from promotions. A lot went into an event’s planning that happened behind the scenes. Strawberry’s list of all the things she needed to do to organize and prepare for the concerts went something like this:

**POR AMOR Benefit Concert To Do’s**

- Find a venue, for free. Negotiate door and bar sales.
- Contact and confirm artists to perform as donation (play for free or small honorarium)
- Get artists’ sound requirements and bios
- Confirm venue can meet artists’ sound requirements or make arrangements
- Confirm sound person
- Develop promotional plan:
  - Design flyers and posters
  - Contact newspapers
  - Contact radio broadcasts
  - Other media
Contact and confirm vendors: local entrepreneurs and organizations in the community.
   Table fee $20 each.
Create show line-up and send to each artist with sound check and performance time
Contact and confirm visual artists (create painting during event)
Contact and confirm food vendor (vegetarian)
Purchase incense and candles
Get in-kind donations from local businesses (food and water for artists and volunteers, prizes for the raffle draws of each night)—create in-kind donation letter of request
Prepare POR AMOR information table (media to describe the project, demographics of Dominican Republic, Puerto Plata and Integracion Juvenil)
Contact and confirm volunteers for both nights (door sales, pass around the email, sign up list, sell raffle tickets)

She checked the items off her list as she went. It was a lot of work. She prayed it would all be worth it. The many, many components that went into planning a successful event would be in vain if nobody showed up.

Outside the Reverb, the temperature was minus fifteen degrees Celsius with the wind-chill. A small string of other promoters clung to their own flyers and huddled together. Their teeth chattered, their knees buckled, their finger tips froze and grew painfully numb. Finally loud applause erupted inside. This was Strawberry’s fourth night in a row to promote at different events across the city. She dug into her bag and tugged out a handful of flyers.

The doors of the club swung open. A crew of guys stepped into the winter night.

“Yo Guy, the DJ was dope but the MCs were kinda weak still.”
“What are you taalkin’ about? That one dude was spittin’ some serious lyrics about real shit. He kinda reminded me of Tupac. But you’re right, the beats were sick!”

“Excuse me,” Strawberry interrupted to hand all three guys a flyer, “I’m hosting a live benefit concert at the El Mocambo. Hip hop, reggae, spoken word. And you’ll be partying for a purpose—all proceeds go towards a volunteer initiative to support youth education in the Dominican Republic.”

They took the flyers. One smiled, one nodded, one said “Cool,” and they continued to walk on.

“But guy!” one guy nudged his friend, “how ‘bout the freestylin’? The freestylin’ was dirty too!”

Two girls in skinny jeans, NIKE hi-tops and hoodies; one yellow, the other baby pink, walked out. Strawberry handed them both flyers as she invited them,

“Party for a Purpose at the El Mocambo this January 11, featuring some of Toronto’s dopest artists in Hip Hop, spoken word, acoustic guitar...”

They looked her up and down, flashed quick, light smiles, took the flyers and kept walking.

“How am I to borrow your lip gloss,” said one to the other as she patted her dry lips. She looked around, scanned the crowd of people exiting and the groups that gathered outside.

People spilled out the club doors and Strawberry tried to hand flyers to each one of them as they quickly passed. One guy walked out with a picked out afro, brown corduroy blazer, a yellow Rascalz T-shirt, ripped jeans, green shell tops with yellow stripes and his winter coat draped over one arm. He slid one arm into a sleeve and then the other as Strawberry approached him with a flyer.
“Come out and support amazing local talent. All the proceeds go towards our volunteer work initiatives in the Dominican Republic.”

“Oh for real? You guys lookin’ for more performers?” he raised his eyebrows and patted one hand over his chest.

Strawberry chuckled, “Not now but hit me up with your name and what you do at this email address,” she pointed to it on the flyer, “What are you? An MC?”

“I dance and MC,” he patted his chest with both hands.

“Sweet,” said Strawberry, “I can keep you in mind for future events. I’m always looking for fresh local talent.”

“Word,” he replied, “When’s this again?” he looked back at the flyer, “Ok January 11th. The Dominican eh? Cool. I’m a try to make it out to this and support.” He said as he buttoned up his coat and wrapped his scarf around his neck twice.

“Peace,” he said and trudged through the snow toward the nearby bus stop.

“Peace,” said Strawberry back. She turned back towards the open doors. Another group of guys came out, this crew more thuggish and screw faced. They didn’t smile when Strawberry approached them with flyers.

“Nah, nah,” one waved his hand at her. She let them pass and handed the flyers to the next couple walking out.
“Oh the El Mocambo!” remarked the young woman as she browsed the flyer, “That’s where Noah’s band played last week. Who’s performing?” She looked more closely. “Wow! Julie Black, Brass Munk, Dwayne Morgan! Yo, this is a serious line up!”

“Yes, we’re partying for a purpose, to help underprivileged children in the Dominican Republic,” Strawberry added.

“That’s awesome. I’m a teacher and I’d love to get my kids involved somehow. Maybe they could be pen-pals or something? I teach grade fours.”

Strawberry and the young teacher exchanged contact information.

Another group of guys waited close by the doors for friends still inside. She noticed one, a cute one, checking her out. She approached them and handed them all flyers.

“Is your phone number on here?” said the cute one.

“No, but my email is,” she retorted with a grin.

“What if I can’t make it to your show but I’d like to call you and maybe take you out sometime?”

She felt her cheeks red and warm, “You can check me at the show if you’d like to see me again,” was her coy response. She smiled and continued to hand flyers to the people who walked by.

Strawberry promoted her event everywhere and anywhere she could. She flyered outside of venues, she spoke about the event on different college and university radio shows and also promoted it at other poetry events. She sent out mass emails. She even devised a method for
flyering. On Thursday nights, when the new EYE and NOW magazines were published for the week, two of Toronto’s hippest magazines, she picked up a copy of both and skimmed through the club and event listings. She made note of all the events she wanted to attend. She paid particular attention to the ones she knew were all ready well attended. She broke these events down into their respective weekdays. She mapped out the areas of the city and the route she would take on each night. She listed her two benefit concerts in the EYE and NOW magazines.

She noted which events were free, which venues where she knew the owners, bouncers, promoters or someone who could get her in for free. She preferred to promote inside instead of freezing outside. It was hard to stay hyped and enthusiastic when she was freezing. People hurried by. They did not stop and talk. She was particularly frustrated when she found her flyers dashed onto the sidewalk. She picked up and saved as many as she could to redistribute. Many lay soggy and damaged in the slushy, wet snow.

It was easier to spark conversation inside a venue. She met a lot of interesting people when she flyered; people in the industry, people involved in other socially active projects, people who loved the Dominican Republic and its warm people, people who worked as teachers and artists and wanted to get involved. It was a three-part opportunity: to sell the event, promote project POR AMOR and form networks of support with many different types of people.

When her toes were officially one degree short of frostbitten and she could no longer feel them, she called it a night and hopped in the car.
On the long and sketchy drive home, it snowed the entire way. Strawberry felt her tires slide over the wet snow on several occasions. What if it stormed on the night of the event? She asked herself. She tried to erase the thought, turned the music up, checked her mirrors and changed the radio station. But what if it did? What if nobody showed up? She hesitated to book her flight because she was still nowhere close to her fundraising goal. Seven hundred dollars wasn’t even enough money to buy her plane ticket. She needed at least 60 people to show up at each show.

When she finally arrived home, she kicked off her boots and unraveled her body from layers of sweaters, socks, mittens, scarf and toque. She tossed her keys on the kitchen counter, dragged her feet up the stairs to her room and practically sleep-walked her body into the pair of fleecy PJs that lay across her bed. She yawned, sat on the edge of her bed, rubbed her tired eyes and laid back with closed eyes. She fell asleep before even lifting the comforter to crawl underneath. Her radio, that she forgot to turn off before she left the house earlier, hummed classic jazz. Strawberry drifted off to dream land to the soft melody of a saxophone solo....

Surrounded by darkness, slowly the pitch black unknown softens slightly enough for Strawberry to realize that she is standing in a dimly lit hallway. There is no light, only more darkness and the cranberry red paint peels from the wall in small, cracked shreds. Indonesian lanterns hang from the ceiling and cast warm, safe light on the dusty walls near her. She feels her heartbeat quicken and pulse through her ears. Although she tastes her prickly fear and does not know where she is or where the darkness leads, she feels safe and walks forward. The soft sound of an acoustic guitar and saxophone invite her to cross through her fears and move forward through the dark, unknown pathway. She moves a few steps forward and the music grows louder then softer then louder then softer as she moves closer to what
seems the hall’s end. She goes forward, step by step, trusting the soothing music. The guitar strings appeal to her heart strings and, deeper than her eyes can see and deeper than her thoughts can articulate, she trusts that it is safe to take the next step. She sifts through the shadows. A quiet panic contains the excitement of her heart that beats anxiously as she moves through the dark barriers, as she inches further down the hall. The music increases and steadies in volume and intensity and she keeps going. She is scared but she keeps going until, finally, the darkness opens and she stands at the edge of an empty concert hall. There is a duet of a young woman and a young man who play music together on stage. The young woman strums the guitar and the young man presses his breath tenderly into his sax. Both artists sway their heads, eyes closed, foreheads squeezed, faces full of release and ecstasy.

Strawberry recognizes the space. It is the El Mocambo. It is a large open space of rustic brick walls, cement columns, high ceilings, eccentric and enticing artefacts, lanterns and statues from Indonesia and India and China.

The duet bow and leave the stage. A four-piece band emerges from backstage and begins to play. Their music is off key and it hurts Strawberry’s ears. The band wears black suits and sits on black chairs with their bodies hung over their instruments. The music that sounded so beautiful in the hall is now replaced with a screeching massacre of musical notes and dark, sad tunes. A loud group of teenagers shout and scream as they play the table-soccer game at the other end of the room, at the other end of the stage. The music doesn’t faze them.
Strawberry looks around at the empty space. The bar is empty. The bartender bends over the counter and picks at her chipped nail polish. She barely keeps her eyes open. At the front door sits an unguarded and empty money box.

The band stops playing and suddenly another, solo, musician appears on stage. He sits on a stool with another acoustic guitar. He adjusts his strings. He strums a soft, almost angelic ‘lover’s rock’ rendition of ‘What a Wonderful World’ and even the rowdy teens stop their game, enthralled in the mirage of this soulful performance. As he strums and as Strawberry’s mind focuses on the music, she closes her eyes, engages, feels at peace and relaxed with the harmony,

“SCREECH”

The microphone screams a hideous screech. One of the speakers blows. The sound man bows his head, mortified. The artist on stage curses and stomps his foot. There is no crowd to disappoint, other than the teenagers in the corner and they laugh in hysterics. Their hysterical laughter sounds in haunting echoes throughout the concert hall and in that moment, Strawberry has the haunting realization, that this, in fact, is her event, the POR AMOR benefit concert. Her stomach sinks.

“This can’t be my event!” she panics and checks her cell phone and rubs her face in her hands and paces back and forth across the room chanting, “What am I going to do? What should I do? What can I do?” And she paces back and forth.

She rushes to the money box, closes it up, sticks it under her arm and runs out to the street to see if something has happened to prevent people from coming. She checks out the weather.
Out on the street everything is normal and the weather is good, no snow and clear roads. Strawberry waves for people to come in but they ignore her and keep on their way. Strawberry runs back inside the club and paces from here to there and finds Abbas, the owner of the club, in the middle of the dance floor. He watches the empty stage. His face looks angry and he looks around the empty dance floor and at the empty bar. Strawberry dashes over to the POR AMOR information table and rearranges the information pamphlets. Her hands shake. Her heart pounds.

“What can I do? What can I DO?!!” she moans.

“What can you do? Well, what will you do? You can change your mind. You can monitor you thoughtssss,” says a voice, “That's what you can do.”

The voice that Strawberry hears is not in her head, it comes from the dark hallway. Suddenly, a slithering figure slides smooth and direct towards Strawberry, like a tempered puddle of water drawn along the cold and dark cement floor. Its body ripples in waves and its fluid movement is like a dance. The intricate gold, black, white and beige pattern of scales along its body becomes visible as it swerves and rolls its neck left to right, right to left. The snake's hazel eyes fix intently on Strawberry and they are bright and bursting with energy, full of excitement. The snake draws closer still to the young woman and perches itself up against a speaker.

Strawberry, too panicked to pay much attention to the snake, races and paces around the room in search of ideas to attract people to the event, for things to do, for things to say, for something to turn the situation around. The snake slithers like a rippling wave, each scale excited by the air, by the light, by the movements it can make. And, as Strawberry races, the snake follows her steps in graceful
movements side to side, left to right, dancing, invigorating, energizing the stream of its movement like a ribbon that glides through the sky.

Strawberry repeats, “What can I do? What can I do?” and the snake repeats, “You can change your mind,” and it swirls its body in circles like a spiral.

“And monitor my thoughts, I heard you!” Strawberry snaps, “What do you mean monitor my thoughts? I need people to get here. I’m thinking about how to get them here. I’m wondering why they aren’t here. What should I be thinking about? Flying kites? Who are you anyway?” Strawberry doesn’t stop moving, jagged movements and sharp words. She picks up drink tickets and counts them. She checks her cell phone again. No missed calls.

“My name is SSSoraiya. I come from the west wind. I represent the Spirit of Water coming with the gifts of fluidity and direction.” Soraiya winks and waves her body in ripples up and down.

Strawberry says, “I’m going out into the street to start giving away these tickets. That’s what I’ll do. I don’t even want to think about why this is happening. I just need to make it better,” she checks her cell phone again, “Why isn’t anybody calling me!?” she moans.

“It’s not so much what you think about—but the way you think...not so much what you do but the way you do it,” says the snake, Soraiya.

Soraiya ripples and swirls. She moves her body to a soft beat, like a drum beat, like a conga drum, in rhythmic ripples as she rolls over to the sound man to confirm the show line up and check the side stage to make sure the artists have water and food ready. Strawberry stands in the centre of the dance floor,
mesmerized by the snake’s fluid motions, clear and direct with purpose and intent. Soraiya moves through the area in waves as she straightens and fixes chords out of place, lights candles and incense, keeps her wide and glowing smile in her liquid dance through the concert hall. Suddenly Strawberry realizes that this is the snake from Rita’s filing cabinet. Her mahogany body and speckled scales reflect the smooth shine of polished wood as she slides smooth and direct around the room.

Soraiya spoke again, “Maybe thisss is your event and it is a huge success. Maybe you need to look around and see all the possibility. You have the ability to raise more money than you need. But you must have this idea firm in your mind. I think you don’t know the law of manifessstation. I wasn’t sure before but that must be why I was called.”

“Called for what?”

“Called here for you. I have come to guide you into dream manifessstation, to guide you towards that which you wish to occur. Wishes are potent, full of magic. Recognize this. Wishes are the very fabric of manifesting bliss. But you, dear child, must believe this first, before any of your wishes can come true. She stopped and faced Strawberry directly, “All things physically manifessst began as a thought. One thinks, believes and attracts what she believes that she will find. It’s a universal law that applies to all people in all places. If you think about what you want to occur, believe its occurrence will replace this,” she dances her body around the room. There is fun funk music that plays now. “The problem is most people focus on what they don’t want to happen rather than what they do want. Let’s turn this scenario around. Close your eyes.”

Strawberry did.
“Imagine you are at an event, your event, and it looks exactly how your greatest intention for an event could be.”

Strawberry imagined people, lots of people, the space full of people talking, laughing, purchasing things, eating things, watching live musical performances. The smell of frankincense drifted up her nose and she opened her eyes.

“Look around you,” says Soraiya. The crowd applauds wildly to the band on stage, “What if this were your event? Do you believe that it could be?” Soraiya points out, “The venue is totally full. There’s a talented line up of performers. The audience is engaged. A visual artist paints on canvas. The owner is pleased with the turnout. Like-minded people gather and seek and support positive vibrations. People have come together to celebrate life and love. You have made this possible. Picture your event in this way...remember how this looks, feels, tastes. Can you believe you have the power to manifest this?”

“Could my event really be like this?” Strawberry looked around in amazement.
“It will be what you believe it can be—this is the law of manifestation. All things start in the mind. First you envision what you want to happen—see it, hear it, feel it as if it is real. Speak about it as if it is real, as if it is already happening. Have faith in your ability. Have faith you can create this. Know that you are supported and guided by forces that are unseen, timeless universal laws. All things in life are created this way. Remember: all our actions will be blessed when you use your thoughts to manifest.”

Strawberry’s brow in a wrinkle, she asks, “Even bad things?”

“I am afraid so. Negative events happen because we believe they will; we believe in the occurrence of what we don’t want to happen. The result of our thoughts becomes our manifestation. When this event was a flop it’s because you worried you would see that, you believed you might face that, and you did. Of course, that is not to say that you have created every disagreeable thing in your life. We are all always dealing with the creations of those around us as well. But the truth is, our realities are created through what we consciously believe is possible. Do you believe that you can make the two live concerts you’re planning a huge success?”
“Well I think they could be,” was Strawberry’s reply.

“What is stronger? The doubts you have or the faith and trust in the process of your own creative manifestation? This will determine your ability to manifest.”

Strawberry looks again out into the crowd. The sound is clear and crisp. The crowd bops their heads, claps their hands, screams for more, and people are dancing to the music. She sees familiar faces up on stage and in the crowd. Of course her event could be just as successful as this one. It could be better, she thinks.

“Have you received the cradle yet?” Soraiya asked as she swirled her long body in a circle around Strawberry.

“Huh?”

“The cradle, the box withholding direction?”

Was she talking about the box from Rita? Strawberry scratched her head. She fiddled through her purse to find the box and pulled it out.

“Yesss, that’s it. Here is the second key.” Soraiya stretches her tongue out from the depths of her long body to bring forth a key.

Figure 18
POR AMOR Co-founders on stage addressing the crowd at POR AMOR benefit concert
with the inscription ‘west’ on it. Strawberry inserts the second key to the left side of the box and it fits perfectly into the Westside.

Soraiya dances in circles and swirls around the guests and across the floor. She slides back to Strawberry, “I must go now. I will be with you in sssspirit and ssssupport through the unfolding of the eventssss you plan. Remember, all things great and terrible start in the mind, as a thought, to a word, to an act, to a habit, to your destiny. Choossse thoughtssss that ssssupport what you want to happen and believe. Thissss isss your POR AMOR concert my Dear—and look—there you are on ssstage.”

Strawberry is amazed to see herself appear on stage. Onstage she thanks the audience and introduces her first poem, “My Time to Rhyme”. The crowd is heavy with silence as people smile, close their eyes and listen intently to the words:

"My Time to Rhyme"

This poem was written specifically
About things going on in these here times
In the cycles of time
You will find these things repeated in kind but
Tonight I feel most alive
So I’m going to take the time
To rhyme it like this
When it’s my time to rhyme
I got my eyes fixed on
The wise man told me how in the now
They’ve put the crown on the ones in disguise

Figure 19
Poet Raydiance at POR AMOR benefit concert
The ones hiding their eyes
Dressed in Italian suits and silk ties
Kings of the global enterprise
Pharaohs who profit at another’s demise
Raising military youth
Fed with cocaine and fascist lies
Teaching them to close
Both their ears and their eyes
To the sound of their impoverished brother’s cries
Locking them inside their national pride
To be controlled by the divide and conquer
State of mind
Enforcing the love child genocide
To stand for love is to be crucified
And yet every single profit that ever lived never dies

Strawberry turns back to Soraiya. Soraiya smiles slyly and lowers her slinky body to the ground.

“May the Great Spirit blessss you on your way,” says Soraiya. She gives Strawberry an endearing wink before she ripples through the crowd, left and right, right to left, back into the dark hallway...

“BEEP—BEEP—BEEP”

Strawberry kept her eyes closed as she reached to find her alarm clock.

“BEEP—BEEP—BEEP”

She pushed the snooze button. She wasn’t ready to wake up from this dream....
Strawberry stands on the stage, chin up, strong voice and smooth hand gestures. Her words are memorized and her tone fluctuates. The ebb and flow of the moving poem drips word by word into the sea of hearts and minds that watch and listen.

So when it's my time to rhyme
In these here times
There's so much going on in my mind
I find it kind of hard to find the time
to convey...
All My love
Is here for you
Standing before you I try to represent what's true
Reminding you of what you forgot
Or perhaps never knew
Perhaps you will discover
What's been hidden from you
Gave us false type of freedom
Like a prison with new types of bars
The invisible kind
Gave our people independence
While fixing chains in their ...

“BEEP—BEEP—BEEP”

This time Strawberry gave in, stretched her toes out of the edge of her duvet cover and wiggled her feet awake before opening her eyes. She turned the alarm off and reached for her journal. ‘My Time to Rhyme’ was fresh in her mind from a dream. It was a piece she was preparing for the concerts and she had many parts already memorized. She added new bits and pieces of thought to
the poem. She brought her journal over to the computer in her room and began to type the pieces of poetry into its first complete version.

As a result of her hard work and planning, by the end of January, after two fantastic and successful benefit concerts, Strawberry had raised the funds she needed to get to Puerto Plata, stay for six months and begin her volunteer work. She booked her flight to leave in February.
Chapter Four: The Mind Serves; The Heart Leaps

However you think of it, the essence of it is to tune in experientially to the immediate presence of love, through activating the longing that already exists within your heart.

—John Welwood

The old white school bus with the *Integracion Juvenil* logo painted in blue across its sides, bumped along the narrow, winding, and pot-hole ridden side roads of Puerto Plata. Children and teachers squashed together and spilled in to each other’s laps as they rode home after another eventful afternoon at the Centre. The new, spacious green bus, from World Emergency Relief, sat useless in the Centre’s parking lot, for a year, with a broken transmission. The Centre did not receive enough funds this year to fix it, explained the Director.

Strawberry wedged between Francesca and Claudia. Yorkelly, one of the smaller students, sat on Strawberry’s lap and swirled a lock of Strawberry’s hair between her fingers. Francesca sat by the window, held Strawberry’s hand and described the new bedroom her older brother Juan was building for her at the side of their house in ‘Los Cocos’. It would be the first time she had her own room.

‘Los Cocos’ was the neighbourhood behind the basketball stadium. ‘Batey Tres’ was the name of the neighbourhood where Strawberry lived. It was home of ‘Los Diablos’, the champion basketball
team in all of Puerto Plata for the past five years. The ‘Diablos’ practiced five days a week on the basketball court across the street from Strawberry’s rented apartment. Some days after work, she brought her dinner to her balcony on the second floor where she overlooked the court to watch them play. ‘Los Cocos’ were the biggest rivals of the ‘Los Diablos’. Strawberry learned all this and improved her Spanish drastically by talking with the children every day in the short four months she had already spent as a volunteer at Integracion Juvenil. She could almost understand everything Francesca described to her as she went through the details of her home and how it was built.

Some boys at the back of the bus jumped over the seats, stuck their heads out the windows, and tossed a volley ball up and over the seats. Some of the girls stood up and slapped the boys when the boys touched them or their hair by accident. The boys started doing it on purpose. Every five minutes David, the wood working teacher, stood up and told the boys to sit back down. Jean Carlo repeatedly jumped out of his seat and whipped Frandy with the long braided bracelet he made of ribbon in the handicraft shop. Frandy huffed and moaned for Jean Carlo not to bother him. Finally Frandy threw his pencil case at Jean Carlo. Marco and Jireina sang a reggaeton song at the tops of their lungs beside Frandy.

The bus screeched to a stop at the corner of Jose Ramon Lopez Street, where Strawberry’s apartment was. As Strawberry stood and made her way to the front of the bus, Jean Carlo whipped Frandy again and Frandy whined for his yellow pencil case back. Reime and Eduardo laughed and taunted little Frandy. Frandy stood and charged towards the boys at the back of the bus. Strawberry flipped down one of the fold down seats to block the centre aisle. She caught Frandy by the shoulders and stopped him midway through the aisle. Jean Carlo flaunted Frandy’s yellow pencil case
up in the air. He dangled it from side to side in one hand, held his clenched fist up with the other hand and dared Frandy to come closer as he cursed a load of foul Spanish words that Strawberry had just learned. Frandy pushed into Ninosca as he tried to struggle away from Strawberry and elbowed her in the head by accident. Ninosca turned around and slapped Frandy hard across his back.

Frandy’s rage evolved into full body spasms. His arms swung everywhere at everyone. He struggled out of Strawberry’s embrace.

“Ninosca!” Strawberry reprimanded her, “Tranquila muchacha.”

Frandy’s kicks and punches hurt Strawberry as he fought to escape her grip. David rushed to the back of the bus, swiped Frandy from Strawberry, pushed him up the aisle, and off the bus, away from all the children.

Frandy got into fights with kids almost every day since Strawberry arrived. It was hard to figure out why. Sometimes kids picked on him; other times he disturbed or annoyed the other children on purpose. Every time ended with Frandy in some physical altercation or another.

The rest of the children sang and laughed. Some just looked out the window. The teachers chatted and fanned themselves with magazines and books, unshaken by the commotion; just another day on the bus home from I.J.
Strawberry folded the seat back up and walked up the centre aisle to the front. The children shouted “Ba bye Fraise.” Fraise was Spanish for ‘strawberry’. It was easier for everyone to say Fraise than try to pronounce Strawberry in English.

“Adios Fruta”

“Adios Fraise. Hasta manana.”

Strawberry shuffled her way through the aisle, smiled and nodded goodbye to the teachers and children as she passed them and got off the bus.

“Ba bye Fraise” said David as he directed Frandy back on to the bus, instructing him to sit in the front seat. David sat down beside Frandy. Frandy crossed his arms over his chest, screwed up his face and looked out the window.

“Adios David, pasa una buena noche,” have a good night Strawberry told David. The door closed and the bus drove off.

Small, smiling faces and flailing arms hung out of the bus windows.

“Ba bye,” the children shouted out the window together. They giggled and competed with their voices to see who could say goodbye the loudest. From the intersection of Jose Ramon Lopez and 12 de Julio Street Strawberry waved goodbye until the bus was no longer in view.
Strawberry’s new home base, ‘Batey Tres’, stretched three blocks above and six blocks across the waterfront boulevard. Strawberry saw the ocean from her bedroom window and she often spent her mornings up on the roof of the apartment building, overlooking the sea. Behind her apartment stood Mount Isabella. Puerto Plata was a tiny coastal city situated between the ocean and the mountain. Locals said the crime rate in Puerto Plata was so low because criminals had nowhere to escape; stuck between water and cliff and only one main road going east or west across the island.

Strawberry walked down Jose Ramon Lopez Street, past the abandoned house with the old, rusted car, packed with empty beer bottles and plastic cups, past the electronic repair shop and ‘Joanna’s’ intimate clothing boutique, past the corner colmado where all the teenagers hung out, past the basketball court, past her neighbour Hector’s house to her apartment on top of Gigi’s bakery.
Reggaeton music blasted from the corner and throughout the street. In Puerto Plata the streets were always alive with music. Mikigua, ‘Los Diablos’ star shooter, leaned against the hood of his parked Honda Civic. The open hatchback exposed large speakers that vibrated the whole car. Guys from the neighbourhood, basketball players and Mikigua’s friends, congregated near his car, sat on plastic chairs from their verandas, passed around a bottle of Brugal rum, or poured Presidente beer into tiny, translucent, plastic cups. Strawberry put her key in the latch, opened the first door to the staircase that led up to her apartment. The smell of vanilla floated from the bakery and through the air like sweet perfume. She opened her front door, threw her bag on the couch, grabbed her journal from the top of the dresser in her bedroom, and plopped herself down on the bed. She lay on her stomach and buried her head in her arms. She flicked her flip flops onto the floor, shook her ankles and wiggled her toes in silence, exhausted by the day’s events. She was upset about what happened with Eduardo in class. She wondered if her classes, if her presence, if anything she had to offer from her
education and experience in North America made any difference. The events of the afternoon built on top of many similar, perhaps not quite as intense, other afternoons. But it was mostly the same: these kids could not keep their hands to themselves, they constantly picked on and beat up each other and Strawberry’s Spanish was not strong enough nor did she have any clever discipline tricks to teach them any other way. They didn’t need art class, at least not as much as they needed clean clothes and a decent breakfast to go to school, the doctors, the dentist, and maybe a psychologist. Their parents needed jobs, their homes needed clean water to drink and wash with and electricity and a fridge. Their hearts needed solace to know they were safe and protected. But they weren’t and they didn’t and Strawberry didn’t have the answers or perhaps even the right questions.

She reflected in her journal:

April 17th, 2004

Today was the most hectic day I’ve had here so far. I could not hold the kids’ attention for nothing. I had the kids work on colour associations with chalk and crayon pastels. At first everyone was totally into it. Ninosca wasn’t there. She decided she’d rather help in the kitchen today. Her absence made a huge difference on the girls’ concentration. They were quiet and focused for the most part. For kids who never had an art class in their life, Gregory and Porfirio are naturals. All the kids love painting. I can’t help but wonder how much this helps them though. They don’t need it to survive. That’s what they are doing, everyday trying to survive. How can people care about recycling while they wonder where their next meal will come from? While they wonder if there is enough rice left in the bag to feed the family and the two new cousins that had to come to live with them. I don’t know if I belong here. I kind of feel silly for my idealistic visions of the healing powers of love. I say I do
this for love, POR AMOR, but what does my love do for them? If they can’t calm down enough to listen to direction, if they’re not used to listening and being directed without a slap or a scream, if they’ve never had a foreign person who doesn’t speak Spanish very well try to teach them something before and they don’t get it, what is the point? Yah, I can love these kids and I believe in the power of being a loving and kind presence in their life but in two months when I leave it goes back to the way things were before I came. Can anything I’m teaching them protect them and keep them safe? Hardly for three hours in the afternoon. I can hardly keep them safe in my class.

Today Frandy got restless in his seat, got up and walked around to look at the work of the other children. The next thing I know, Eduardo’s got Frandy pinned to the ground and he’s wailing on him....

Strawberry stopped writing and her thoughts surfed over the details of what happened between her and Eduardo only two weeks ago. She glanced at the picture Eduardo drew for her pinned to the wall above her night table. She stared at it.

The thing was, Eduardo barely spoke. Even though most days his pages remained white and blank, he showed up every day. He took his seat in the corner to the far right and stared off into the garden through the white metal blinds.

This was Strawberry’s first teaching experience, her first class of students. The staff at the centre defined their students as ‘at-risk’ and only accepted destitute cases of poverty and abuse.
Strawberry’s first students hit each other, boys pestered girls and girls pestered boys. They scribbled on and crumpled up each other’s work. They ran in and out of the classroom. They were excited and curious, wounded and disturbed—full of life, vibrant colours, jagged edges, and graceful smiles.

When Strawberry began to volunteer at the center, the social worker, Deya, gave her a brief profile on each child’s home situation. Sometimes Frandy’s mom would tie Frandy and his little sister to a chair to keep them safe at home when she had to go to work and had nobody to babysit her children.

Eduardo’s mom went missing the previous summer. He lived with his step father. Deya described him as a cruel and unapproachable man.

One day, Strawberry discovered Eduardo liked to draw. It was during recess, after all the children were outside playing volleyball and skipping, and Eduardo remained seated in the corner, his silhouette fixed in the sunshine that streamed through the blinds. Strawberry welcomed him to stay as she began to prepare the paint stations. She approached his desk with a brand new pack of Crayola markers and placed them in front of him. The children loved
markers more than pencil crayons, pastels or paint. She rarely let them use them though since they always forget to put the caps back on.

“Quieres probar?” ‘Would you like to try?’ Strawberry asked Eduardo.

Eduardo smiled and nodded yes. He rarely smiled. She smiled back, about to return to mixing paint when he put his hand up, and signalled for her to wait. He reached into his Spiderman knapsack. He was fifteen. He pulled out the lined paper notebook Strawberry gave the children to practice their drawings and expressions at home. He scanned the room for peaking faces through open windows, assured himself nobody was watching, and handed her the book.

Strawberry was delighted to see the pages of his notebook filled with drawings. As she leafed through there were cartoons he had either traced or copied, farm animals, trees and flowers. Some of his drawings were of people in front of houses, in fields, on hills, at farms and waterfronts. He identified his father, sisters and brothers and his grandmother. Many drawings had a dead-looking woman either in the trees or on the ground. Her skin was gray and her clothes were black. That was his mother he said. In many drawings she was accompanied by a red man. That was his step-father he said. The step-father’s eyebrows pointed inward and downward. His whole body was coloured in red.

“Wow. Es tuyo?” amazed Strawberry asked if it was his.

Eduardo gazed at the floor and nodded, “Si,” then took the notebook and pulled out a folded piece of paper Strawberry had not noticed from the middle of the book. It had her name on it. He handed it to her. Surprised, she opened it. It was a pencil crayon drawing of a luscious, single
stemmed, red rose. He included intricate detail and shading to the leaves and petals. Across the top, in what read as one entire word:

“tequierofraise”

and underneath,

“eresmiangeldecielo”.

Strawberry noticed many of the children did not put spaces in between their words. It took her a moment to translate:

“I like you Strawberry. You are my angel from heaven”

She put the paper in both hands and held it close against her chest.

“Gracias!” Eduardo raised his eyes to meet Strawberry’s. Strawberry looked intently into them and she cupped her hand softly around his shoulder. Her mouth grinned. Her eyes softened. Her chest warmed. When she felt water trying to race to the inner corners of her eyes, she turned away and walked back to the paint stations. She wanted to be strong. When she looked back to Eduardo, he smiled, picked up the box of markers, pulled out a blue one, a green one, a purple one, laid them all out across his desk, pulled the cap off the green one and smelled it before he glided it along the edges of the crisp white paper.
Strawberry couldn’t help but feel like an afternoon like today’s cancelled out all the great progress she made with Eduardo. But those things couldn’t cancel out so easily could they? She recalled the incident, almost in slow motion, the details still vivid in her mind.

“FUERA Eduardo!” LEAVE, Strawberry roared.

His eyes bulged. He stared blankly. Frandy screamed and demanded to be let go.

“EDUARDO! FUERA AHORA!” Strawberry screamed for him to LEAVE NOW.

She hated that she resorted to screaming. It made her feel out of control. She wanted to be a clever and creative teacher. She could have let the cabinet fall and pulled him off of Frandy herself, or put her arms around him and held him tight, saying nothing. But she screamed. Her voice matched her angry face and she took in the chaos that was her classroom.

Eduardo straddled Frandy. His knees pinned Frandy’s arms to the floor of the classroom.

Eduardo’s wild and vacant eyes looked at Strawberry. Frandy’s frayed t-shirt crumpled in Eduardo’s clenched fist. Eduardo’s fist pressed firm into Frandy’s chin keeping a tight grip around his thin neck, tears streamed down Frandy’s face. Frandy trembled.

Strawberry’s arm pressed into a fallen shelving cabinet to stop it from crashing. The contents of the cabinet lay spilled on the floor. Her free arm pointed to the closed, wooden classroom door as she motioned Eduardo to leave. Their eyes exchanged a long glare. His free, cocked hand, ready to pummel little Frandy’s face, slowly released and lowered to his side. His eyes welled with tears and
darted from Strawberry to Frandy to his classmates back to Strawberry. Eduardo shoved Frandy hard into the floor. The back of Frandy’s head banged into the cement. He released Frandy, stood up and pierced his sharp glare into Strawberry.

He turned back to the corner, where he always sat, and glimpsed at his crumbled and torn drawing. It lay on the floor beside his desk. He was drawing a kite before Frandy came and ripped it from under his forearm to show the rest of the class. The vibrant blue, yellow and red chalk pastels of his kite now smudged and smeared into crumpled crevices.

Eduardo’s nostrils flared, his lips pursed, and he stepped over scattered pencil crayons, markers, glue, scissors and other supplies that flew out of the cabinet. He stepped into a puddle of red acrylic paint spilled from the cracked plastic bottle. He stomped out of the classroom. Red footprints tracked across the smooth, gray cement.

Everyone froze. They had never heard Strawberry raise her voice or get angry. She was not angry at Eduardo. She was trying to protect Frandy. She stood the cabinet back up against the wall. Frandy ran into her arms. Strawberry could not look at the children. Her eyes were not ready. She stared down at Frandy’s feet. His heels hung off the back of his too-small flip flops. Her heart felt heavy. She struggled with her stubborn tears, her eyes fixed on the red footprints leading out the door. If he never came back to art class, she hoped he would keep drawing.

Francesca, Yorkely and Luis Miguel helped Strawberry clean up and put the supplies back in the cabinet. Jose helped Yorkely wipe the spilled red paint with a stack of brown paper towels. Usually, at the end of each day Strawberry would put on classical music, sit the children in a circle and calm
them down with breathing exercises before they got on the bus to go home. Today she let the children leave earlier to play outside until the bus came.

Strawberry jotted down these details in her journal while her head pounded and body begged to take a nap. She stood up, placed her journal back in the top drawer of her dresser and glanced at the turquoise ocean line out her bedroom window. She admired the endless sky meeting the endless waves of the ocean, rippling off into places unseen, unforeseeable. We never really know how far our actions or impressions go, she thought to herself. She played soft classical music to block out the reggaeton from the street and crawled under the mosquito net, into her bed. She tucked the sides of the net tight to keep mosquitoes from flying in. It did not take her long to drift off...

The waves roll in and away from the shore like a slow lullaby, soothing and charming. On land and behind her, a choppy, crunching sound rises from the trees. She looks around but there is nobody there. The noise makes her uneasy and she tries to concentrate on the flowing vision of water and the boundless, unconfined, unconstrained, open sky before her.

Reime walks toward her on the beach. He wears denim cut-off shorts with no shirt and no shoes. His eyes look glossy and desperate. He comes to tell her how hungry he is and she tells him she has no food, nor money, only paint and paint brushes. He shrugs and smiles and continues walking down the beach and she looks up for direction. Suddenly it is night and she doesn’t feel safe when she looks across the beach. She feels peace when she looks across the water but the sound of crunching leaves, as the wind rolls through, keeps her uneasy. Discouraged and disturbed, she furiously packs art materials into a bag. Her mind rushes over and through all the ways her program seems useless and futile and foolish and she sees the teachers at the Centre frown upon her and shake their heads and roll their eyes and ask each
other who she thinks she is coming here with her art supplies and her garbage bins and her S.T.D. bingo games and she sees the children, miles and miles of children and their ragged hair and ragged clothes and their ragged mouths full of bad words and bad breath and bad teeth living in bad neighbourhoods with their bruised eyes and bruised shoulders and bruised self esteem. She sees their bruised innocence and their bacterial infections and their swollen stomachs and swollen feet stuffed into black dress shoes with no socks. And they have scars on their faces and arms and elbows and knees and rashes in patches all over their skin and deep congested coughs that seem to last for months and sullen faces on the ones who hardly ever speak but love to paint. She sees joy all over their face when she lets them paint.

She wants to feed Reime but she has no food.

“What can I really do to help? What was I thinking?” Strawberry throws her hands up and shouts to the sky, “I am a fool.” She picks up a stone and throws it into the water, “A fool full of idealistic dreams.”

“Is that what you think?” the rustled crunches of the trees stop. Startled, Strawberry jumps up from the log where she sits and where a furry raccoon wearing a fedora and silver rimmed glasses, holding a book in one paw, a pen in the other, looks curiously at her from the other end of the log, as if the raccoon has been sitting there the entire time, quiet and unnoticed. Its sleek black, brown and grey coat shimmers in the moonlight. It has smooth patches of white fur around its nose and eyebrows, a smooth line of brown, short hair down its nose bridge and two shiny patches of black hair surrounding its eyes, extending outwards half way down and fully across the edges of its face blending into its neck. She recognizes this handsome raccoon from Rita’s charcoal sketch. The raccoon approaches her on all fours,
crawling up to a spot on the log closer to where she sits, patting the log to gesture for her to sit back down.

“Who are you?” Strawberry steps back away from the raccoon and asked.

“Don’t be afraid. I got this beach on lock. My name is Ra-Chelle. I come to check on your thoughts. Only real talk will I chat, I came to peep where your mind’s at. When I think thoughts I write it down, spit it over a beat or acapella sound—musical or not my thoughts are profound. Whether I’m in the tree or on the ground my mind abounds with street and book smarts when I get down. You dig? Like I said, I think thoughts very well. And for you I’ve got some thoughts I’d like to tell—like this one,” Ra-Chelle opens her book and reads from it, “We are strong and able when our mind is focused and stable. Reality can be expected to be a result of where your thoughts get directed.” the Raccoon puts the book down, closes her eyes and smiles.

Strawberry’s brow squeezes into the centre of her forehead, “Okkkay,” she answers confused, “Who said that?”

“I did,” responds Ra-Chelle. “It’s a thought I got.” Strawberry slowly steps closer to the raccoon and sits next to her to hear more.

“I come from the North Wind. My wisdom reflects the places I’ve been. I represent the powers of stability and potential. I got mad gifts of strength that’s essential. With endurance I guard the wisdom of the ancient stones. Whether through forest path or street alley I got the skills to carry my own”. Ra-Chelle pushes up her metal rimmed glasses that slide down her nose. She sets her fedora on the log
beside her. She looks far off into the distance, rubs her furry paw across her chin and ponders before scribbling something down. She speaks again, “With heart one is kind, with head one is smart. But heart can be blind when head doesn't serve the heart.”

Strawberry mulls over the riddle. “So that’s a book full of your thoughts?” she asks.

“Word up!” replies the raccoon. “It’s something I use to know what I’m thinking. I write my thoughts down to get insight on them, you know, to get a better idea of what I think.”

“That’s cool!” says Strawberry, “I write in my journal too. But can’t you just think what you think? Why do you have to write it down to know what you think?”

“I don’t have to. I like to. Truth is most people don’t even think about what they think or where their thoughts are directing them. I use my mind to write my thoughts and it helps put me in touch with my heart. I use these pages to lay down my stories, poems and thoughts. It helps me check my own vibe, helps me discover me in ways that not writing does not. You dig?”

“Um—kind of,” replies Strawberry, “I write poetry and I reflect. I guess I just never thought about it as a way to access my heart. Hmmm.” She stares off into the distance, like the raccoon did, and thinks about her thoughts. The wind picks up and the waves crash and Strawberry feels her body shiver all over. After a few moments she reports her thoughts to the raccoon.

“I have followed my heart,” Strawberry begins, “My heart led me here and I was so sure that I was doing an honourable thing, that I was giving of myself in a way that would be helpful. But all my heart seems to be good for now is giving hugs and kisses and smiles to these children, to these people. That’s
not helping them. Love doesn’t grow food, it doesn’t make money or pay off national debt, it doesn’t stop women from being abused, it doesn’t make alcoholics stop drinking, it doesn’t stop women from dying during childbirth, it doesn’t create jobs.”

“Well,” Ra-Chelle grins as she strolls over to the water’s edge, rinses her hands in the water then faces the young and discouraged Strawberry. “It can—love has the potential to change anyone or anything.” Ra-Chelle drinks in and contemplates the distraught face of the young woman. She rubs her chin with her paw, picks up her book and browses through it again. When she finds the page she looks for she closes her eyes and smiles. “Word!” she says and opens her eyes, nods her head, taps a hind foot against the log for a beat and begins a rhyme, “Yo! Check it out as I reflect/You can think in two ways/Two ways can become one/one way will lead to suffering and the other overcomes/.”

Strawberry squeezes the skin of her forehead together again, crosses her arms, raises one eyebrow at the Raccoon before she pouts, “I don’t understand. How can I decide how I think? I just do. I think too much sometimes if you ask me.”

“Look Girl,” Ra-Chelle continues her rhyme, “You can think with your head/ Or you can think with your heart/ Your head will find the way/ Your heart will make you start/,” she stops her rhyme and leans in closer to Strawberry, “Do you recognize your guidance? Right now, where is your heart?”

“Somehow by something for some reason, I feel drawn to be here on this island, called for this work, to this project, to this people and their culture and their land. I feel it in my heart and it makes me want to help. But I don’t know if I am helping or just wasting my time with some crazy dream. There’s so many things here I don’t understand.”
“Hmmm,” says the contemplative Raccoon, “Things you don’t dig. You still question...very good...keeps you seeking and thinking...thinking about to what direction to go next. Thinking is not bad—it is good, chill, some bomb-dig stuff. A very good thing to think, I think,” she drifts into another deep thought, pumps her paw up to the sky with excitement, reaches for her pen, flips to a new page in her notebook and scribbles quickly to catch her fresh idea. When she’s done she starts tapping her foot to make the beat on the log and recites,

“Think about the service/ To which you’re being drawn/ Our head does the thinking/ Our heart sings the song/ Head and heart united/ Poetry and dance/ One writes the words/ One gives dreams a chance/,” she looks up at Strawberry, again pleased with her written rhymes. “Are you feelin’ your own life, like are you in love with it?” Ra-Chelle asks.

“I want to be. I think I’m in love with my dreams, but my life is so confusing. I mean I’m not doing what my parents hoped I’d do, I’m not doing anything most of my friends have done, I don’t want some mindless office job where I simply punch a clock and sell my precious life for wages that I use to spend on a bunch of things I don’t need over the weekend. I want more from life than financial security. I want passion. I want creativity. I want community. I want Spirit. I find it hard to enjoy so much material comfort when I know so many people have so little around the world. When I’m here I see how loving everybody is even when they have nothing. I learn so much about love here. My dreams comfort me. I imagine what I want to be, where I want to go.” While Strawberry speaks, the raccoon keeps rubbing her chin. She listens intently to what Strawberry has to say. When Strawberry finishes speaking, the little Raccoon recites yet another rhyme:
“Matters of the heart/ Sometimes painful and sometimes blissful/ Always useful, always guiding—
check my melody/ I have the third key/ And then you will have three/ I represent the mind/ That
processes love into poetry/ The head is a masterpiece/ The heart a wise owl/ The heart is the why/ The
head penetrates the shallow/,” all the while the Raccoon closes her eyes and nods her head and pats her
paw through the air like there is this non-stop hip-hop or house beat in her head.

“Please tell me straight, what is it you mean to tell me?” pleads Strawberry.

The raccoon smiles and continues, “Two paths are clear/ But only one serves the other/ Dig your
heart as one leg/ Your mind as another/ Together they will walk/ Together they will work/ One serves
the other/ As it wonders through the murk/ The heart has the message/ The head finds the way/ The
heart holds the dreams/ The head likes to sway/ A reckless lost wanderer/ The head can become/
Without the grounding love of the hearts beating drum/ The two like to dance/ A salsa of heart leads/
The heart guides the passage/ The head trims the weeds/ Many paths lead up mountains/ Many minds
make travellers stop/ Blocked by fear, blocked by doubt/ Blocked by rational thought/ Make your mind a
servant/ Make your heart a guide/ Make compassion and patience/ See beyond what lurks outside/ Go
within to the heart/ For direction that you seek/ Use the intelligence of your mind/ To map your journey
to the peak/ Dreams await and healing comes/ To the wanderers who heed lessons/ How the heart may
serve the mind/ For you right now is the question/ Then shall you know why you are here/ And why here
is where you’re meant to be/ Ask yourself why you’re here/ And let the mind look in places only the heart
can see.”
Ra-Chelle puts down the book, smooths the fur on her arms from the shoulders down, places the fedora on her head and slants it slightly as she searches Strawberry’s face for a response. Strawberry is deep in thought, her eyes closed in concentration.

“May the Great Spirit bless you on your way,” Ra-Chelle concludes.

Ra-Chelle rubs her nose softly against the young girl’s arms and cheek. She wraps her furry arms around Strawberry and squeezes her. Then she places a key, labelled North, in her lap. Strawberry opens her eyes to find the key but no raccoon. Ra-Chelle disappeared into the night as mysteriously as she appeared. Strawberry takes the box out of her pocket and places the key in the top keyhole. It fits perfectly. Suddenly she is itchy all over. She scratches the skin on the back of her hand. Now she hears the buzz of an insect in her ear...

A sneaky mosquito who’d found its way through a tiny hole in the mosquito net, buzzed around Strawberry’s ear awaking her from her nap. Light shone through her window and she wondered if she had slept the whole night through. She looked at her watch—6:45 pm. She lifted the mosquito net and crawled out. Outside her window the sun started to set. She wiggled into her flip flops, grabbed her keys and headed down the stairs outside her apartment and towards the waterfront boulevard.

As the sun made its way down, past the horizon, on its continuous circular journey, Strawberry admired the golden orange ball in its glory. As she walked, she saw many of her neighbours, whole families, sitting on plastic chairs together outside their homes. The electricity had gone off. On average, in Puerto Plata, the electricity shut down three to four times a day. The locals said that the
government was not paying electricity bills. At night people joined their neighbours in the street or congregated in the homes over candlelight. They cooked on gas stoves in the dark.

Almond leaves burned on the seashore. The aroma wafted up the street. Strawberry closed her eyes to smile and sniff. This was a smell she woke up to each morning when she went up to the roof to do her prayers and morning meditation. It smelled like a natural incense mixture of fire and flowers.

Strawberry walked past Ana’s colmado when she heard her name called, “Fraise!”

“RING—RING”

It was the bell of Reime’s bike as he sped towards her.

“RING—RING”

“Hola Reime!” Strawberry was surprised to see Reime, a student from I.J., in her neighbourhood when he lived at the other side of town in Los Cocos, where Francesca lived. Suddenly she had a vague remembrance of him being in her dream this afternoon though she couldn’t recall why or what exactly had happened. Reime had been upset with Strawberry in the afternoon at the centre because she asked him to leave her classroom. He would not stay in his seat and was disturbing the class by coming in and out.

He pulled up in front of her and handed her two beautiful, full, red hibiscus blooms.

“Thank you, Gracias! Reime! Que dulce!” How sweet she said as she thanked him.
“De nada,” You’re welcome, he said, as he blushed slightly, smiled, wound his peddle up with one foot, “Bye,” he said and then flew away down the rest of the hill.

Strawberry continued down to the waterfront, on the northern coast of the island, big smile across her face, wide open sky ahead, boundless, limitless sky, a horizon perfectly straight, ocean perfectly wide. The tides receded as the sun lowered.

The Malecon, lined with a thick, orange cement railing wide enough to serve as bench space to sit, held scattered, seated guests across the ocean front. There were two pathways, one for walking and one for bicycles along its side. All the little cartitas, the small food trucks or carts, lined up selling hamburgers, fresh conch, oysters and octopus. Strawberry crossed the orange barrier and hopped down on to the beach. Sometimes she saw Haitian children, the street kids who shined shoes or walked around with egg crates, balanced on their heads, full of boiled eggs for sale, swim there. Strawberry assumed they didn’t know the water was dirty or that they had no other place to bathe. Many times she tried to ask them if they knew but very few spoke Spanish and almost none spoke English. Haitians speak Creole.

Strawberry turned her back to the garbage and focused on the sea sounds and sights. She inhaled deeply. The salty sea water scents crept up her nostrils. The cool ocean mist breeze softly tickled her cheeks and nose. She looked out into the wide cascade of rippling shades of blue growing...
darker as the sun continued to sink under the horizon. She sighed, relaxed from her afternoon nap and eager to surrender the worries of the day to be washed away with the crashing tides, back to the sea, where all drops found their place in the greater whole. She felt alive, incredibly grateful, and overwhelmed with an emotion of joy she couldn’t seem to find the words to describe.

“What is love?” she asked herself out loud as she drank in the last bits of sunlight. “Could this be it?” She looked into the far sky, where the clouds danced into different shapes and shades of orange, streaks of red and magenta clouds and she felt energy pulse through her body like waves of excitement and bliss running through her veins. The sun finished its fade below the distant sea line. Darkness blanketed the sky in the warm evening heat. Strawberry walked back up the orange cement railing and sat herself under a lamp post where she could begin writing words to reflect this inspiration. Her heart beat slow and strong, she felt its rhythm throb in her chest in tune with her breath and the thin waves that rolled calm and gentle under the night sky from the edge of the world to the heart of the shore. She began to write:

“POR AMOR”

I’m here for Love
Ask yourself why you’re here
Could it be to acknowledge
Each and every particle of Love
Lingering in the air
Aside from the clothes I wear
From the curls in my hair
From all of life’s irrelevant cares
I care

I’m here for Love
To feel Love
Watch it sit, play with it
Make it flip up and down
Until you can hear the sweet sound of balance
Juggling all those talents of self,
Of other, of the divine
Imaginative Love movements in time
White doves and purple porcupines
Freeing imagination to define
The details of your picture perfect tomorrow
And watch it manifest
You’re passing the Love test
That’s why you’re here
Can’t you hear it calling you nearer and nearer
To the clearest of clearer ocean view inside of you
Keep your focus
Remember the locusts and the floods
And all the reasons we fell because
We wean ourselves off the only truth which is Love

I know why I’m here
Ask yourself why are you?
I’m here for Love
And for this I’ve got important work to do
In this land of Love
Full of palm trees and sunlight
The breeze kisses me every time I turn left or right
Straight across my heart is a symbol of flight
And I soar
In this land of Love I now adore
I begin to drift with the breeze  
Allowing Love to carry me  
Learning finally  
To keep my eyes open for the ride  
I love the ride on the back of Love’s motorcycle  
Crisp breeze rapid speed  
Bending with the width of each turn  
As I need to accept  
And explore  
To put in some hard work and do it FOR AMOR  
Ask yourself really what are you here for?  
Me—I’m here for Love

Love that mystic cure  
That creates the most unexpected lure  
Into another’s embrace  
We could not have been meant to stay in a case making the  
Infinite supply of Love go to waste  
Face to face  
In this here space  
Love is ever-present, ever knowing  
Every time I simply close my eyes and just feel  
It tickles my brain  
Stimulating me infinitely  
With what once seemed so plain  
So lame—Love—just a word used in mind games  
Thank god I’m no longer there  
I am here now because I care  
About the youth, about my family  
About myself  
I not only care about ours  
But the environment’s health
I care like a stealth just stalking the next dark corner to shine
My light
Just waiting to inspire the next soldier to fight
Inspired by a Powerful and Holy Guiding Light
What a delight it is to feel free
To feel the Love flowing between you and me
To understand the meaning of the warmth
That comes from family
I’m here to stand like we are here as one unity
Creating positive community
Based on equality, authenticity, justice and Love
I’m here because
Of the Love that I adore
Thanking our Creator for the Love I have in store
Taking the time to laugh, dance, sing, and play
While working fully POR AMOR
I’m here for Love
Ask yourself—why are you here?
Chapter Five: Patience for the Unfolding

But as for the seed in the good soil, these are the people, who hearing the word, hold it fast in a just and worthy heart, and steadily bring forth fruit with patience.  
—Luke 8:15

It was a humid November night, at Miro’s restaurant, on the east side of the Cabarete beach strip, where Strawberry prepared to host her first POR AMOR benefit concert in the Dominican Republic. She named the show ‘Fire on the Roof’ in light of its cause to help her friend, Altagracia, whose house burned down by an uncontained electrical fire.

Altagracia, one of the teachers at Integracion Juvenil, of short height and loud presence, became one of Strawberry’s new friends during her time volunteering at the Centre. When the volunteer project was over, they kept in touch and eventually began to collaborate to facilitate POR AMOR weekend workshops in Altagracia’s community. Altagracia lived in a barrio named, San Marcos, on the outskirts of Puerto Plata close to the foot of Mount Isabella.

Altagracia was an active community leader and God-fearing servant regarding the affairs of her family, neighbours, students and church. Strawberry looked up to Altagracia as both a mentor and a community partner.

On a Saturday night in the middle of October 2006, while Altagracia and her two daughters, Michi and Nadeline, gathered inside their tiny evangelical congregation up the hill from where they lived, an electrical fire began in their house. What happened was the power went out, as it usually did, and when it came back on the electrical surge sparked a small fire in the iron left plugged into an
outlet. The fire quickly engulfed their small, two bedroom, and wooden home. Neighbours ran to the
church to fetch Altagracia but they could do nothing. They watched as the fire department contained
the fire from spreading to nearby homes. Altagracia’s two girls stood each on one side of their
mother, clutched her arms and ducked their heads into her bosom. The flames flashed on their wet
cheeks. All that remained was a heap of ash and smoke.

Neighbours from the barrio brought food to the family each day and each day neighbours
offered the family their homes for rest. Altagracia and her two girls stayed at Marlaini’s house, the
round woman with a great loud laugh who lived with her husband and son across the dirt path.

On the Monday afternoon, Strawberry went to visit Altagracia and her family. She brought
papaya and coconuts. When Strawberry arrived, Altagracia quickly pulled her around the back of
Marlaini’s house, to the yard. Chickens clucked and picked at seed spread in a pile near the almond
trees, and old, rusty car parts lay in a pile beside cracked plant pots. Laundry hung on a line between
two avocado trees in full bloom. Strawberry sat across from Altagracia at a tiny wooden table while,
in a low voice, Altagracia shared the dream she had received the night before. Her hair hung frizzed
and uncombed, her clothes were clean and unmatched and the lines in her forehead spoke louder
than the smile stubbornly formed on her face. She said her dream was a message from God. In the
dream God told Altagracia to build a medical clinic where her house used to be. It was to be a two
story building with the clinic on the main floor and living quarters for her and the girls on the top.
Being the faithful woman of God that she was, she decided she must follow the dream and build the
clinic, that she must find the money, that God would provide it to her somehow, “Through the Grace
of Jesus Christ” she said, “Through the grace of Jesus Christ,” she repeated.
“I need your help,” she told Strawberry, this time without a smile.

“I have lots of experience organizing fundraiser shows Altagracia,” Strawberry suggested to her friend, “It’s how I raised money in Canada to come here in the first place,” she said. “And now that I have made many friends and connections with people here, foreigners and locals, I am sure people would love to come to a live musical event in support of a good cause.”

“Well, Ok,” replied Altagracia, “God is helping us through many good people like you.”

They shared the papaya, some tea and a long embrace before Strawberry hopped on a motto taxi and rode home. When she arrived in her apartment she jumped right into making lists of phone calls to make, people to visit, performers to approach, just like she did with the POR AMOR concerts she organized at home. She planned to involve people all over the area from Puerto Plata to Cabarete, including her students at school. Cho Cho, a friend from ‘Batey Tres’, suggested the great idea to have POR AMOR t-shirts made for the show. He said he knew a printing company in the city that could do it for a great price and that he would investigate what she needed to make it happen.

Miro’s, which normally cheffed up a delicious Moroccan style food fair, had closed their kitchen for renovations so Strawberry had food catered in for the evening. The restaurant ambiance, with Middle Eastern decor, backed onto the Cabarete beach strip of restaurants and night clubs. Inside, Strawberry jetted back and forth across the open dining room floor to decorate the walls with program photos, delegate tasks to volunteers, coordinate sound with the DJ, and confirm that the food platters, donated by Joli, another restaurant on the beach, would arrive at nine.
Lydia, the owner of Miro’s, originally from Toronto, loved hosting charity events out of her establishment, “especially with live music!” she exclaimed. Bill, a local artist and friend of Lydia’s, brought in two acrylic underwater paintings to donate.

“I’ve brought about five more oil paintings from a collection I’ve been playing around with for the silent auction,” he told Strawberry. He handed her two pastiche collages of oil paint, full of vivid, protruding strokes reminiscent of contemporary Haitian style art. Duplicated forms and shapes of fish and coral spread across the canvases.

“Oh great! Let’s just lean them up against the wall here,” Strawberry pointed to a side ledge with tables that lined the left side of the restaurant. Lydia had a volunteer spray paint POR AMOR on the wall behind the bar. Kelly came with her projector for the slide show of POR AMOR project photos to be projected on the wall throughout the night.

Since the end of her volunteer work at the I. J Centre, Strawberry picked up a teaching job at the International School of Sosua during the week. ‘Open Minds’, a musical band of some of Strawberry’s students at the school lounged on the patio sofas with their parents, ate hamburgers and plantain chips and waited for the sound check of their first public performance outside of school. All their instruments were tuned, the sound equipment was in place and they waited for the last speaker to arrive to start their sound check. Edgar, the watchman, offered to go to Ono’s, another neighbouring restaurant on the beach strip, to ask to borrow one of their speakers since he couldn’t find the missing speaker and Lydia hadn’t arrived yet.

“Are you nervous?” Strawberry asked Thomas, one of the lead vocalists.
“Na, just excited,” Thomas replied.

Thomas, a student in Strawberry’s language art class, loved to write spoken word poetry ever since Strawberry shared some of her poetry with her class. Since then he joined the band with his friends, used his poetry for new lyrics and was now one of the band’s lead singers. Van played on drums, Benyam played lead guitar, Sina played keyboard, Eddie played bass and now Thomas, Eddie’s younger brother, prepared for his key singing role. He brought a pair of conga drums to complement Van’s percussion.

Like the all previous POR AMOR shows, Strawberry created a five sensory experience within the space. There was food, art, music, people who would arrive she lit sticks of frankincense to burn around the room. She placed boards of photo collages with pictures of previous shows and projects at the front door, behind the entrance table. Clare, a mother of one of Strawberry’s kindergarten students, strolled in and greeted Strawberry with a kiss on both cheeks.

“Oh I can’t wait to hear you sing tonight. I’m so happy you agreed. I could listen to you sing for hours,” said Strawberry.

“Oh get out! I can’t wait to hear you sing! Is it true you’ll be singing one with the band?” prodded Clare.

Michelle, a friend and colleague of Strawberry’s at the school, volunteered to mind the door to collect entrance fees, donations, and sell t-shirts. She arrived in a rush.

“Sorry I’m late. Yohan needed a ride to work. What can I do?”

“You’re just in time,” Strawberry encouraged. “Just start to set up the table at the front entrance. Everything you need should be inside the orange box.” Michelle set up her table with the email list, information pamphlets about POR AMOR, Altagracia’s plans for the medical clinic, and began to fold POR AMOR’s first ever t-shirts. The red, green and yellow logo painted across the front was still fresh, not wet, but she handled them delicately just in case.

Abbas, the owner of the El Mocambo in Toronto, flew down to Puerto Plata to meet Altagracia, support the event as well as learn about the people and impoverished conditions of the Dominican Republic. It was his first time to the island. Abbas also ran a charity, called ‘Serving Charity’, that he intended to get involved with the rebuilding of Altagracia’s clinic.

Abbas paraded around with his camera as everyone prepared. He snapped shot after shot of street kids who shined shoes on the side of the road, of mobile vendors who sold goods out of boxes and of guitarists who played love songs to tourists for tips on the beach.

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At nine o’clock people trickled into Miro’s. One by one and group by group, people began to fill up the restaurant. They admired the art work auctioned on display, ordered drinks and mingled while they waited for the show to begin. Parents and students from the International School of Sosua were the first to arrive. They sat at tables and on high bar chairs. The high school students left their parents and gathered at the tables placed out on the beach. Altagracia arrived with Mishy and Nadeline in a van with a group of her neighbours from her barrio. Strawberry reviewed her poems and the folded piece of paper she carried in her back pocket with the show line up and scheduled time of performances on it:

SHOW LINE UP:

9:00—Welcome, Discuss the cause (brief), Poem—Plug: raffle draw and support the bar
9:15—Claire (acoustic guitar)—plug: thank you to all sponsors, donors, Lydia
9:40—Abbas and Altagracia speak on the cause (building clinic)
9:50—Poem (Fire of the Roof)—plug: POR AMOR info table and t-Shirts
10:00—Tadeu (acoustic guitar)—last two songs I sing—plug: Silent auction
10:25—Open Minds -band (with Tadeu)
11:05—Vibrant Rise (hip hop)
11:25—Thank yous and Good nights
At 9:30 Strawberry welcomed the guests and began her first poem. When she finished she invited Clare and her guitarist up to the stage. People who walked by on the beach came up the back stairs to check out the buzz from inside.

Abbas brought over a bottle of Presidente beer to Strawberry.

“Look like it’s going to be a great night,” said Abbas as he squeezed her arm warmly. “Hope so,” said Strawberry. She noticed Altagracia who watched her across the room. She took a swig of her beer, gestured a toast and smiled. Altagracia barely smiled back. Strawberry felt a tap on her shoulder. She turned to find three young men in white chef shirts holding platters of appetizers. “Oh perfect!” she said, “Let’s set them right here on this table,” she motioned to the table at the side of the bar.

When Strawberry wasn’t on stage she mingled through the room to meet and greet guests, to make sure Michelle had enough change, to assure performers had the proper sound and to invite guests to talk with Altagracia and her neighbours. Most of the night, Altagracia sat on a bench near the front door with two
young men. Strawberry approached her with excitement.

“So far so good, eh?” Strawberry extended her arms around Altagracia. Altagracia smiled slightly and remained stiff. Strawberry pulled back.

“What’s wrong Altagracia? Is everything ok? There’s so many people here I want you to meet that can help. What’s wrong?”

“Oh nothing. Everything is ok,” she said with a smug, forced smile, then sat down on the bench again.

“Really?” asked Strawberry.

“Oh yes. Perfectly fine. I have been meeting your friends throughout the night” she said. “I have met Abbas too. He is a very nice man. A good man.” Altagracia looked past Strawberry to the crowd of people around the bar and at the tables. She did not bring her gaze back to Strawberry.

Van’s mother brought a beer over to Strawberry, “Congratulations. What a great turn out. I can’t wait to see the boys on stage!” She handed the beer to Strawberry. Altagracia looked at the beer and then off into the distance again.

“Can I buy you a beer?” Van’s mom asked Altagracia.

“No thank you,” Altagracia answered. Mishi, who stood
closely behind her mother overheard and followed with, “We don’t drink in our religion. God does not allow it,” She remarked with her eyes fixed on Strawberry and the beer she held in her hand.

Kelly approached, “Strawberry can you come check out the projector for a second? I just want you to show me how something on your laptop works so we can get the slide show back up. Someone stepped on the chord.”

“Oh, sure. Excuse me,” said Strawberry to Altagracia, Mishy and Van’s mother.

She followed Kelly to the slide projector. When the slide show began again, she quickly reviewed the lyrics of her last poem for the night ‘Fire on the Roof’. She picked up a platter of food and offered it to guests. She encouraged them to go talk with Altagracia as she looked over to the bench where she still sat. Altagracia smiled politely at the people who approached her. She kept her arms and legs crossed. Strawberry lit some more frankincense, took a swig of her beer and approached the stage to call up Altagracia and Abbas to address the crowd.

“Before my next poem and the rest of tonight’s performances, the even greater reason we’ve gathered is to support my good friend Altagracia. Altagracia and I work closely in her barrio, San Marcos, offering prenatal and breast feeding support to young expectant and new mothers. As some of you may know and some of you may not, one month ago Altagracia’s home burned to the ground by an uncontained electrical fire. Thank God nobody was hurt but the whole house burned down. I’d love to introduce her as well as another special guest tonight, my good friend Abbas, owner of the infamous El Mocambo concert hall in Toronto, to share with you the plans for rebuilding Altagracia’s house with the addition of a built-in medical clinic for the people in the San
Marcos community. Abbas is also a dear friend, supporter and partner of project POR AMOR. Abbas is founder of a Charity called ‘Serving Charity’ which he uses as a vehicle to help people in need all over the world. He continues to show his on-going love and support for POR AMOR and the people we work with here on the island. Can we please put our hands together for Altagracia and Abbas”.

Abbas grabbed the mic and handed it to Altagracia.

“Oh thank you so much everyone,” said Altagracia in a soft voice. Thank you for coming here to help me and my family create a good space and healthy medical clinic for our community. I know God is with us. May He be with you too.” She handed the mic to Abbas and stepped back away from the front of the stage. Abbas spoke for almost ten minutes more about his experiences doing charity work in India and Peru, about his experiences of transforming the El Mocambo into a performance venue strictly for charity and fundraising events and his experiences working in partnership with Strawberry and project POR AMOR. He explained the architectural plans Altagracia had discussed with him and laid out some of the finer details of the plan to be implemented in stages. When he was done Strawberry came back on stage, thanked them both and followed with the poem she had created for the event:

“Fire on the Roof”

I am the fire
Burning what’s caught
Sparking the movement
Untying the knot
I am the fire
Acknowledge me or not
I am a thought
I am a word
The mystical song of the endangered bird
The crying herd
Of truth filled words
Watching the honey sour and the milk curd
I am a word, a sound, a vibration
I am the message of fire for the uprising nation
I am crying: UNITE.
As I witness the separation
Miss or blatant lack of communication
Manipulative psychological
Forms of unwanted fornication
I am a tin can revelation on the side of the road
Watching city degradation
And ego driven mind states corrode
My fire is ready to explode as I emulate the Son
I am the paradox of all is one
Because as it rains, I remember the sun
As I taste the sweet juice, I remember the poison
As I wait for the King, I remember Mary’s boy son
How many times this same battle has been one
And yet truth filled secrets of ancient pasts
We still seek to know
Where can we go
What can we say
To a people who embody unconscious dismay
Too caught in their day to day
Caught in illusive displays
As they unconsciously play
Their part in our destruction
I am a piece of sand used in this construction
I am burning instruction
But will you listen to me?
I am the words my Creator gave to me
I am the word, sound and power
Behind what you see
I am the tears forming Niles towards that lost city
I am a vessel waiting for Jah’s holiness to use me
I am a girl on the roof watching the ocean
Letting my spirit nourish and moisten my emotions
I am a potion only the grand alchemist creates
Filled with scribbles, lines and dots
I am still a blank slate
I complicate, I simplify
I continue to insist on asking why
I am the truth personified
Especially when I won’t comply
I am watching rivers run dry
While powerful waves take away thousands of lives
Children too young for such pain in their eyes
Watching masses disguise
How they feel just to look strong
Concealing their true selves
Whenever they do wrong
I am the one who saw through all along
I am a song, a word, an emotion
The girl on the roof counting waves in the ocean
Solidifying my devotion
Fighting for peace amongst this commotion
I am the silence
Fire sparks waiting for the phone to ring
I am the baby cub waiting for my Lion King
Bells to ring, horns to blow, building to shatter
I am the mist piercing through this physical matter
My mind is my ladder as I climb into my heart
I am the ending you reach once you start
Let it burn let it burn let it burn from the heart
My love is a dart
Sometimes it stings sometimes it smoothes
I am the rough sandpaper
Sculpting the smooth
I am the fire truth
Acknowledge me or not
I am like nothing you have or could have bought
The happiness eternal
The happiness sought
I am the fire acknowledge me or not
The high priestess entity
The street corner rot
Arrow sword and gunshot
I am the fluid moving through the blood clot truth of
What I know
The tiger and the dove
The lion and the crow
The serpent and the rainbow
The purifying glow
Actions I take though I’m not sure what to say
I trust listening to the whispered secrets
Of my soul’s eternal sway
We can stay or run away
Face it later or today
But as time quickens there is less time for delay
Let it burn I say
If you don’t need it, send it away
Let it burn I say
Let it burn
After the guests left, the restaurant was tidied and everything that needed to be packed up got packed, Strawberry sat down and put her feet up. Van’s father came back in the restaurant to carry the last amp out to his truck. She handed him the coiled extension cord that rested on the table beside her.

“What a great night Strawberry. The boys are so excited. Thanks for all your hard work. I hope you raised enough money to get started,” he said.

“Thanks. I hope so too,” she yawned and he left.

She looked around the venue, Bill collected the last two unsold paintings, Michelle locked the deposit box and gathered the information pamphlets and the watchman stacked the chairs onto the table tops. Strawberry looked out into the sea’s dark horizon. Waves glistened in the soft glow of dancing moonlight.

“Let me walk you out,” said Strawberry to Michelle as she rose to her feet again and lifted a box full of t-shirts to bring out to Abbas’ car.

“You okay?” asked Michelle, “You look a little down.”

“Just tired. I’ll be all right,” said Strawberry.

Outside, Abbas loaded his camera and other boxes of POR AMOR paraphernalia and information into his car.
“That the last box?” Abbas asked.

“Yup,” replied Strawberry. “Where’s Alta?” She asked Abbas.

“Oh she left during the Vibrant Rise performance. Her van arrived and she said she was tired. I’m meeting with her tomorrow,” said Abbas.

“You are?” asked Strawberry. “Do you even know where she lives or how to get to her house?” she asked with confusion.

“Yeah, Mishi is meeting me at Central Park to bring me there.” He lifted the last box into his trunk.

“Oh. Ok. She didn’t even say bye,” Strawberry crunched her forehead and raised an eyebrow.

“You were probably busy or something. Ok get in,” said Abbas as he plopped himself into the driver’s seat.

“Nah, you go ahead,” she offered, “I’m staying tonight at a hotel close-by and I want to have a moment alone on the beach before I go.”

“Ok, breakfast at my hotel tomorrow and then we can go into the barrios again. You’ll come with me to see Alta no?”

“Yeah, maybe. I don’t know. I’ll call you in the morning. Drive safe,” she shrugged, stepped back on to the side walk, headed through the alley and back to Miro’s.
Her purse lay on the end of the bar. She picked it up, finished the last swig of her beer, tipped the watchman and walked down the stairs at the back of the restaurant onto the beach, towards the tikka lights and away from the thumping music of night clubs on each side of Miro’s. Through the sticky heat, a chilled breeze brushed up her arm hair. The sand between her toes felt cold too. A soft ocean mist sprinkled her face. It felt damp and soggy against her cheeks. When she reached the shore she sank to her knees on the beach, let out a deep sigh and drew circles with her fingertips. She looked out into the darkness. Small tears formed in the corners of her eyes. A dim light shone from a nearby tikka lamp. She pulled out her journal and purple pen from her purse. She wrote:

It was such a great night in so many ways. I am proud of our success. We raised 14,000 pesos, that’s almost $1000 Canadian and that is enough to build the foundation for the first floor of the clinic. It’s a great start to rebuilding the home, great promotion for local artists and for POR AMOR. The band was a huge hit with everyone and their parents were so proud, Bill sold three paintings and it was all to help out Alta, even though she was acting weird all night. Like she was mad at me, or ignoring me? She didn’t even say goodbye. I don’t think she has any idea how hard I worked to make this night such a great event. Everyone enjoyed themselves. And she hardly talked to any of the guests. I don’t understand. I’ve never seen her act so quiet before. She talks to everybody. I only saw her laughing and smiling with Abbas but when I approached her she was kind of just giving me the brush off. I feel totally out of the loop with her. I don’t know what was up. But I couldn’t help feeling like my efforts were so unappreciated. I just don’t get it.

Strawberry closed her book, shuffled it back into her purse, and took three deep breaths by the shoreline. She heard a strong and distinct caw of a bird that swooped towards her and landed in
the shallow shore water. The stretch of its wings amazed Strawberry. It moved with majestic dives as if to show off its prowess and stride. She assumed it was a stork. She remained still to get a better look at the bird but could only see a dark mirage of feathers that poked its head in and out of the water. Its beak was much too small to be a stork but still she could not make out any details of the dark silhouette.

Strawberry stood up and walked along the beach to the alley between restaurants that led to her hotel room. She changed into her PJs, threw her clothes into a pile on the floor then wrapped herself up in the sheet. A gentle hum of bachata playing outside her door sang to her for the short time before she slipped out of consciousness and into dream world...

*Strawberry and Mishi stand outside the van that revs with impatience as the driver honks his horn for Mishi to get on. Mishi says, “Ok, Ok,” to the driver and to Strawberry Mishi says, “We can’t accept your money. It was money made in the place where ‘the drink’ is sold. God tells us the drink is evil. I’m sorry.” And she gets in the van and the van drives off. Strawberry runs to the beach and falls to her knees. She cries. And she cries. Circling her finger in the sand she suddenly hears the loud caw of a large bird that comes swooping down and lands beside her.*

*“Greetings from the Winds of the East,” says a wondrous eagle. The grace of its landing reveals its height as she stays kneeled and it stands almost as high as her shoulder blade. Its shiny black coat reflects the moonlight and its white fluffy head and neck expands as it turns its head left and right, nodding its strong orange beak to acknowledge the young woman. Its large dark eyes with mysterious glow are the same dark eyes in the oil painting at Rita’s house. These eyes focus intently on her.*
“What are you doing here?” Strawberry asks, “Shouldn’t you be at Rita’s? What are you doing in the middle of the Caribbean?” She uses the back of her hand to wipe the tears that remain on her cheeks.

“Good evening. My name is Goldi. I’ve been sent by our elder, Rita. I am a helper of the east with powers of spiritual force, of waking and freedom. I represent the spirit of air, the gifts of clarity and far sight. I have a message for you. And this message is true: take comfort; in due time all shall be revealed.”

Strawberry watches the bird swoop up in flight and come down again to land this time on her shoulder. Strawberry is surprised to find the weight of the eagle light as the feathers on her body. Goldi speaks into her ear.

“Tell me: what do you believe? Can you patiently trust in the unfolding of events in their due time? Where is the Creator in your view?”

“I’m really not too sure,” says Strawberry, “I mean I try to be patient. I don’t know what’s unfolding. I have my own ideas of the Creator and they do not fit into any one religion. Yet I certainly believe in a Creator, a Source greater, much greater, than myself and this world. Is that what you mean?”

“Perhaps in some ways. But if this is so, why do you worry? Why do you doubt? You have done good work and your intentions have been pure. Tell me what is it that troubles your heart?”

“I worked so hard to help them. I worked so hard to try. I thought we were friends and I was doing a good thing. Now they don’t want my money and she won’t return my calls. I don’t understand.”
Goldi springs her body down to the sand, shakes her head, fluffs the feathers out on her neck and flaps her wings outwards. She stretches her short neck and looks around from left to right. She leans in closer and her head turns. She keeps her left eye fixed on strawberry as she speaks.

“Many seed planters are not around to watch the first leaf poke through the soil. Many gardeners are not present to see each flower bloom, each bulb pulse. Great growth and great healing happens in dark places, places that are invisible to the eye, where nobody sees. The roots of the tree are the cardinal points of its sustenance. All nourishment comes from the places unseen. Fruitions are not only for the fruitful and destruction not only for the destructive. Remember the lesson of patience, patience in the unfolding events in their due time.”

Strawberry feels her own impatience grow. She does not understand. She cannot see past her own grief. Goldi ascends back into the air and then down again to the earth.

“In winter we cannot expect to smell the sweet fragrance of flowers stretching open their petals to offer their scent. In autumn, when leaves change into vibrant signals of their descent back to the earth, we cannot expect them to re-emerge before the resting periods of winter and darkness. No seeds are planted in vain. Nothing blossoms before its time. Sometimes we ask for oranges and instead we get apples. The importance is not in which fruit has been planted or what seed is used but that the act of planting has occurred in states of love and honour. Your fruits will be divine. Trust in the divine, in the unfolding of all germinations. Imagine your efforts are underground. Their fruits will burst forth at the time that is right, that is meant. For now, for you, I have the fourth and last key. It will open you further to the guidance of your destiny.”
Goldi reaches under one fluffy wing and brings forth a key, the last key, labelled east. Strawberry examines its glow. Her heart flutters as she brings out the box from her pocket and slides the final key into the right side of the box. As the key clicks in the keyhole, the cover of the box, with the inscription ‘Know Thyself’ flips open. Inside, is a bronze antique compass that radiates a soft yellow glow. She lifts the compass from the box.

“Trust in the cycles and trust in the seasons. With patience as the virtue, all timing has its reasons. You have planted many seeds in gardens beyond what the eyes can see. You have dedicated yourself little one and acted with integrity.” And Goldi extends her broad wings at both sides and winks and nods at the young woman frozen, mesmerized by her realized gift.

“May the Great Spirit bless you on your way,” Goldi says and with one strong flap of the wings she is back in the air and fading away into the midnight horizon.

Strawberry follows the compass dial wherever it directs. It points east and she walks east toward a stunning view of the sunrise. Light from its glow fills up her body. It points south and she walks south and follows a path to a place full of many people who greet her with love. The dial points west and she walks west and is guided to a dance floor where she moves her body with joy and grace. The dial points north and she climbs a staircase to the clouds where she finds many interesting books and people to talk to...

Sunlight reached through Strawberry’s hotel window, across the room and onto her face as Strawberry awoke the next morning. She wiggled her feet and unravelled the edge of the sheet she had twirled around her finger in her sleep. She reached for her journal on the night table and began
to sketch the image of a compass that remained vivid in her mind from her dream. Below the compass she wrote:

You know, after sleeping on it, I’m thinking that regardless of what happened with Altagracia last night, I will continue this project POR AMOR. Helping people makes me feel good. I will do it the best way I can. And I will help myself learn to be a good helper. Today I think I’d like to go the Internet cafe and look up educational programs back in Toronto that can help me learn more about effective community development, especially on an international scale. If I’ve learned anything here I’ve learned that I still have a lot to learn. But that’s okay. I am finding my purpose, the work that is meant for me, work that makes me feel good and that serves my greater community. I’m feeling ready to go back to Toronto soon and learn more about doing this work. I want to learn more about working with different cultures. I’m sure whatever happened last night will make sense when I talk to Altagracia. Some kind of miscommunication has transpired. We’ll fix it. She’ll probably call me today to explain.
Part 2: Reflective/Theoretical Journey
Chapter Six: Lost in the Land of Structure

Truth is within ourselves, it takes no rise from outward things, whatever you may believe.

--Robert Browning

Curse words, goal disputes and hockey sticks slapped against pavement woke Strawberry up to kids in the neighbourhood as they played street hockey outside. It was a hot, late August morning, around eleven o’clock and Strawberry stared blankly at her ceiling. These sounds startled her. They were so different from the roosters’ crow or the merengue music that blasted through the window of her apartment in Puerto Plata. She had been home in Canada for two weeks. The books on her shelves, the posters on her walls, the yellow and purple paint and even the displaced knick-knacks on her dresser, window sill and ledges through her room, now seemed foreign and unfamiliar. Home was home but it was different. She had grown used to simplicity; to cold showers, no tap water or electricity for days on end.

She went downstairs to make tea. Her mother sat at the kitchen table and read the newspaper.

“Hey Mom. Why aren’t you at work?” asked Strawberry.

“Oh, I have a hair appointment downtown today so I took the day off. Didn’t you say you needed to do something at school? You want a ride down there with me?”

“Yeah. That would be great. I have to go to Robart’s library to get my student card.”

“Ok, I can drop you off at St. Clair West station. Have you chosen your courses yet?”
“Most of them. I’m still trying to find out which ones would be most help to POR AMOR. Seems like there are so many options. I mean, they’re all about community development but I can focus on international aid or organizational development or sustainable practices within the non-profit sector or transformative learning studies or arts-informed inquiry or aboriginal studies and indigenous ways of knowing, embodied learning, creativity and wellness...need I go on?”

“No. So, yes there are a lot of options. Which option will get you a job you like after?”

“Well, that’s the thing, right? They’re all useful for some type of job in the field of community development. But my goal is to use them to improve and expand POR AMOR, acquire non-profit status and create my own employment through my own organization—that’s my dream.”

“That sounds good Honey. But how about considering working for somebody else first before that can happen. Organizations don’t develop overnight. You have to build your experience and expertise.”

“Yes, I know Ma. That’s why I’m going to school to learn about it,” said Strawberry.

“Anyway, I have to leave by 1:00 so be ready by then okay. I’m just running over to the grocery store to pick up a couple of things first.”

“Sure,” replied Strawberry. She opened the fridge to get some milk for her tea. She still felt overwhelmed by the options. Things like orange, pomegranate and cranberry juice, muesli cakes, eggs, cheddar and provolone cheese, chocolate soy milk filled the fridge. Things like nutella, three types of jam, two types of peanut butter filled the cupboard. Five minutes just to decide what to eat.
In the Dominican Republic, Strawberry kept a few vegetables in the fridge, sometimes food leftover from the night before, a small carton of milk and maybe some orange juice. She bought natural passion or pineapple juice from the lady on the corner who made it right there in her blender. The electricity went out so often that her food spoiled quickly anyway. On her small budget she bought her peanut butter and graham crackers or ordered pizza as a treat she afforded herself once a month.

On their drive through her neighbourhood, out to the main road, everything seemed foreign. All the neat houses stacked side by side and all the same height and beige or brown brick and white or green garages and window shutters of colours soft and dull. There were no turquoise or baby pink or sky blue painted houses like the concrete ones that lit up Puerto Plata. The suburban, plain houses in her neighbourhood looked ridiculously huge for their small families. Neat little gardens on neatly separated and cut lawns. At least there was no garbage. There was no music either.

“What time will you be done?” asked her mom as they turned on to the highway ramp.

“Around 4:30 I suppose,” Strawberry answered.

“Okay. I’m going to visit your Uncle Danny after my appointment. Call me when you’re done and I’ll come back to the station to pick you up.”

“Okay.”

In Puerto Plata public transit consisted of motto taxis, public cars or minivans. In the public cars, which were standard four-doors, Strawberry sat squished in either the back seat with three other
passengers, or in the front seat sharing the chair with another passenger. Usually, due to her small frame, Strawberry nestled in the middle, on a pillow that protected her bottom from being dug into by the emergency brake. The thirty minute drive on the road through the countryside from Puerto Plata to Sosua beach winds between the two cities, along the tropical ocean line and through several small towns. To the left, miles of turquoise satin waves roll through the ocean. To the right, miles of lush, green sugarcane fields and mountains full of coconut, mango, lime and almond trees. Salsa or meringue or bachata splashed through the tiny car radio. When she sat at the window seat her arm hung out the car and made waves up and down with her hand. She remembered the warm breeze on her face and its pressure in the palm of her hand while she flapped it out the window.

Strawberry watched strip malls and factories pass by over the long and wide paved highway, down the 401, onto the Don Valley and through the busy city streets until they reached St. Clair West station.

At the subway station, Strawberry took out her wallet and fished out three dollars worth of coin. Before hopping on the escalator down to the subway platform, wallet still in hand, she headed for the public bathroom to release herself after having drunk three cups of teas before leaving the house. She placed her wallet on the toilet paper dispenser, hung her bag on the door hook, and stared at the TTC advertisement on the back of the door before she flushed, grabbed her bag and headed down the escalator to the subway tracks.

Brown and beige brick tiled the floors on the southbound platform, TVs suspended from the ceiling featured news broadcast warnings of men, armed and dangerous, on the loose, of gas prices.
that continued to rise, of Al Gore campaigns against global warming and weather forecasts of rain and humidity. There were also repeated previews of ‘America’s Next Top Model’, season three. Advertisement after advertisement of movie previews and college programs and dating services and travel agencies and liposuction decorated every fourth column between the north and south train tracks. Today the entire staircase and platform walls were covered in ads of the new Global TV shows coming out in September.

The silver subway train slid along the tracks, sly like a serpent, halted with a ssssssssss and opened its mouths. The passengers, distracted from each other with their magazines, video games and iPods quietly stepped on board. The doors hissed shut. Strawberry stared down at her tanned feet and imagined the beach in Sosua.

Strawberry got off at St. George station. It was her first time downtown since she arrived back in Canada. Hot dog stands and homeless people shook her like a splash of cold water in the face after a peaceful afternoon nap. Most people in the Dominican Republic were so poor they ate rice and beans with plantain almost every day, could not afford to see a dentist or a doctor, had no hot water, did not own a car but it was rare to find a person homeless. In all the time she lived on the island, she saw crazy people, violent people, drug addicted people, but not one single person who slept on the street. It’s not that she forgot about poverty in Toronto, just that she had a new awareness of how sad and even ridiculous it seemed for a country so rich in resources and public services to have so many homeless and displaced people.
She walked along Bloor Street past a man who slept on a bench with bare feet and ripped pants showing his underwear, two teenagers sprawled out on the front steps of a church with a dog and a sign that read “Spare change for good Karma” and a man with a long matted dreadlock for a pony tail who waved his arms up and down and wailed, “Who do you think you are! It’s all for nothing! You don’t know nothing! Where’s your heart? It’s all for nothing! Who do you think you are!?”

The tall buildings and long traces of concrete and the bicyclists and skate boarders and the couples and singles and the students and seniors on motorized wheel chairs swirled around Strawberry like aliens in a foreign film. It was hard to imagine at this very moment that there were basketball games, siestas and tourists who dipped and wiggled their toes into the hot sand of the beach on resorts in Puerto Plata. It was 1:45 in the afternoon, just about the time the children would be waiting at the bus stop for the I.J. bus to arrive, high school students at I.S.S. would be entering their final period, women in Padre Granero and San Marcos might be hanging laundry on the lines while the sun was at its hottest.

In Toronto cars were neatly parked beside Green P parking ticket machines and lined both sides of the busy street. Nobody sat outside the houses on lawn chairs playing dominoes. There were few children to be seen. People walked fast, chatted on cell phones, carted briefcases and crinkled their foreheads. Men worked in orange uniforms and wore yellow hard hats. There were parking lots and TTC streetcars attached to wires webbed above the city streets and condos being built with signs that advertised swimming pools, saunas, gyms, hair salons and bowling alleys on the premises. There were 20, 30, and 40 story high buildings that cast long, cold shadows and blocked sunlight from reaching the sidewalks.
Strawberry arrived on the second floor of Robart's Library and stared up into the high, thick, well-lit ceilings of the massive building. Six or seven students lined up below a sign that read “Student I.D. Cards”. She joined them. She chuckled to herself at the neat metal posts that held up the elastic polyester strips of material to create neat lines of people who patiently waited their turn. It was such a sharp contrast to her experience of lines in the Dominican Republic, where lines were disregarded, where the loudest person at the store, bank and bar counter got served first, where everybody smiled and laughed and carried on, unbothered by who stood where in lines.

“NEXT,” the desk clerk repeated after each person left. Strawberry stepped to the counter.

“Hello. How are you?” Strawberry smiled.

“Fine. Two pieces of I.D.,” asked the young male clerk with a firm face.

Strawberry reached into her bag and shuffled through the items in her purse. She felt her keys; moved them to the side. She felt her water bottle; pushed it over. She clasped her day timer and shuffled around it. She set her bag on the table to open it wider. She peered deeper into her bag. She patted her pockets. She checked her bag again. She scratched her head. Where was her wallet? She retraced her steps...on top of the toilet paper dispenser in the bathroom at St. Clair West station! She remembered.

“Aw SHIT!” she slapped her hand on the counter and looked at the young man with a blank face who met her gaze unmoved. She giggled a nervous shrug, “Um, I seem to have forgotten my wallet. I’ll have to come back. What time are you open until?”
“Four o’clock,” he said and called, “NEXT!”

She rushed down the stairs, through the revolving door, out of Robart’s library and back to St. George subway station. She tapped her foot with impatience on the northbound platform and ran into the subway doors when it arrived and they opened. She rode three stops north, stared down the doors and dashed through them before they fully parted open. Out of the subway, she skipped up the steps of the escalator. She turned the corner and charged into the public bathroom. She thrust open the bathroom stall she had used earlier. No wallet. She rushed out of the bathroom, over to the fare booth, and blasted through the microphone built into the plexi-glass between her and the female TTC employee,

“EXCUSE ME! Did anybody turn in a black wallet that was left in the bathroom this afternoon?” Strawberry’s voice frenzied.

The woman in the booth looked up from her magazine at Strawberry, “Nope. Sorry.” She looked back down at her magazine.

“Shit, shit, SHIT!” Strawberry repeated. She lost twenty dollars, no biggie, her bank and Master card, no biggie, but her S.I.N. card, driver’s license, health insurance card and birth certificate. Huge biggies! Tomorrow was the last day to get student cards without paying the penalty of late enrolment.

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At Service Canada there were three waiting rooms for three ministries: Health, Transportation and Immigration. She explained her situation to the security guard wearing a dark blue uniform. He directed her to the reception desk.

“What can I do for you Ma’am?” asked a man with grey hair and a black moustache behind the desk.

“I’ve lost my wallet,” Strawberry shrugged, “And all my I.D.!”

“Can I see a piece of I.D. please?” asked the man.

“I just lost it all. I lost my wallet,” she repeated, “I don’t have any I.D. right now and I need to get it back as soon as possible.”

“A piece of mail, a bill, a bank statement?” he asked.

“I didn’t bring any of that,” she answered, “I’ve just come back to the country after being away for several years but I’ve been paying my taxes. I should be in the system.”

“I’m sorry we can’t help you without some form of I.D.” he replied.

“I can’t go home to get a piece of mail,” she pleaded, “I live all the way in Pickering and I don’t have a car. I need to have at least a temporary driver’s license for tomorrow.”

“Look Ma’am,” he rolled his eyes, “There’s a big line up of people behind you. You can’t do anything here until you show us some piece of identification that proves you are a Canadian citizen.”

“I pay my taxes,” she retorted. “I am in the system. Just look me up. My name is Strawberry—”
“Ma’am,” he interrupted, “You have to come back with some identification or else we have no way to know that you are who you say you are. Please step aside now,” he grunted with annoyed impatience.

“This is ridiculous!” She snarled and marched to another counter with an available teller.

“Your ticket please?” smiled the clerk, an Asian woman with freckles on her nose and cheeks.

“What ticket?” asked Strawberry.

“The ticket you must wait in line to get at the reception desk Ma’am. You’re not number C108?”

“C108? Look, I lost my wallet and I need to replace my I.D. I need to at least leave here with a temporary driver’s license.”

The woman chuckled, “Sorry Ma’am, but you must get a ticket from reception and wait in line. All those people sitting in the waiting room there have been here before you. You must wait your turn.”

Strawberry went back to the reception desk. The clerk rolled his eyes again.

“Look,” she lowered her brows, “I need your help. I have tuition and administrative stuff to do at school. The deadline is tomorrow or I have to pay a late fee that I can’t afford to pay. Going home to get a piece of mail with my name on it is not an option for me at this point. I would never make it back here in time before you closed.”

The clerk stared at Strawberry. She watched his blank face. The clock behind him tick, tick, ticked. She held her breath to block the heavy odour of the man behind her in line and stared back at
the clerk. The clock tick, tick, ticked. Finally he said, “Ma’am, you’re putting me in a difficult position.” He huffed, “Here, take this number, wait in that waiting room,” he pointed to the Ministry of Transport, “And explain your situation to them. But they’re going to tell you the same thing that I am,” he warned.

“I’ll take my chance,” Strawberry responded.

He tossed a tiny yellow ticket across the counter at Strawberry. Number T209. Strawberry picked it up and proceeded into the waiting room full of people. She found a vacant seat between a woman talking on the phone in thick Jamaican accent and a young Caucasian woman who fiddled with her two young boys as they pestered each other and cried impatiently to their mom about how bored they were.

“How much longer? When is it our turn? When can we go home Mom? I’m hungry! I’m bored! I’m tired!” they whined.

“Just sit down and hold on. It’s almost our turn and then I’ll take you to McDonalds,” she told them.

The room smelled like a mix of food, perfume, and plastic. It sounded like heels that click clacked and computers that beep beeped and conversations of people seated in rows, people who paced back and forth across the room, clerks who talked and held the phone between their shoulder and ear while they typed. The elevators chimed like background music to the soup of multicultural
languages in the room. A tall African man paced back and forth across the room looking lost and confused. Ticket in hand, he paced back and forth.

Strawberry kept her eyes on the big screen. She waited for her number to come up. A red-headed man in a green hoody rolled beside her in a wheelchair with blue ribbon laced through the wheels and he waited for his number to come up. An Indian man in a black toque talked on his cell phone while he waited for his number to come up. People chewed gum, played with their phones, picked lint off their work clothes, organized their purses, crossed their arms, uncrossed them, crossed their legs and uncrossed them, drank out of metal and plastic water bottles and waited. All waited for their numbers to come up on the screen.

Finally the screen flashed T 209.

“What can I do for you Ma’am?” asked an orange-haired woman with a thick Scottish accent. She kept her eyes on her computer screen. Strawberry explained her situation, again.

“Can I see a piece of I.D. please, anything with your name and address?” She looked up at Strawberry’s face, eyes now full of water.

“I don't have any,” she explained, again, with every detail she could muster for sympathy about why she didn't have I.D. and why she couldn't leave and come back.

“Let me see if you’re in the system?” said the woman.

“Bless your heart,” Strawberry sighed.
The clerk found Strawberry in the system and was able to print her a temporary driver’s license.

“Now go back to the reception desk, get another ticket and use this as your I.D. to get a new health card in the other waiting room across the hall,” directed the woman. After Strawberry did this, she waited in another line to use the computer to fill out an application for her birth certificate replacement card, then she got back on the street car and travelled to City Hall on Queen Street to get her social insurance card renewed.

At City Hall, she walked past Nathan Phillips Square, past the fountain, past the scattered pigeons and towards the panelled glass windows on both sides of two large mahogany doors. In the building, at the reception counter, she took another ticket, sat in a row of chairs full of people who waited for their numbers to be called.

When Strawberry’s number was called and she completed the necessary documentation, the woman at the desk said, “You will receive the documents and your new card within three weeks or fifteen business days. Have a good day. NEXT!”

At 3:45, Strawberry put her temporary drivers license back in a pocket of her bag and headed down Queen Street through the Eaton Centre to the subway to try to get back to Robart’s before the student card desk closed.

At 4:02 she arrived back at the student identification desk. The lights were off and the doors were locked. Strawberry treaded back to the subway, called her mom from a pay phone, and headed northbound to St. Clair West station again. Her mom arrived around a quarter to five.
“Get your card and everything sorted out?” Strawberry’s mom asked.

“You have no idea what a fiasco today turned out to be. I need to go to the bank before we go home to get a new Master card and bank card. No, I didn’t get anything at school sorted out today. I lost my wallet, I’m exhausted and I’ll explain everything on the way home if I don’t fall asleep first.”

“Oh. Um, ok.” said her mom.

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At home, after dinner, Strawberry went up to her room, pulled out her journal and the new photo album she put together from the pictures she developed in Puerto Plata. She put in a CD of salsa music and she flipped open her journal to a page with a sketch of a compass with a heart at the centre. It was an image she scribbled down one morning in a hotel in Cabarete after a fascinating dream where she received a compass from an eagle. She began to write:

Just looking at that sketch I drew of a compass a couple months ago. Let me tell you how I could have used that compass today boy! I felt so lost today and disoriented in the city of Toronto. Would have been nice to have a compass to guide me to where my wallet ended up. Yes! I lost my wallet today! Spent the whole day like an alien trying to get back my identity. Wouldn’t it be great if we all had personal compasses to tell us where to go in life! A little tool of direction to tell us if we’re going the right way. It could tell me things like, should I have left Puerto Plata to come back to school here in Canada? Should I have left Canada in the first place to pursue my project POR AMOR? Has it added to my life or distracted me from where I need to be? Is going to school going to offer me the direction and knowledge I seek? Have I
chosen the right program or even the right line of work for me? I can’t stop thinking about Puerto Plata.

Strawberry flipped through the photo album of pictures of her students at the I.J. Centre, pictures of her and her friends at the beach, pictures of her facilitating her art, health and environment workshops, pictures of Deya and Altagracia and the soot and rubble remains of Altagracia’s house after the fire, of her students at I.S.S., of the concert ‘Fire on the Roof’ in Cabarete. Tears formed as she turned the pages. She started a new poem in her journal:

“Puerto Plata”

Vaster than the ocean
Heavier than an avalanche
Sublime and mystic
Sometimes there are no words
Sometimes there are more words
Than time to write
Feelings in motion
Poetry my potion
What simple utterance of tone could respect with honour what I have sensed

The sweet breeze that smelled
Of burnt almond leaves
In the sunrise
The sunshine, the grapevine, the fine line
Between our self and our spirit
The whispers when we hear it
To sit on a rooftop
Boundless, heart full yet insecure
And not fear falling off
To trust in the ways of the unseen
My heart beats through its seams
O Puerto Plata what a dream
That came alive when I was there

The sweet breeze that smelled
Of burnt almond leaves
In that place I formed a simple nest
Looking through photos, my memories retrieved
Reminds me I’m here in this city’s mess
This complexity that steals time and mind space
I am a gypsy that roams place to place
Looking for my way finally to face the grace
Of knowing where I belong

Tainted and tattered beauty
In the cracks of those city streets
Bruised homes with bright paint
Barred windows and big smiles
Hearts strong and pliable
Children scattered like dust in the air
Smelling like flowers, like innocence, untainted,
Sweet
Like the smell of burnt almond leaves
Like the sturdy and tall palm trees
Alive when I’m there
Feeling lost when I’m here
Walking through city streets
That make my sense of me unclear
Too many ads and signs and sad people full of fear
So many possessions people hold dear
At the expense of losing compassion
Trading human bonds for fashion
The love we hold back and tend to ration
Isn’t home really where the heart is?

Is our heart in the place we tell of
Could it be I’m fantasizing
Arroz con habichuelas
That island where faith stands tall like mount Isabella
The bella bellas in the street
Create their business smelling sweet
Life is nowhere perfect
But people do not live on the street
Wondering where is the place I meet
Myself, my heart, my purpose
Wondering whether this urban complexity
Is worth it
Wondering where material accumulation
Through purchase after purchase
Is worth us
Losing touch with inner wealth

Inner health of our dreaming self
Hearts longing to connect
Subways full of people who don’t connect
Working three jobs leaving our families in neglect
No time to talk with children
Who look to adults for direction

I remember jugo natural en la esquina
Grandmother’s outside playing with bambinas
As the beautiful carolinhas bloom without the leaves
In Batey Tres there live many Thieves
Yet life conceives
Happy moments come and leave
And if you don’t have a fan
Worry about mosquitoes and not Just heat
But in the morning in the street
You can smell the sweet
Incense of burnt almond leaves
Where keeping your smile is more
Important than
What you achieve
After all our progress it’s hard
To believe
That we got lost in the
Structured land of
Our complexity
I remember the simplicity
And wonder why do we keep Building buildings
With high Walls that block us from
Ourselves?

Strawberry closed her journal and the album and reached them both to the floor beside her bed, rested her head on her pillow and imagined herself on a hammock by the sea, her body supported and swinging in a gentle breeze, the ocean waves slowly rocking her to sleep. Her eyes grew heavy and she sunk further and further into her mattress, each breath deeper, more relaxing. She pictured turquoise waves. Within minutes she floated away into the land of sleep and dream...
Strawberry is outside the bus station waiting for direction on which bus to take. She looks to the compass to tell her which way to go. She holds the antique compass cupped in both hands, its tarnished shine reflects its age and it radiates the colour yellow. She can feel the energy of this gadget all through her hands and up her arms like gentle vibrations. Its bronze needle swings up and around and down and back up. She holds the compass steady to make out its direction. She turns her body to face different directions. The compass dial moves south and then west then north and back down to west and then north again and then back to east. She shakes it and holds it up to the sun. A homeless man with a large matted dreadlock for a pony tail paces in front of her and the station. He throws his arms in the air and shouts, “Who do you think you are? Who do you think you are? Where’s your heart? It’s all for nothing!” He rushes over to Strawberry and shouts, “Who do you think you are?” up in her face and he taunts her, “Where’s your heart? You don’t know nothing!” He swipes the compass out of her hands. And he runs. Strawberry tries to run after him but she can’t run because her feet are stuck to the ground.

A grey haired man with a black moustache and glum face stands outside the front of the bus station smoking a cigarette. He sees the whole thing but keeps his dismal and blank expression.

“Please help me. He’s run off with my compass!” Strawberry pleads with the man.

“Sorry, Ma’am, I’ll need to see some I.D. that, in fact, that was your compass,” he replies and flicks his cigarette butt to the road.

“Please!” her feet are stuck. “There is no time. PLEASE!”
The clerk rolls his eyes, “Ma'am you're putting me in a difficult situation,” and he rolls up his pants legs and his shirt sleeves and starts to run after the bandit down the street and through the alley. They turn off into another alley and then another. Strawberry waits in the empty bus station and soon the clerk returns with her compass in his hands. He gasps for breath and his eyes are dull and emotionless.

“He got away but here's your compass,” he huffs through short breath and then lights another cigarette.

“Oh, thank you. Oh, thank you. Oh, thank you!” she repeats as she takes the compass in both hands and opens its lid. It has no glow and its soft yellow illumination is flat; no colour, no energy, no vibration. The arrow points south no matter which way she turns. She circles and circles herself in hopes that her movement will resuscitate its movement. The needle doesn't move. The compass is broken.

“Oh NO!” she gasps, her heart sinks, her hands tremble. “How will I know which way to go?” She walks out into the sidewalk and raises her hands to the sky, wide open, arms open, chest open. She looks up high up for the answers and her gaze is severed by the cold and sharp edges of tall, gray and black glass skyscrapers.

On the corner, ragged men in dirty jeans and scruffy beards huddle outside the Salvation Army shelter and share cigarettes. Busy men and women walk by in long, quick strides carrying brief cases in one hand and holding BlackBerry cell phones in the other hand pushed up against their ear. People walk fast with purpose. They know where they are going. A man on the corner in a straw hat and plaid overcoat strums his guitar and whistles on his harmonica that is well out of tune. The sounds of his shrieking music and the drilling machinery of so many construction sites and cold buildings taunt her.
The hotdog stands taunt her. The storefronts and pipe smoke and exhaust fumes and people who walk forward and backward and sideways all taunt her. And the homeless man cackles and cackles, “It all means nothing. You know nothing. Where’s your heart? It all means nothing.” Cackle, cackle, cackle.

She shakes her head, back and forth, tears fall left and right. She shakes her head. She’s all alone. This can’t be happening. She has no compass. She shakes her head.

“Where is Rita now? Where are my guides? Where are the animals?” She shakes her head. She has no more tears to cry and no one around to help. She turns back towards the bus station and feels her heart pound. She walks across the bus station and she stands on the platform and she waits for a bus to arrive and she trusts that it will and she trusts that she will get to where she needs to go. She waits on the platform and taps her foot up and down, up and down, waiting for the bus to arrive and it does and it is headed westbound…

Strawberry jerked herself up in her bed. She gasped for breath and felt the chill of a cold sweat damp between her body and pyjamas. She could see nothing in her dark room other than the red numbers of her clock radio that read 3:03 a.m. Eyes wide, she sat still and located herself in her surroundings.

“Only a dream,” she uttered softly to herself as she rose from her bed and staggered through the dark hall to the bathroom to get a glass of water before she went back to sleep.
Chapter Seven: Constructing the Inner Compass

Human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot be reduced to verbalism or activism.

—Paulo Freire

Strawberry stared at her page with her mind blank, her ideas unclear. She sat within the ivy-covered walls of the university library, tucked in a quiet corner, at the west side of the building facing College Street. She was trying to work on her final essay for her critical theory class with Professor Freire. The topic she chose was sustainability: what it means for people and organizations to exist sustainably within community development contexts. The more she researched the topic and reflected on her own experiences, the more questions she had and the less she knew where to begin with her paper. It seemed there was no clear solution to what makes for sustainable communities. The world changed so fast. Even the term sustainability, similar to terms like culture and community, was so broad and difficult to pin down into definition.

“How can we properly understand concepts we can’t even define,” she scribbled in her notepad.

She started writing a poem:
“System?”

Oh system
Do you really want to hurt me?
Do you really want to make me cry?
The tears I’ve cried, the times you’ve lied
Oh system, oh System
Why when it’s really real, do you hide?
Please drop your pride
Come in, it’s cold outside
In touch and unified our system should be
So why do you keep using me to help you
Create a perverted reality
Full of hunger and Wall Street salaries
Why do you insist on perpetuating fallacy
When it’s the exact thing creating the malady of your heart?
Do you like being ill?

Oh System—sit still
You are forgiven
Come out from where you’ve hidden and let’s heal
The day is spent
Let us rebirth and repent
Life is today, ours and new
So mysterious are you
Dangerous and calculated
Young and innocent
Cold and manipulative
Tender and just
Reluctant to trust
Timid and frightened
Forceful and fierce
Who are all the people you’ve had to become
In order to be the person who you think you are?
How long will you boast your scars?
Obsess with scars?
When will you realize you’re now unbarred?
When will you tell your story?
Put pen to your glory waiting to receive you?

Oh system
Put whatever you want in your shopping cart
Any car, any jewel,
Any fine piece of art
Make yourself full and make yourself smart
But then will you ever arrive at the heart of it system?
When tell me System will you finally learn to listen?
Please tell me System, where is the Love?

She tried to focus on forming her essay outline but her mind drifted again and again back to her latest conversation with Deya.

“How are the projects going Deya? I haven’t received a report from you yet.”

“Oh, very good. The children made a birthday party for everyone in the barrio, all the kids, so cute. The women from the project came and helped. Maria made a big cake. We all made birthday cards and helped the children write poems to put inside.”

“That sounds great. And what about Angela? Has she found a place to take English lessons yet? Or has she started them?”
“Oh, not yet. Angela is very busy these days with her new granddaughter living in the house but she comes to the project every Saturday to help still. One moment please.”

“Sure.” Strawberry stood in the kitchen and began to run water into the sink to wash the dishes. Deya came back on the phone.

“Sorry. So Angela is doing a good job. She is very great help for me.”

“I see.” Strawberry turned the water off. “Well, I did not receive any reports from you yet.”

“Oh yes, I know. I am sorry. I’ll send it soon. One moment please.”

“Sure.” Strawberry turned the water back on a squeezed soap into the sink. Deya came back on the phone.

“Sorry. Things are crazy busy here. Charlotte got sick. My mother’s blood pressure is high again. I’ve had the flu for two weeks now and Patricia is here with Juanito.” Strawberry turned the water back off.

“Oh my. That’s a lot to deal with at once. But Deya, if you don’t fill out the reports how can you show Angela how to do it? If Angela doesn’t learn English, how can I communicate with her about the projects when you’re in Canada? You know my Spanish is not that great. I’m worried that the projects will have to stop when you get your visa. And then we will have to start all over again.”

“Oh no, no—Angela is good. She will make a good job when I go.”
“I know but—I know she will. You know she will. But if she can’t report about it and I’m here in Canada and soon you’ll be here in Canada. We can’t expect people and organizations to fund our projects if we can’t even report on them.”

“Hold on one moment please.” Strawberry threw her hand up in the air, raised her eyebrows and said, “Sure!”

When Deya came back she said, “Sorry honey, let me call you back tomorrow. The electricity just went out and I have to go buy gas for the stove to cook for everyone.”

“Oh. But...forget it. Talk to you later,” Strawberry sulked.

“Ok. Bye.” Strawberry hung up the phone, left the unwashed dishes in the half full sink and flopped onto the living room sofa with her head buried in the pillows.

At the oak wood cubicle, Strawberry turned to a fresh page in her notepad and tapped her pen against the blank page. She watched the time tick by the seconds. She had a meeting scheduled with professor Freire at 11:30 in his office. The full name of Freire’s course was “Critical Theory in Community Development Perspectives”. He was a visiting professor from Brazil, taught half of his classes in Portuguese and half in English. He spent his life as a scholar developing literacy programs for impoverished people in Brazil. He rose himself out of the depths of poverty and now worked with some of the most influential and revolutionary community development activists around the world, including Miles Horten and Moses Coady.
Strawberry jotted down notes on the frustrating episodes that she saw prevented the POR AMOR projects in Puerto Plata from continuing effectively. The clock tick, tick, ticked. It was 11:18 a.m.

**Sustainability**

- What does it mean to exist sustainably? (personal and organizational)
  - both require money, at least for basics (food and shelter; program materials and admin costs)
  - affected by social structures: system works against sustainability (i.e. Job stress, extensive reporting)
- How does one navigate a system set up to create injustice while at the same time find their place in it?

She tapped her pen on the page again, chewed the end, tapped some more. 11:22. She decided to pack her things and head over to Freire’s office located in another building, up the street, on campus.

At 11:35, she lightly knocked on Professor Freire’s office door. The door was open a crack; she poked her head in. He sat in front of his computer screen and clicked the keyboard buttons aggressively.

“Hi Professor Freire. I see you’re in a flow. I’ll just be outside here whenever you’re ready.”

“Ok, thanks. Give me just three minutes.”
“No Problem.”

Like most university professors, Professor Freire’s office was filled with books, stacked on shelves, in piles on the floor, open and marked all over his desk. There were piles and piles of papers and folders. A lot of his books were in Portuguese.

Taped to the outside of Freire’s office door was a poster that read: “Thoughts become words, words become action, action becomes habit, habit becomes destiny. Destiny is purpose.” Strawberry leaned back against her backpack and waited.

“Hi Strawberry.” Professor Freire stood in the doorway a couple of minutes later, “Thanks for waiting. Come in.” Strawberry followed and took a seat across from him at his desk.

“So how are you?” Professor Freire asked.

“Oh, I’m ok,” said Strawberry, “I’ve come to discuss the paper I’m writing for your class and also about an issue regarding community development work.”

“Ok. What’s on your mind?”

“Well, I’m writing my critical theory paper on the issue of sustainability, specifically within the context of personal and organizational sustainability, and I’m kind of struggling with the concept of ‘critical consciousness’ that you’ve been discussing in class,” Strawberry explained, “I’m not sure I get it so I’m having trouble seeing how to include it in my ideas for the paper and also, remember last time we met I told you about my project POR AMOR?”
“Of course,” said Professor Freire.

“Well I think I have to put the Dominican projects on pause,” she sighed and explained the reporting and communication issues she was having with Deya and the details of the projects. “It seems so ironic to have this issue arise as I’m writing about sustainability and, here I have to stop funding these two programs. I’m not sure what to do and it sure isn’t helping me write my paper.”

“Ok. I see. Well, from my work and experience with the topic of sustainable community development, one of the key elements to generating next steps for people, is to begin to develop something I call critical consciousness, within ourselves and the communities we work. So let’s start there. I’ll try to clarify that concept for you and then we can relate it to your project. Hopefully that will help you with your paper. Would that be helpful?”

“I hope so,” Strawberry sighed.

“Ok, so consciousness is a way of being in the world. It is a method, a way to act with intent,” Professor Freire began to explain, “Most people don’t take the time to ask themselves—what way do I intend to be in this world? What are my intentions? Am I acting, being, working in ways that are in line with my values? Or even simply, what are my values? This is the beginning. Developing critical consciousness is a process. It doesn't happen overnight. There is a lot of start and stop, trial and error throughout the process. That’s how we learn. We begin to examine our personal struggles with oppression, what is stopping us from living by our values, and how are these issues related to larger issues in our social system. For example, when we consider the problem of poverty and we come to understand it as directly related to education. Most uneducated people are impoverished. That is,
most poor people are poor because they are uneducated. When we see that, then we start to question: Why aren’t they educated? What is preventing them from getting an education? Why are educational opportunities not equally accessible to everyone? As answers to these questions begin to surface for us, we’ve already started to develop the process of critical consciousness around that issue. Follow me?”

“Yes,” said Strawberry.

“We don’t want to just be part of the system, especially one that oppresses us. We want to engage ourselves with the system in such an intentional way as to change the way we interact with the system. So we start to question more. We want to free ourselves from aspects of the system that keep us and the communities we work with oppressed. Critical consciousness is the path towards liberation from oppression. It’s a way of thinking and interacting with the world that helps to free us from oppression. It’s a very particular type of learning for the purpose of liberation.

Strawberry pulled her notepad from her knapsack and began to scribble notes into it. “But there are so many problems with the system, so many things that prevent our freedom,” she said.

“Our own mind being one of the biggest,” replied Professor Freire. “A human’s primary purpose on Earth is to be a subject, the centre of their own world and not merely an object with the purpose to serve somebody else’s world. Reality is not something static. We don’t have to believe somebody, especially simply because they are an authority that says “This is the way it is, the way it has always been and the way it will always be”. We can begin to look at reality as something to be worked on, seeing the problems as things to be solved. We can recognize ourselves as creative and intelligent
beings able to think, act, and create solutions to problems. From there we can combine our energies collectively, start to join forces with others on certain issues that are important to us, and solve those bigger problems together. Community is developed together, amongst people, not for people.”

“But why is it then,” Strawberry asked, “That most of the teachers and adults in my life have told me that this is the way it is and we have to find a way to adapt to what already is? We are taught that reality is something ‘out there’ and how we feel about it is something ‘in here’,” she points to her head, “And the challenge is forcing your ‘in here’ to conform with their ‘out there’. We are taught to conform more than create.”

“Right. And what about what’s in here?” he puts his hand on his chest.

“Exactly!” said Strawberry.

“I have a theory about education. I call it the ‘banking model’. Within the ‘banking model’ there is the assumption that students come into the classroom as empty vessels, like empty containers who come to be filled by the knowledge of the teacher. This model assumes that the student comes to class without any useful experience unless it applies to the teacher’s lesson. Anything that opposes what’s being taught is dismissed as useless. Now, what if that teacher is teaching them principles or concepts, even histories, or versions of it anyway, that are oppressive to their liberation as a human being? What if what is being taught is meant to train the student to serve the larger ideas and politics, the ideology of a system that oppresses certain human beings so that other humans can prosper and live excessively luxurious lives? That’s the ‘banking model’ whether the teacher is conscious of it or not—it happens all the time. And then think of the opposite: what if what was
being taught was directly related to each student learning to liberate themselves by developing techniques to creatively act in the world in ways that transform their reality?"

“That would be amazing but hold on. Remind me again what an ideology is?” Strawberry asked.

“At this point, an ideology is a perspective, a belief that guides one person or a whole class of people, like a political party or particular group with a certain socio-economic power or status. An ideology can even guide an entire social movement. It is a set of ideals that promote a particular perspective on how things naturally are or should be. An ideology is not reality and it’s very tricky. Most people support it without even knowing. It slides right under our conscious awareness until we learn to recognize it for what it is. That’s what’s important to understand. Ideology is a representation of a particular reality. It is presented as if it was the one and only way, but it’s not. All of the world’s major religions, for example, are ideologies. They assume they are the only way and that’s why they bicker and even war so much. Get it?”

“Yes. I mean I think I’m starting to,” Strawberry replied.

"One of the major ideologies of the education system is that education is neutral—that the lessons being taught are general knowledge, common sense, true for everyone as if they are not in service to any one particular class of people or political perspectives. But this is not true. I argue against this. My argument is that education is never neutral and that what is taught within the education system is either used to teach young people to conform to the ideologies of the present system, whatever it is, or that education is used to help students increase their “practice of freedom”. It’s one or the other. It can’t be both. Education is not neutral. Practicing freedom is a way
of learning and being educated where men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to think, act and participate in the transformation of their world.”

“That is so amazing—I mean the idea of that. But wait—let’s back up to the ‘banking model’ and education not being neutral. That is so disturbing. It’s disturbing because, as students, we work so hard to become a part of the system. We have no idea that this system is set up so that only a choice few will reap the benefits and freedom this system offers. We are taught that we all have equal opportunity but what you’re now saying, which is confirming something I already feel, is that this is not the case; that it isn’t equal opportunity, not even in North America. Who needs that kind of education? Even our own teachers promote this!”

“Most of the time they’re not conscious of it. They’re doing their job. They need a job. They’re trying their best in the best way they know how. They could be, and probably are, oppressed too.”

“So again, we must oppress ourselves in order to work in this system. Feels like a system of modern day slavery.”

“Don’t get me wrong Strawberry, education is crucial. It is the number one factor in liberating ourselves from oppression. The problem is not education in and of itself. The problem is to what extent education is being used. Is it being used to breed conformity to ideologies that are oppressive or being used for liberation? When we use education purposefully and are able to then look clearly and critically, beyond the ideologies and “his-stories” that do not serve us, then education becomes indispensable to our freedom. The world starts to look different to us,” Professor Freire continued.
“We begin to see and name more distinctly the things, people, and structures that inhibit and/or support our personal empowerment and liberation.”

“So we start to use education to develop our critical consciousness?” Strawberry suggested.

“Precisely,” replied Professor Freire. “Some people tell me it’s discouraging and even depressing to constantly be aware of all things in our lives, all the various parts of the political, economical, medical, educational, socio-cultural systems, aspects we simply cannot avoid, that work to prevent our freedom. Many people think and live as though freedom were unattainable. They believe changing the system is just too much work, too big a task. My answer to them is that if everyone just worked on their own freedom without causing harm to others, these would be the first steps towards individuals coming together actively to transform the system. You would see more and more people naturally gravitating together in solidarity to transform oppressive aspects within the system. They would recognize their own struggle for freedom in the struggle of their neighbour and work together. That is strong community.”

Professor Freire stroked his beard between his thumb and forefinger, “In Brazil, I take pleasure in facilitating spaces for people to engage these topics together in my classroom. My wife and I host dinner parties a couple times a year where we invite colleagues to share conversations and opinions and I always invite a student or two because I think it’s important to include young people in these conversations and hear what they have to say. And we talk about ways to liberate ourselves and each other from different oppressive mechanisms in our society and communities. In these ways we form networks of support in our struggles for freedom from oppression.”
“Actually,” Professor Freire went on, “My wife is here with me for the next couple of months before she goes back to Brazil and we have decided to host one of these gatherings with some of the colleagues and friends I’ve made here in Toronto sometime next month. Maybe you’d like to come and be one of the student representatives?”

“Really?” said Strawberry wide eyed.

“Yes, why not?” said Professor Freire.

“So through these gatherings you’re kind of developing communities of consciously critical people working towards change?” Strawberry asked.

“Each in his or her own way, yes. Or at least talking about it. There is a lot of positive change that comes from dialogue alone. Conversations change our minds. And changing our minds is the first step to changing our world. All great creations and solutions, every invention on earth, started first in the mind. Good ones and bad ones. It would be great if you came to the dinner. I’m sure people would love to hear more about your project and the work you started overseas and in your community here.”

“Yes, I could come. Please let me know the details. I’ll send you an email to remind you. I know you’re super busy.”

“Yes. That’s a good idea. It will be a great networking opportunity for you and the conversations are always inspiring. The most interesting people show up and you never know who they’ll bring with them.” Professor Freire leaned back in his chair, “Now in your case, with POR AMOR, it seems
what you set out to do was an act that came out of an ability to think both consciously and critically about the way you want to be in the world, how you wish to work within the system. You certainly picked a path not as travelled as most but one that signifies an important shift I've started to write about in my work where young people are taking the lead in social movements of transformation. You went down to the Dominican Republic, against the norms of your system. I mean I’m sure you were expected to simply choose a career that contributes to the system already in place and of which you had a much greater privilege, simply by being born and raised in North America. But you surpassed these norms in order to work in solidarity with people much less economically advantaged than yourself by virtue of the simple fact of their being born into a country with much less privilege and economic development. Your intention was and is honourable.”

Professor Freire uncrossed and re-crossed his legs. “How successful you were? Well, sometimes social outcomes are hard to measure, especially since you were foreigners introducing concepts you learned from your own culture. One must always be careful of this. When people of economic privilege want to help empower people of less privilege by joining with them in their struggle for liberation they must be careful to not mock their struggle by making a charity of it and imposing their own values on those people. This is the same way a teacher should not impose the knowledge they have to offer as the only knowledge that counts. When people from places and cultures of privilege seek to help the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin, of their privilege. The marks of privilege are very discreet, many times unconscious, pieces of the same oppressive ideologies they seek to struggle with the people against. They have been taught and they view the origins of poverty to be a problem that exists within the
people rather than the system that shapes the ways the people are forced into being within the world.”

“Some of these prejudices,” Professor Freire continued to explain, “Include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think for themselves and have the capacity to know and create their own solutions. The oppressed people must be able, must learn to be able to solve their own problems, must themselves be empowered, find the power within themselves to solve their own problems. This is an indispensable precondition for any revolutionary change to occur. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people and their ability to learn to solve their problems, which engages him or her more effectively in their struggles than a thousand actions and projects in their favour without that trust.”

“When I think of my volunteer experience with the youth in Puerto Plata I’m not even sure I trusted myself, never mind the people. More than anything I was able to teach them, I learned so much about myself. I have found the work so far to be more of a process of self discovery. As I continue to discover myself and how to effectively continue work I’m passionate about, I give the people I’m working with the freedom to discover themselves too. But we’re all always learners together in a process of discovery aren’t we?”

“Yes, it is all process, a process by which we are in continuous cycles of engaging and then pulling back to evaluate the effectiveness of our methods of engagement and then re-planning an evolved method, creatively forming solutions to the problems perceived and re-implementing an idea or project that engages and then pulling back again to reflect. Our work becomes an ongoing
cycle of think, act, reflect, think, act, reflect, and, within this process, liberation is being facilitated little by little. You are certainly on the right track with that insight. Effective community development and practice involves ALOT of patience and perseverance, as do all struggles, especially ones that sustain themselves throughout time and challenges. It’s important to remember we’re working at working with people, not for people—finding a place to be subjects in our own worlds, not objects in somebody’s else's. We do not teach people what ‘we’ think they need to know to transform their problems. This is arrogant and disrespectful of their culture and experiences. That is not to say that cultural ways are not meant to be critiqued, of course they are as well. There is a time and place for everything. But the place to begin must be in trusting the people, that the experiences they have have given them a certain knowledge base with which they can teach people from the outside about. Only in solidarity with the people, ready to become a student of what they know at the same time as being a teacher of what you know, can real dialogue and knowledge sharing begin. In this way new knowledge can be created—the knowledge that forms collaboratively out of the dialogue—the collective learning that happens through shared perspectives. Is this making sense to you?”

“Yes it makes perfect sense. But it is very unconventional, very revolutionary. These ideas are definitely ones that I would like to incorporate into the community development work I do within POR AMOR, especially with the work overseas. But locally too. All people have something to share, some kind of knowledge they bring to the group. Everyone has something they can teach and learn.”

“Yes, and developing a critical consciousness is really like learning to navigate systemic territory from within, almost like this internal compass that guides us through the system, showing us the
aspects of it that oppress it and therefore the aspects of it in need of transformation. It’s really a process of humanizing the system isn’t it?’

“Yeah, I guess so. Sometimes, I mean within the system, it’s hard to even imagine what it means to be human. Our system and all its various mechanisms seem to have brought us so far away from our true nature that in general people don’t even know what our true nature is anymore.”

“Well, the truth is, discovering our true nature has always been a process of self discovery. Only we ourselves can discover for our self. If society is built to keep us unaware or not curious about this we can live our life without ever even starting the quest. We are always creating meaning as we go. Of course we have biological needs. Also, we are social animals and have need for relationships. It is the form of these relationships that enable the transformative qualities. It is the knowledge and action, inspired through dialogue, that creates positive change and liberation for us. We can relate in ways that dominate and oppress us from one another, from one group to the next group, or we can relate in ways that are loving and kind, ways that liberate us to co-exist and co-create new ways of being in the world, collectively, that is true to the essence of what it means to be alive as a human being at this time, on this Earth.”

“Wow. This is so helpful Professor Freire. I have a lot to think about. I don’t want to take up too much more of your time. I’m sure you have many other things to do, but before I go, can we talk a little bit about love and how it fits its way into our conversation about critical consciousness and freedom. As you know, POR AMOR means ‘for love’ in Spanish. So many people treat love as this airy fairy concept that hippies use while they’re high on pot or whatever. Or some people have this idea
of love as something segregated to Hollywood concepts of romance that aren’t realistic. But love is truly so much more than this. I see love as the number one crucial aspect of any effective and sustainable community development. You have to love people to help them and you have to love yourself in order to be able to love people. But it’s hard to talk about love, since it is a word so overused, so cliché. For me, it’s hard to discuss, what I see as the most important aspect of community development, love, without watering down my ideas as soon as I start to talk about it. People in general, even myself included, take the notion of love for granted. We totally overlook or disregard the crucial role love plays or doesn’t play in our lives and experiences of being a human, in relationship with other humans and life forms in society and on the planet.”

“Love. Now you’re getting heavy. What can I say about love? Dialogue cannot exist without love. Liberation from oppression cannot exist without dialogue. Love is at the center of people’s ontological purpose—to be actors upon their reality.

“What’s an ontological purpose?”

“It is the nature of something’s existence, the reason for its being. Human beings have an ontological purpose to act upon their reality in order to change it. That is why society changes and evolves. Our purpose is to be free to take action at the same time as share dialogue with each other and the forces of our oppression. For this to happen there must be love. There is nothing constructive in fighting force with more force. Love is a necessary precondition to any meaningful and sustainable social change. People cannot talk, honestly and constructively, about these matters if they do not feel a profound sense of love for the world and for people. Love is the fire, the passion
that moves people to act, because love is an act of courage and not fear. Love is a commitment to others, for the oppressed it is a commitment to their cause, the cause of liberation.”

“How poetic,” Strawberry concludes. “Thanks again Professor Freire. I think I have more than enough now to start my paper,” She packs her notebook back into her knapsack. “See you in class.”

“Yes, see you. Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

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Strawberry went back to the library to continue working on the outline of her essay with the new ideas inspired by her conversation with Professor Freire. First she started to outline a new poem:

“Compass Medicine”

Where’s my medicine?
Where’s my medicine?
Centered at the heart
I’m reflecting the light
With insight
Working from the in-spin with a grin
Into the depths of beginning
To trust inside directions
Directions that point
Thoughts that anoint
Infused with emotion
Into the jointed
Sometimes inspired by the inner compass pointing
Me in the direction of my True Love
I am finding my way

Though you can’t take me above my problems
No bird’s eye-view
Into a 3rd eye view of my scene
I can feel you
From inside
Compass points towards
Whole scene viewed in multiplied sections
The connections of parts
Shards of reality
Mixed pieces of truth and what they say reality is

“They say: weapons of mass destruction\(^2\)
We say: weavers of mass delusion
Creating a confusion
With smoke and illusion
Now people are losing
Their minds and their rights”

Now people are losing their minds and their rights
We got to pick up our plight
Into the night moon we find our guidance
We are soldiers in the jungle

\(^2\) Quotation within poem is an excerpt from the Vibrant Rise song, “They Say”.
With our weapons and our compass
Writing a myth
Each piece of the structure has a purpose
Our compass blessing of the heart
Let the heart be your guide

We’re in the midst of overcoming our spiritual genocide
The closer we look the more they have lied
Separations are keeping us hypnotized
Consumer culture and capitalism
Making the TV make our decisions
For us

But we gotta find our own true way
To mend the scars that are clouding our understanding
Of the past
We get clouded
We begin to forget
We can’t hear the direction
Forgot the connection was ever even there

Where’s my medicine?
It’s in the act of re-piecing the pieces back together when
All the fragments have been scattered
Remembering what matters
Re-membering my gift
My compass
My medicine
Re-membering my gift
My family
My heart has been directing me
To members whose love rings true to me
And I do it for them too
Cause we are one and I feel that as true
  Living being harmony
Love is about harmony

  So I'm using my heart to get me
Directed towards healing love
  Making me a channel
So I am surrounded and filled
Grace in the world with my cup full
Over flowing with blessings to share
Communities to repair
Rights to declare
Start to right the unfair external forces
Whose destruction they keep enforcing and we keep ignoring
By endorsing our life with dreams
Love and trust what's inside and not seen

  Where's my medicine?
All around us and
Love will surround us in medicine for the heart
In all pieces, all people, all members
Love as present and pliable as energy
Glue holding pieces together
Shining the light into dark places—manifesting
Dreams out of potential
We are learning to find our way
Chapter Eight: Meeting of the Minds

Despite our conditioning by the industrial society, we want to name, once again, this world as holy.
-- Joanna Macy

Strawberry paced back and forth in the driveway of the small, country bungalow in North York, where Professor Freire stayed during his time living and working in Toronto. There were bowing irises, a path of blue, purple and yellow pansies and small cedar trees in the front garden. She clutched her cell phone to her ear and held a corning ware dish of berry crumble as she listened to her best friend convince her of the reasons why she should go inside.

“I’m already an hour late,” Strawberry pouted, “I know it doesn’t matter but I’m not going to know anybody and I just don’t feel like sitting with my professor and all his professor friends right now. I don’t know why I said I’d come?” She moaned and peeked around the garage to the front window to see if anyone could see her.

“What? Yes I know this is a great opportunity to meet people but my paper is due on Tuesday. I don’t even have an outline yet. I feel totally stressed. My eyes are all puffy. They’ve probably all finished eating. I’m going to walk right in the middle of the conversation and probably have nothing interesting to say any—what?” She stopped her pacing and looked at her watch.

“No I’m not being silly. I’m just losing the point of things like this. I’m tired of all this thinking—tell me again why I wanted to go back to school?” She started pacing again. “I know. I know I travelled all this way. Fiiiine,” she huffed. “Yes, I’m walking up the front steps right now. Thank you
for your voice of reason. I’ll call you later.” She shoved her cell phone back into her purse and rang the doorbell.

“DING DONG.”

Professor Freire swung the front door open. “Hello there, Strawberry. Welcome. Come in,” he said. Incense and curry spice filled the front entrance. There was a collage of different shaped mirrors on the wall, a pile of shoes at the entrance and a basket full of laundry leaned against a closed door. Down the hallway she heard voices.

“Sorry I’m late,” she explained, “I was working on my paper and I wasn’t feeling so good today but I feel a bit better now so I came.”

“No problem at all. There’s lots of food. We’ve just started to eat. Come on, we’re in the dining room. I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

A woman with hair fixed into a long braid, wearing a long, magenta skirt and large golden hoop earrings walked down the hall towards them and picked up the basket of clothes. She extended her free hand out to Strawberry and shrugged,

“Last load,” she nodded to the basket. “Hi. I’m Elsa.” Strawberry shook her hand.

“Elsa is my wife,” said Professor Freire.

“Paulo put up a good ransom so my father agreed,” she poked Professor Freire in the tummy.

“My name is Strawberry. I’m one of Professor Freire’s students.”
“Ooh, what a great name,” Elsa said, “Come on in. Let me take that for you.” She reached for Strawberry’s dish of crumble, winked and handed it to Professor Freire.

“Thanks,” Professor Freire smiled.

“Ok. Go eat,” she commanded, then nudged the door open with her hip and lifted the basket into a room with a washer and dryer. Strawberry followed Professor Freire into the dining room.

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In the dining room, four guests sat chatting around a large oval dining table. A mixture of mini conversations and chilli spice filled the air. The dim light from the chandelier complemented candlelight that burned on corner and side tables. A large pot of chilli, tiny bowls of sour cream, green onions, cheddar cheese and a basket of sliced French stick bread was spread across the pale blue table cloth.

“Everyone—this is one of my students, Strawberry. She’s in my critical theory course,” said Professor Freire. Strawberry raised her hand in hello, smiled and nodded.

“Hey Strawberry.”

“Hello.”

“Welcome.”
“Good evening.”

Strawberry parked herself in a seat, “Smells delicious,” she said. Professor Freire sat down too and scooped her out a bowl of chilli.

“Strawberry does some interesting community work in the Dominican Republic and also here in, what’s it called again?” asked Professor Freire.

“East Scarborough,” said Strawberry.

“Right. Sorry, I’m still learning this city. Her project is called POR AMOR and she uses the arts to work in communities on issues of empowerment, health and the environment. Is that right?” He asked her.

“Yes,” she said.

“Since you’ve all met each other now would you each mind just quickly introducing yourself to Strawberry and a quick bit about what you do or what you’re passionate about so we can integrate

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3 All the guests at Professor Freire’s dinner party, excluding his wife Elsa, are the theorists that compose the literature review/theoretical background to this research. For a complete description of who they are and what literature they are referring to, see the ‘Character Profiles’ section of Appendix and the Bibliography. The entire dinner conversation is drawn from their writings and theories and has been paraphrased to align with the narrative style and intention for audience accessibility.
her into the conversation?” he asked his guests. Elsa hummed down the hall, brought a pitcher of water in the room and placed it on the table. She sat in between Strawberry and her husband.

“Hi,” said the woman sitting across from Strawberry. She paused, took a deep breath and exhaled. “I’m Joanna. I’m passionate about life—all living things. I work with individuals and groups all over the world on modes of healing our separation and reconnecting with ourselves, each other, and the Earth.”

“Wow. That sounds so interesting,” said Strawberry.

“Hi. I’m Kofi,” said another man. He poured himself water and took a sip. “That chilli is spicy—whew!” he turned back to Strawberry. “My passion is soccer. But when I’m working, it’s to engage people in the struggle for human rights. I work to create equity in communities. I’m a human resource consultant and I teach at the University of Toronto.

“Hi I’m David,” said the man next to Kofi. “Passions? Hmmm, I’m passionate about arranging fruit platters,” he said.

“That was a good fruit platter!” agreed Kofi.

“I do a little writing and teaching here and there too,” added David.

“David’s being modest,” said Elsa as she turned to him, “Or silly. He is an amazing writer,” she boasted, “Tell her about your new book David.”
“Oh right. I just had a book published called, “The Great Turning”. Currently I’m touring with the book, giving seminars and hosting workshops at different graduate institutions,” said David.

“What is your book about?” Strawberry asked.

“I advocate the importance of creativity in the current state of our planetary existence and argue how tapping into our creative gifts and potential offers us opportunities to solve the critical conditions of our civilization and our relationship to the earth,” replied David.

“It’s a brilliant piece,” said Professor Freire, “I just finished it. He talks about how we’re on the verge of a very pivotal change in the Earths’ history where we have the ability to enhance and speed up the destruction already in place or creatively combine ourselves in units, organizations and networks as a way to collectively imagine solutions to some of these great problems. How’s the tour going anyway David?

“Oh good, good,” replied David, “Getting some good responses. The ideas seem to be reaching people and synchronistically popping up in different ways by different people everywhere; which is good.”

“Hi I’m Ed,” said the man sitting to the other side of Strawberry. “I’m a retired professor at the University of Toronto and I run a research center there called the Centre for Transformative Learning Studies. I’m passionate about playing the drums. How about you Strawberry? What’s your passion?”

“Who me? Oh, um, I guess I’m passionate about writing poetry. It’s nice to meet you all. Thanks for inviting me Professor Freire,” said Strawberry.
“My pleasure, I’m glad all of you could make it,” said professor Freire. “Maybe you could share a poem with us by the end of the night Strawberry.”

“Um, Sure. I could do that,” she replied.

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Quality of Life and States of Disconnection

Prof. Freire: “So, we’ve been talking about ‘quality of life’. What does this term mean to us? What does it mean as far as education, concepts of community, sustainability of eco-systems and social systems go? I mean Ed, you’ve even written about this as a specific topic in some of your literature, especially the piece you wrote on your vision of education for the 21st century. We live in a time of mechanized workforces and unavoidable telecommunicative devices that are created to keep us more connected and yet it seems we are less connected than ever before...or are we? Is it fair to say that our social connections determine our quality of life? or is it the ability to secure ourselves financially? What do you think?”

Ed: “For a long time our material gain and capital has been the most defining element to how people perceive their quality of life. That thinking is still prevalent today. Yet, the truth is we are living in a period of the Earth’s history like no other. It is a very unique moment in time where we are in the midst of a major shift in the Earth’s processes and what it means for us as humans to live on this planet. The quality of life we’ve grown accustomed to is in jeopardy because we’ve realized the damage it’s doing to the Earth and Earth’s life forces. We’ve realized the way we’re living is not
sustainable. All living things, including us, and the Earth, are one. If She’s sick; so are we. There is no denying that our planet is sick with pollution, water crises, economic crises, and global warming, to only name a few. As a result, we suffer the effects of this. That being said, there’s no doubt our quality of life needs to and is starting to change. We have a duty to prepare our next generations for this change. People like you,” he nodded at Strawberry, “Will be taking the lead.”

Strawberry: “We could be. We should be. But will we? I don’t know. When I look at my peers I just see people struggling to set up themselves. We get our jobs and start our families and then we’re too busy to think about social and ecological change.”

Ed: “I think we need to start critically thinking about what we teach our children and how to prepare them for this shift in thinking. I write a lot about the idea of a “quality of life education”; education that speaks to our humanity and ways we can ignite people’s potential to create positive change rather than fill their minds with statistical and historical facts that do not prepare them for the creative problem solving they will be called to do. We need more art and less culturally biased lessons. These are the ideas I’m working on most recently.”

Joanna: “I agree with you Ed. As we prepare to start acting and being more interconnected and harmonious with each other and the Earth, we need to help people learn about these ideas in ways that activate the senses and the imagination; through stories, images and rituals. Ideas lack power to reach people if they’re only intellectual. Our ancestors knew this. That’s why they created rituals and ceremonies to honour the Earth and spirituality. They also knew how to catch the attention and passion of young people.”
Ed: “In this critical time we are faced with the opportunity to change our relationship to how we inhabit this Earth or perish in its destruction. We are being demanded to change the way we live, even down to the basics of how we eat and shower. We’re realizing that not only people or even certain people are important. All beings, all species, all elements are one—part of the same system—each affects the other. Our indigenous peoples all over the Earth always knew this and learned how to live harmoniously with the Earth and Her incredibly intelligent and nourishing processes. So I think creating a new, fulfilling quality of life involves a revival of the teachings and traditions of our indigenous peoples.”

Joanna: “I read this article not too long ago that equated our quality of life to how happy we are. People of different professions and ages all over North America were surveyed and asked how they measured their happiness. The findings showed that people view their quality of life as being enhanced through their social relations. The point was made that no matter how much material they accumulated or how advanced and convenient technology had become, people measured their level of happiness by the quality of relationships in their life, with romantic partners, family, friends and colleagues. Indigenous people also had very strong communities, mostly strengthened through strong social relations. People are interlinked by the roles they play in community.”

Strawberry: “I feel so disconnected from these native teachings though. They don’t teach us about this in school. What do we do if we don’t know anything about these teachings and traditions? How do we access this information?”
Joanna: “Well, although it’s been said that we’re the natives of the Industrial Growth Society—I believe we’re starting to hear the voice of our ancient ancestors now because we want to know what they knew and what we seem to have forgotten.”

Ed: “It’s not so much information as it is a way of life. There are aboriginal communities that surround the city outskirts—going to the direct source to learn is probably the best way. There is literature, organizations and people who form collaborations with Aboriginal communities. Joining in solidarity with the Aboriginal communities and supporting them in the revival of their own lost pieces of culture and traditions is probably a good start. The journey to find this knowledge is both personal and communal. Once you commit to it, it will open itself up to you. One must go it alone and join forces with others. We find ways to do our part. For me I have journeyed back to Cork in Ireland, the land of my ancestors, and learned of the indigenous teachings of the Druids.”

Joanna: “I use the Buddhist teachings in my work. These are also ancient wisdom teachings. These teachings can be found in shamanistic teachings of the indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia, America, Australia, Old Europe, Siberia and Arctic Regions. One of the beautiful things I have discovered through my fascination of these teachings from many different parts of the world is how similar they are. Of course geography affects the types of ceremony used or artefacts created yet the message of community, social roles and concepts like love, courage, justice, seem to prevail throughout time and place.”

Strawberry: “That is comforting. And encouraging. No matter where we’re from we can connect and agree on these same values.”
David: “Yes we can. I think something important to keep in mind, whether we’re looking to the past or the future, is that the changes that need to occur, in order to transform the way we live on earth to be sustainable, need to happen on a mass scale. It’s not one organization, one government, one country or even a whole continent that can do it. We need all of the human population to be involved in this change. Reconnecting with ourselves and our lands, reverence of life above personal gain and fulfillment, means we have to learn to sacrifice some of the luxuries we’ve been dependant on.”

Elsa: “We do see hints of change here and there. I mean people are recycling, and using reusable shopping bags and buying free trade products. But it’s true, in the full scope of things, these small acts are very minor when we consider the larger culprits like clear cutting forests, using green lands to test nuclear weapons and whole societies that are still at war.”

Kofi: “One change on a large scale is how the non-profit or civil sector is growing all over the world. Did you know that Canada, second to the Netherlands, has the largest non-profit sector in the world? In 2000, over 2 million people worked fulltime for the sector. I think that’s significant evidence of people collectively responding to social and environmental issues.”

Joanna: “Yes, working collectively is essential as is being compensated for it. But let’s not forget how important doing our inner work is for care of our outer balance. I mean, on top of these basic lifestyle changes: eating organic, buying local food, carpooling and working together whether through paid or volunteer work in the non-profit sector, we also need to change how we interact with our own selves. Helping people learn to balance the four dimensions of our self: mind, body,
emotion and spirit...which is especially important and especially hard in a society that pushes spirituality and emotion to the fringes at the cost of the common culture of capitalism and consumerist drives. Purchasing has become the number one way that we relate to each, by what we have and not what we do. I agree with Ed that what we have has been the predominant way we define our quality of life but as the Earth is in crises and we’ve been called to respond, quality of life will be defined by our ability to pull together and work this out, not defined by what we have but by what we do, how we create personal and ecological harmony and balance. Right now things are waaaaaaay off balance; inside and outside us.”

David: “But let’s consider the systemic blocks to the quality of our lives. Our leaders must address these problems at the systemic level. This is no easy feat. We must put a lot of pressure on them. This is the same system that benefits the rich and powerful. They’re not going to simply handover their power and privilege in order to save the planet because unfortunately many people don’t believe change is possible or they deny that we are in fact in crisis because they do not want to make the efforts required to respond. Many have the philosophy to live it up while they can. They’re not concerned about future generations.”

Kofi: “How can people deny we’re in crisis? I mean I guess the ones with power may deny it because to change their ways would mean to offer up some of their privilege. But I think the more serious problem is that people feel helpless. It’s hard enough to deal with our own problems. So many people are struggling everyday just to achieve basic survival. How can they be concerned with issues taking place on a planetary level?”
Prof. Freire: “Fair enough.”

Kofi: “Speaking of systemic blocks, some of the major challenges we’re facing in the non-profit sector these days are the way we interact with the business and government sectors in order to sustain ourselves as an organized entities of social service. As a sector, we’re constantly and increasingly challenged to adjust and respond to the changing needs of what it means to exist sustainably in today’s changing world.”

Elsa: “What exactly do you mean, Kofi?”

Kofi: “It is important to understand the origin and history of the non-profit sector to recognize its challenges and trends, to understand the forces that control and influence it so that we can engage the important work we are called to do within communities of people. Nonprofits don’t just serve the poor and marginalized. They are the connectors of society. They keep the economic and public sector connected to the voice of the people. According to the United Nations Development Program, the capacity of an organization lies in the ability of the organization to perform efficiently, effectively and sustainably. Here’s a concrete example of what I mean with regards to non-profit sector organizations struggling to exist sustainably: for a civil sector organization to continue its work, it needs sufficient funding. One of the latest trends and more significant changes in the sector with regards to funding has been a recent shift by government agencies, which by the way provide more than half of the budget to the non-profit sector, from program to project funding.”

Prof. Freire: “So what’s the difference between program and project funding?”
Kofi: “The difference is this: program funding is when an organization is granted sufficient funding to carry a program through from anywhere between 2-5 years, and that’s a minimum. Now a project can run for as little as 6 weeks and is usually no longer than 1 year. It is much easier to get funding for a 6 week project than it is for 5 years. Only after years of proven effective project functioning does an organization become considered for program funding. The shift in the sector that I’m talking about is that now, more and more, the government funding agencies only want to fund projects and are funding programs less and less. They like funding projects because they see the outcomes as easier to measure—it's easier this way to determine their return on investment. But the truth is that social outcomes are never easy to measure. Many programs that do fantastic, transformative and empowering work for marginalized peoples are having to shut down because they cannot prove the difference they’re making in such short time blocks. Funders want to see results, but when it comes to social issues, results take place over years. There are so many factors that affect it. Sometimes the fact that a person is still alive or isn’t living on the street or isn’t on welfare anymore, or has a job is the measure of success. It seems ridiculous to try to use return on investment business models to measure social outcomes. It’s setting organizations up to fail.”

David: “Yes, I see your point. These are some heavy systemic blocks.”

Kofi: “And the irony of it is, in times like now, during an economic recession, the government downsizes its own budget so there is less money allocated to address social problems and, as a result, these services get downloaded on to the non-profit sector. So we have more work to do and less funding stability and support to get it done.”
David: “And so it is that the ones who have the most power to effect the social change are in denial of how much change is actually required. Unfortunately, our system keeps recreating people of these values. That’s why it’s so hard to change. I call these types of systems, empire or dominator systems. They are defined by patriarchal principles that have systematically, by the force of power of those in power, trained and socialized us to transfer our dependence from the earth on to the system so that we have no idea how to exist without our social system. As a result, we move further and further into its culture, a culture continuously designed for our detached awareness of the harmful effects of living this way. Empire systems have evolved to a state where we slowly replace our identity as human beings to become mere consumers. It gets embedded right into our psychology with seamless unconsciousness. Before we know it, it doesn’t matter who we are. It only matters what we buy. We sacrifice our personal, familial, community and ecological health in order to obtain and maintain a lifestyle that we believe signifies a good quality of life.”

Elsa: “Not only are we losing knowledge and understanding of how to depend on nature for our sustenance, how to practice sustainable agriculture and uses of our natural resources, but as a result, nature is in turn turning on us. The amount of natural disasters, disease and immunity deficiencies that plague people’s everyday lives is growing daily. For heaven’s sake, we can’t even send our children to school without fear of them dying of peanut butter sandwiches lurking in the classrooms. Some kids are allergic to grass. I’m waiting for kids to be allergic to broccoli and apples, or even all fruit and vegetables! What will our quality of life look like at that point, when even our own bodies start to reject what we need to sustain ourselves?”

**Quality of Life and Connecting with Self:**
David: “The whole situation does seem bleak if you look at it like that. But we don’t have to only look at it like that. There’s a lot of potential for good to come of this. Let us not forget the power of the human mind alone. When we look past these power structures that seem to stand in the way of helping this situation we see that the oppressor cannot exist without somebody to oppress. Dominator systems cannot exist without the powerful being dependant on the disempowered. What we’re now realizing, painfully at first, is that these types of systems have reached their limits. And this is a good thing. Here lies the hope in the matter. It is here where we can begin to come together and plant the seeds for strong communities to birth and work together to create the change that’s called for.”

Strawberry: “I often think about my community and how disconnected people are, even I am from my own neighbours. To tell you the truth, I was feeling so down about my own situation and living back in this city that I almost did not come tonight. I didn’t feel like it would make a difference. But I believe my mind has changed and I am so glad I came and had the opportunity to meet and connect with people who are also so passionate about life and connecting with it on meaningful levels. I see my emotional state this afternoon, these feelings of alienation and disconnection that arise, as a distinct effect of living in a modern city. When I lived in Puerto Plata people were very connected and friendly with their neighbours, it’s like they were part of something together—whatever they were going through—they were in it together. Not to say everything was perfect or that they were able to create positive change in their communities but the strength of the social bonds amongst people was much more evident than I find it is here. I have a poem I wrote to express
this sentiment: the insecurity and loneliness associated with living in big cities with weak social networks of people. May I share it?”

All: “Of course, sure, fantastic! Go right ahead. We’d love it if you would.”

Strawberry had this poem memorized. She recited:

“Projected”

This morning I woke up
Feeling myself, a pinball
Projected from inside
Reborn where others died
Projected in to the wide,
Multiplied features of some type of
Spiritual suicide
Projected from my hide,
I cried, “My pride!
My heaven! My womb!”
I know there’s a better place
Can’t remember what it looks like
But I was in there.

This morning I got out of bed
Amazed at the hair on my head
As I exclaimed with a certain dread,
“Since when did locks grow out of
Steel containers?”
Bordered chambers
Are merely mental creations
I reminded myself
After all, you’re still a body
A rare commodity of life
Oh yeah, I thought, oh yeah…
See I got a steel container
Of individuality
In-divide-duality
Those tiny portions of reality that split
And fit together to form
My hysterical narrative of fatality
Oh yes!
It is fatal but remember…it’s only a game.

And we are all just pin-balls on line belts
Moving through the machine
As time melts
Away all memories
Of those unhealthy cards
We’ve been dealt by those referees
That authority, that small minority
I sat on the belt feeling mad that
He kept stamping me with logos
But as the show goes on
I got constructed
As I bounced along I got conducted,
Projected, casted, hurled, propelled,
Contained.

I’m conducting a little Interview tonight
Came to ask you folks
Out of straight curiosity
Does anyone else feel like a pinball?
I’m sure you do
You’re bouncing too
Bouncing through
Those wobbly posts of rubber
Soft coatings put up by your mother
“Be careful of the gutter, “she warns,
“It’s always, ALWAYS there.

If you’re lucky
Your flippers aren’t dysfunctional
Happy faces on your lunch and all
Those kicks in the ass to get you up top
Again you drop
But over time the idea is to get good
At copping when to bounce
You bounce, you bounce, you bounce
You land, you get comfortable
You bounce again
You bounce, you land,
You score 500 points,
You bounce again
Keep bouncing friend
Make yourself an expert bouncer
A smooth romancer
A graceful dancer gliding
From discourse to discourse
From meaning to symbol
From watched to watcher
Practice your bounce into glide
And you’ve no need
To hide from projection
You’ll gain so much affection
They’ll put your picture
On the Big Board
That big screen that keeps the score
That flashing extravaganza
That makes you want more
This morning
I woke up feeling quite insecure.

Applause from all: “How inspiring. That was great. How clever. Could you send us a copy of that?”

Prof. Freire: “Thanks Strawberry. I think we can all connect to that feeling."

Strawberry: “Really?”

Elsa: “Of course Dear—we’re bouncing through the system looking for connection too.”

Prof. Freire: “‘That flashing extravaganza that makes you want more’—I love that. That’s how ads work don’t they? We don’t have a choice to turn all this advertising off, it’s everywhere: magazines, public transit, bathroom stalls. We begin to lose the idea that there are even places outside of the market place and we increasingly have trouble relating to each other as anything more than consumers. Our concepts of democracy, freedom of choice, even ‘quality of life’ are sold to us like ideas to be consumed as well. We’re fed these ideas full of flavour and void of substance, like fast, salty Big Mac combos, supersized with promises of happy days. We gulp them down in front of our TV and we become full of something but it sure isn’t nourishment and it makes us feel more miserable. They’re like Twinkies when we need salad, like a sandy desert when we need a fruitful
garden. Did you check out those metaphors? I got some poetry in me too! And speaking of TV, has anybody seen Naomi Klein's film ‘No Logo’?

Ed: “Yes it’s a great film. She talks about how our essential identities are largely formed by what we have the ability to buy.”

Kofi: “I haven’t seen that one. I’ll have to check it out.”

David: “Some interesting literature I came across in my research for “The Great Turning” was that many ancient cultures were matriarchal as opposed to our present patriarchal culture. I read that in ancient Egypt, once the power of Isis, the feminine goddess, was transferred to Osiris, the masculine god, the dominator culture model took over. With a dominator culture in power, oppressive mechanisms in society, like slavery and debt, were implemented. Finally, even the religious leaders became corrupted by these mechanisms causing the creation of a business-like commercialization of the afterlife—one where good deeds were replaced by magic charms sold by religious leaders. To obtain these magic charms became the most secure way of entrance into the Kingdom of Re, the equivalent of heaven.”

Ed: “These ideas and enforced ideologies of power and passing into a peaceful afterlife are all symptoms played out in the market economy that emerged from these old ideas of domination.”

David: “Ideologies can act like that—like ‘prisons of the mind’ when we are unconscious of them. Stories of haves and have-nots, rich and poor, survival of the fittest, compete or die, are cultural stories that have been passed on from generation to generation imprisoning our minds on mass
scales from seeing the potential of human societies existing any other way. Yet in ancient
civilizations, like for example, I’ll use ancient Egypt again, people and their way of life flourished for
tens of thousands of years. I think creating a new, better, nourishing way of life involves developing,
what Paulo has so brilliantly articulated in his work as, a critical consciousness. People need skills to
look critically at the stories that define our culture and more importantly WHO controls these stories
and why. From there we can find ways to agree and even create what stories we would like to start
telling in order to empower ourselves.”

Prof. Freire: “Why don’t we all start with our own stories?”

Kofi and Ed: “Exactly.”

Prof. Freire: “We must empower ourselves through the revival of our own subjectivity. When I
developed that term ‘critical consciousness’ it has always been about seeing past the people into the
structures formed by the powerful to see who and how the wheels are being systemically churned to
create these oppressive realities for people.”

Joanna: “Ok. Ok. Yes, it’s important to be critical but it’s also important not to be cynical when
spreading these messages to people. Being cynical leaves people feeling hopeless, like ‘what’s the
point?’, as Kofi and Strawberry pointed out for us earlier. The catastrophes that are happening are
creating great opportunities. You know? Like the saying ‘everything happens for a reason’? If you
really think about it, never before has the potential for humans to step into their creative potential
been so great.”
David: “I don’t think we’re being cynical right now, Joanna. I completely agree with you. In fact I argue in my book that the ‘great turning’ of the civilization will be lead by people’s creativity and creative problem solving initiatives. Creativity gets to the heart of things and I truly believe that at the bottom of all the worlds horrible acts by people, people just want to feel good, be safe and be free. I feel optimistic about the possibilities. But we also must have a clear eye to the reality of the situation. Being critical as opposed to cynical empowers us to be part of the change. From there we see where action needs to be taken and we take it.”

Joanna: “When I think about quality of life I always bring it back to the Earth. David, you mentioned ancient matrilineal cultures and I loved that because the ‘Goddess’ wisdom that pervaded those cultures nurtured all life systems. The Earth has self organizing powers. We can learn from her systems. An interesting study done by a group of biologists proved that life systems, like cells, bodies, ecosystems and even planets, are dynamically organized and intricately interdependent in every movement and every function. Each part is an element in a bigger pattern. They came to this realization by looking at the whole system of things, by looking at relationships and how things work together instead of any individual parts on their own. No single element is of any useful function on its own but only has value through its role in the whole system. Life systems adapt spontaneously through cooperation between parts and this is how the system organically self generates. If it’s thrown off balance, that’s how it adapts and renews itself—by the parts working together to re-balance the whole. This is the Goddess wisdom of the Earth. Communities of people work the same way. That is why there’s hope. These organic processes will show us how to live harmoniously with
all life, ultimately creating the quality of life where we feel, as you say David, good, free, safe,
nurtured, loved and cared for.”

Prof. Freire: “I’ve always said, and I truly believe, that the most effective thing people can do is
begin the dialogue and support each other’s empowerment. And look, here we are,” he raised his
glass to toast, “To creating sustainable qualities of life one conversation at a time.”

All: “Cheers!”

Ed: “Quality of life can only improve once we start retraining ourselves to create and envision
vibrant structures that address our vital needs. We need a cultural awakening, one that helps us
imagine and envision new dreams to aspire and work towards. Sustainable dreams for sustainable
qualities of life. Has anyone heard of the theory of ‘Human Scale Development’?”

Prof. Freire: “I think I have vaguely but please refresh my memory."

Ed: “Human scale development is a theory created by two scholars, Max-Neef and Hopen Hayer.
I encourage you all to check it out. Basically they assert that human needs are the basis of attaining a
nurturing quality of life. They plainly state that in our current state, humanity as a whole is losing its
capacity to dream.”

Elsa: “Dream, like use our imagination?”

Ed: “Yes—like imagine, envision, use our minds to create pictures of the type of world we want
to be in, the type of people we want to be. We often get so stuck on the way things are, on
complaining and feeling helpless, that we forget how to imagine things a different way. How can things change if we can’t even imagine things changing?”

Strawberry: “Honestly, sometimes it feels like there’s so much tension in dreaming. Those who fight to keep their dreams alive constantly have to struggle against everything and everyone who says dreams aren’t reality and that we have to face reality. We are pushed to assimilate with what people call ‘reality’. Some of us try to resist and pull away from it. But you can’t pull away from reality. Tonight I feel pushed and pulled, in a good way, inspired to forge together with people who believe in this collective dream of a better way to live on Earth but many times when I’m alone or with others who do not share this vision, I feel crazy and like my efforts are foolish or in vain. I feel lost and alone. There is so much tension in manifesting this dream, in so many ways it feels so unsupported and hard that is it even worth it? I try to be realistic but I wonder: must reality be pessimistic? Is reality meant to murder dreams? No wonder there are so many alcoholics and drug addicts. Reality without dreams is full of pain and suffering. It’s hard to know where to draw the line between dreams and reality. The mind wants what’s real but the heart wants to live the dream. I want to keep dreaming, I want to hold this vision of a better world. Where do I focus? What is most important first?”

Ed: “Be kind to yourself first. Easy does it. Find ways to relax that tension you feel so you can move through it. That tension is real until you get good at moving through it and then it won’t feel so tense. There will be less fear involved. You are young and vibrant. You still have much to learn as you go. You are already so far ahead of many others in taking a lead in this change. Be proud of that at the same time as humble. Continue to do your good work. And whatever you do, keep dreaming.”
Quality of Life and Connecting with Others

Strawberry: “It seems ironic. I think about the challenges to sustainability you mentioned, Kofi, for organizations in the non-profit sector and then the challenges to living sustainably for individual people, and it seems as though sustainability is about getting comfortable with instability. It’s like sustainability lies within the ability for a group or individual to manage instability and keep going.”

David: “That’s it. It’s about developing resilience to endure the instability and find creative ways to solve problems as they arise. This type of resilience will become essential while we shift human culture into new ways of being.”

Joanna: “The group work I do, which I call ‘the work that reconnects’, is exactly directed at that purpose—ways to come together and find our points of connection so that we can feel safe and supported in our humanity rather than vulnerable and crazy and lonely while life, as we comfortably knew it, continues to change and shift. My work is about reviving and opening our hearts that have grown numb due to all these feelings of separation and disconnection from ourselves, each other and the Earth. The numbing of our hearts deadens us to our ability to survive and transcend these conditions.”

Prof. Freire: “For this same reason that’s why I believe in the concept of dialogue, talking to each other, is so important to help us spark in each other new ways to view and participate in our world. Think about what happens when we talk. It’s a mutual process between speaker and listener where both parties give and receive knowledge. Knowledge is not some ‘out there’, objective thing. Even scientists will admit their knowledge is merely hypothesis. At one point in history, we thought
the planets revolved around the Earth and even further back we thought that the earth was flat. We assumed these were facts at that time until we acquired new knowledge to prove their untruth.”

Joanna: “At one point we thought we and everything else in the world was made of stuff; that tables, chairs, our hair and our brain and our cars were all made of stuff that could be broken down into its defining blocks of matter. But as quantum physicists now proves there is no stuff, no essential particles. The further you try to look at what the matter is that composes an atom the more you see nothing but energy and relationship of energy particles that seems to be continuously coming in and out of discernable vision, even with the most refined microscopes. Energy and relationships—that’s all there is. That’s all we are.”

Prof. Freire: “There are so many ways to know. We can know with our mind and we can know with our heart. Sometimes we have no rational reason as to why we know things but we just do. Experience is the most obvious and convincing way we know something. Yet, each of us has so many different experiences. Even when we experience the same things we experience them differently. We hear the same joke and I roll over with laughter and you barely crack a smile. I say I know the fastest way from here to the CN tower and you show me that you know a faster way which makes me have to adjust what I thought I knew. Knowledge is never fixed or static; it is always changing and evolving to include new information as it arises. Dialogue, people discussing, is a form of acquiring new knowledge just like reading is or experiencing new things is. Knowledge is subjective. It is context specific. And so dialogue becomes such a powerful tool for social change because talking to each other creates different exchanges of knowledge amongst people that produce new knowledge.”
Strawberry: “It’s true that we learn a lot from talking. I never thought about it much before but I have learned so much tonight.”

Prof. Freire: “And now this knowledge is part of your story, your sense making. We have to know and tell our own stories. We must embody the knowledge that is our truth from our direct experience and share that and give that name and voice in order to truly work from empowered, self-empowered positions within our communities and society at large.”

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That night Strawberry went home with her head full of ideas and her heart full of inspiration. She bounced onto her bed, rolled over to her night table and pulled her journal out from its drawer as she began to jot down some thoughts before crawling under the covers,

I’m so happy I went to this dinner tonight. I learned so much just from being around those people and listening to them talk. I learned that no single element in any life system is useful in and of itself. The only value of each part is the role it plays in relation to the whole system. Only together, all parts working together, can the whole system be balanced and sustainable. I also learned that all there really is to reality is energy and relationships. Energy creates and relationships support. Professor Freire has such amazingly interesting and intelligent friends. The whole conversation tonight has given me a new way of thinking about my paper. It was a great opportunity for me to meet people who really care about the things I care about too. There was a real sense of community and support amongst us; a feeling like the problems aren’t so big and that since we are not alone, we can put our minds together and solve them. I am home now thinking about it and I feel so empowered with these ideas alone. So here’s some new ideas to add to my outline:
• Personal and organizational sustainability is created through supportive networks (both professional and personal). Healthy and sustainable communities develop by people working together. The power in numbers and change that is already beginning is evident in the growing size of non-profit sectors world-wide.

• Revival of indigenous teachings—think holistically—harmonious collective functioning—these teachings show us how to connect with self, other and Earth

  Holistic sustainability = good quality of life
  o Physical—money
  o Emotional—social networks
  o Mental—education and on-going learning opportunities
  o Spiritual—ritual, ceremony, and quiet reflection

• Sustainability involves adjusting to instability and developing resilience

• The single most effective thing people can do is to start dialogues together about today’s problematic issues and inspire each other through dialogue to come up with solutions. We all support each other’s empowerment and the dialogues that result inspire us to think and be in new ways that align with the transformation necessary to get us through these times sustainably

Strawberry closed her journal, tossed it and her pen back into the night table drawer, switched off her lamp and relaxed into herself under the covers and into a restful sleep.
Chapter Nine: Humility: Who Are You?

Humility places us in a state where learning becomes possible. It gives us a taste for simplicity; and when we are simple, we are also more genuine. Humility helps us find our place under the stars.
--Pierro Ferucci

Strawberry locked her bike beside a row of other bicycles on the pale silver bike post outside Julian’s espresso bar in East Scarborough. It was a humid, Thursday night in July and she decided to bring her new poem, ‘Stories’, to the weekly open mic poetry night hosted there. Outside Julian’s, many people lounged on the outdoor patio, drank coffee slushes and lemonade.

Strawberry opened the front door and stepped into an air-conditioned, dimly lit room where the scent of chocolate and cinnamon gusted through the air like clouds of temptation. A full display of fresh dessert, cakes and ice cream, flirted behind the glass window at the café counter. The performances had begun and the room was full of people who sat together around tiny tables or stood around the edges of the room. The small circular tables with tea lights and menus reminded her of the days she would set up for the open mic night at Spectrum Wednesday. She surveyed the room for an open chair. The
host stood at the mic and called up the next performer. Strawberry approached the table where the host sat and asked for the sign-up sheet.

“You gonna sing me a love song Sista?” He peeked up from under his Jays cap and smiled.

“Only love poems for you, Mista,” she smiled back.

“Vocab,” he put out his hand to shake.

“Strawberry,” she took his hand and shook. He handed her a pen and the sign-up sheet. This was her first time at Julian’s. Her friend, Niki, told her about it and was supposed to come with her but had to back out last minute. Strawberry didn’t recognize any of the names on the sign-up sheet. She signed her name, glanced again across the room for an open seat and this time spotted one next to a girl with her hair in corn rows. The girl switched her gaze back and forth between the poet on stage and the journal she scribbled into. Strawberry approached her table and leaned down to the seated young woman.

“Is anybody sitting here?” Strawberry mouthed the words in a quiet whisper. She pointed to the seat. The girl looked up, quickly moved her notebook and bag to the side of the table, directly in front of her.

“No, go ahead,” she mouthed and motioned back.
Next on the mic came a tall and soft spoken male poet who mixed his poem with song. It was a love poem about a new relationship he was in and his guitarist played a soft melody in the background which created a romantic and smooth ambiance in the room. Strawberry pulled out her journal and jotted some minor adjustments and additions to her poem.

Two more poets were called up to the stage before Strawberry’s name was called. She sat back and listened to each one intently, eyes wide, wide smile, and she looked around the room to see a mixture of responses. Some people glued their eyes to the performers, some chatted quietly to each other, some couldn't sit still and darted their eyes around the room looking around to see who was looking at them, looking at the front door to see who walked in, looking in their compact mirrors to see how their make-up and hair looked.

“Next to the mic we have Strawberry,” called the host, Vocab. Strawberry was startled to be called so soon after she arrived. She closed her journal, put her pen back in her bag and sifted through the tables until she reached the front of the room and approached the mic. Strawberry cleared her throat.

“Ehem. Good evening. My name is Strawberry. It’s been a while since I got up on the mic and shared. I’ve been a little out of the poetry scene, but never out of writing. You know how it is. So tonight, I’d like to share with you a new piece I’ve been working on. This piece is called “Stories”. It’s about searching within, whatever that means to you. I mean, you know, sometimes we get overwhelmed with all the details of what we should do, what we could do, what needs to be done and it’s hard to know where to even start with all the things going on in our world and in our day and
just in life in general. So we have to go in, I mean inside ourselves and sometimes it's foggy. So I try to write myself through the fog. Maybe you can relate.” She opened her journal, cleared her throat again and began.

“Stories”

I was afraid
I stopped remembering
I want to tell you a story

This is a story about what was
Not being said

I was afraid
I stopped remembering
I want you to listen
Because I want to tell you a story
About being full of tension
If there was such a thing as
Migraines in places
Other than my head
Than I would totally have a migraine
In my shoulder blades, the back
Of my neck, my chest
The heart of my culture,
The mind of all ideologies that
Don't serve us
It's intense
I am tense
Sometimes it feels too hard to breathe
While I’m soaking in this tension because the
Struggles of my masked oppression
The struggles of my culture’s obsession
The struggles of my his-story’s lessons
Got me feeling disconnected

So what can I do about it?
I can try and remember who we are, who I am
I can start with a story
Not his but mine
I and I, I can try, as I am

This is a story
And I want you to listen
Because I hear you heaving your breaths
Like you can’t breathe either
Sometimes in this world it’s hard to breathe
We get heaving with anxiety, self doubt
The depression of the oppression
Of not knowing how to see,
Not knowing how to hear
Not knowing how to be seen and heard
And not knowing that this causes tension
All this mass media with my mind has been messing
Am I being real cause I can stand here confessin’
That once again the almighty is
Dishin’ me another lesson
It’s feel like life is such a test and
I just want to know what to study to stay dressed
In the walk of my talk
So I search for words and ways to unblock
The truth under the piles and piles of hypocrisy
I want you to listen to me because
This story affects you too
After all, this story is not only about me
Whether or not you respond to this affection
Is only for you to see
Perhaps it’s true that I
Never met you before
And yet the words we say out loud
Are truly what we’re fighting for
Yes sometimes listening is a chore
I want you to listen because this story affects you
Because this story is about me
Because this is a story about me telling you
You’re a reflection
About me telling you we’re all just mirrors
About me telling you that I am your
Deep reflection

This is a story about I am
I am that I am that I am
I am
I want you to listen because I am
I am so tired of listening to everyone’s story
I am so tired of framing my story around their stories
I am so tired of changing my life to fit a role in their story
I am a story
And this story is for you
This is a story you will feel as you move
Through my mental window
I will entertain
This is a story about me picking your brain
This is a story about us
As we are
As we are
As I am

Serious though
This is a story about some serious things
Listen cause this is not a story about me
Falling in love
About me trying to shove
All my energy into getting a man
This isn’t a story about men or women or oppressors
Or detectives or sheep or shepherds
Or zombies or ghosts
This is not even a story about
What most of you think it is
This is a story about...a friend of mine

She went on an adventure
This is a story about my friend
She went on a fantastic adventure
Inside of herself
This is a story about a girl
Who overcame her attraction
To things that held her back
This is a story about remembrance
About acknowledgement
About surrender
It’s a story about surrender
This is an adventure
Just breathe
This is an adventure about foreign empires
And sublime pyramids
This is a story about diamonds and rainbows
This is an adventure story about my friend
Who travels fearlessly
Through the unknown depths of her
Utter self and she...
She bounces in four directions
She uses her heart for direction and she...
This is a story about her going in so deep
She can’t get out
And it’s dark and sometimes she can’t see
And sometimes she doesn’t know how she feels
And sometimes she doesn’t know where to go
And sometimes her dreams are so real and she...
This is her and she’s telling the story and she...
She wanted to tell this story
But I’m telling it for her

This is a story and it’s truly just that
This is a story about stepping back
This is a story about stepping off
This is a side step of the two step
Dance I’m doing
Around the fire of this story
This is a bodily convulsion to the gods
This is always a message of the One
This is my way of belly dancing
With my scarf of words
Used to channel the fiery passion
Of the deep seated need
To tell this story
The passionate revival, the intricate and vital
Need for story telling
The need to tell this story, my story
Your story, our story
This is a glory story
This is story about the glory of the glory of...of...
The glory of the story teller’s glory
After telling a story
That kept him company in his lonely world
So proud to exchange story for attention
He fictionalized his past
She fantasized her present
They moved, step by step, piece by peace
Moulding their dreaming, manifesting, creative
Soul questing future

But this
This here
This is our story

This is a story about the things I say
This is a story about the lies they told
This is a story about what he said to me
This is a story about what she did to me
This is a story about me being afraid of what
He or she might do to me
This is a story about me moving past, moving forward
It’s about being true to me
This is a story about manifesting destiny
It’s about an unfolding reality
Listen carefully
This is a story about being hesitant, procrastinate
Yet it’s a story about fearlessness
It’s all part of a story sequence
The frequencies of fluctuating shifts we make
To make sense
This is a story about going inside
It’s a story about courage
It’s not only about me
This is a story about us being afraid to go inside
Cause we aren’t certain what’s ‘in there’
And we’re afraid because
We’ve heard stories about it
Many, many, many stories
Or we’re afraid because
We haven’t heard any stories about it
But we have lived these stories
We are these stories

This here is a story about saying it
It’s about relaying it, relating it,
Connecting, reflecting it, effecting it
It’s about shaking off these complications
It’s a story about hesitation
It’s a story about holding a vision
It’s a story about awolling mind prisons
About seeing, tasting, smelling,
Hearing the sounds of that dream
And engaging our light prisms
This here is a story about what is not being said.

And perhaps you don’t care
And perhaps you’re not there
And perhaps you don’t get it
And perhaps you won’t let it
But in deed you won’t forget it
Cause this here
Is the opposite of fear
This is a story about love
Love is truly what this story is about
Human, know thyself.

Strawberry closed her journal, closed her eyes, for a split second and reopened them to look forward upon the audience. The silence lingered, people rubbed their chins, tilted their heads to the side, squinted their eyes, and then applause began.

Vocab approached the stage. “You kept your word Sista. You kept your word. Dam! My head hurts girl. Give thanks Sista. That was deep.”

“Yes. Give thanks,” said Strawberry and she walked back to her seat.

Vocab took the mic from its stand, “Okay folks, give it up one more time for Strawberry,” the crowd snapped and clapped. “On that note we’re going to take a ten minute intermission.”

The girl who sat next to Strawberry at the table smiled with excitement. “I really love your style girl! You write in a way that, as an audience member, I really felt included in your thought process. I don’t know, somehow I felt involved. I mean you really voiced stuff we all think about but people don’t really talk about and then you got all deep with it. I couldn’t keep up with it. I mean it’s the kind of poem I need to read cause there’s just so much in it. It was great. Give thanks.”

“Oh thank you! Thank you so much,” Strawberry said.

“My name is Humility,” the young woman put her hand out to shake. Strawberry shook and sat down beside her again.
“Nice to meet you,” said Strawberry surprised. “Humility? Really? That’s your name?” Strawberry asked, secretly relieved to learn of somebody with a stranger and potentially more embarrassing name than her own. A waitress came to the table and Strawberry ordered a lemon tea.

“Yes—indeed it is,” Humility’s smile was firm, her chin up, slightly defensive.

Strawberry responded, “No offense. It’s a beautiful name. Just makes me think I’m not the only one with wacky parents. I mean my name is Strawberry. What can I say? I’d rather Humility than Strawberry,” she raised her eyebrows with a nonchalant grin.

“It wasn’t given to me by my parents actually. I worked very hard for its meaning. Why do you think your parents are wacky? What does your name mean?”

“Don’t you think it’s a little wacky to name your child after a fruit? I mean at least they didn’t call me Cantaloupe or Kiwi,” Strawberry smirked.

Humility maintained her smile though her eyes grew concerned, “It must mean more than that. Where are you from?”

“I’m from Toronto. What does that have to do with it?” Strawberry asked.

“Well, sometimes we are named because of where we’re from, sometimes because of where we are going. We are given names for many different reasons. What does Strawberry stand for?”

“I don’t know. It’s a weird name to have, just like yours. What does yours stand for?”
“My name is anything but weird Strawberry. My parents named me Freda. Freda means tranquil leader, although my mother told me she named me it just cause she liked the name. Maybe your parents named you Strawberry simply because they liked the name, but no names are random. There is always a reason, even if our namers don’t understand it at the time of naming. All names have purpose.”

The waitress brought Strawberry her tea and she dipped the tea bag up and down in her mug perplexed by the thought of her name meaning something significant and associated with some type of purpose.

Humility continued, “Humility is a name given to me by an elder of the Six Nations, Mohawk tribe, of this land. Her name is Grandmother Moon. She named me Humility because she saw the value in lessons I have learned, lessons that are important to my life walk, lessons that I will continue to learn for the rest of my life. A name is a representation of what you exude. What you exude is your purpose. Have you ever thought about your purpose? Like what you are meant to do or have to offer your community?

Strawberry paused in reflection, “No. I mean yes. I mean, lately... wow. Sorry I’m just having a moment.” Strawberry stared into her mug of tea as her mind raced through the past years of travel and community work and being back in school and the conversations at her professor Freire’s house the week before. She began again, “I’m always thinking about meaningfulness and how to do things that are worthy of my efforts, I mean to do good things with my time, to be helpful to people and try to make the world a little better of a place in my own way. I have actually really been thinking a lot
lately about purpose and where I am going and what I am meant to do. I’ve never thought about the meaning of my name though. I mean what if my name doesn’t have a meaning. Strawberries are just fruit. Does that mean my purpose is to be fruitful or something?”

“Well,” said Humility, “All names are callings of the Creator, of the Great Spirit. No name is in vain even if obvious. The Great Ones, the “ones who know”, know all names. If you speak to a Great One they will tell you.”

“Where do I find a Great One?”

“A Great One can be in many places. They are an elder, a wise one, someone who understands the ways of world and spirit. Much about life is simple, more simple than it seems and yet intricate complexities lead us to confusion that eventually leads us to truth. It is all part of the path. At the end of this month I will be attending a full moon ceremony with the Six Nation community. There will be many elders there, including Grandmother Moon. If you like you can come and ask the Grandmother yourself, like I could introduce you and you could ask her. She should be able to help you with your name or even call out another name. Grandmother Moon told me we can have several names on our walk depending when and if we are ready for them.”

But tell me about Humility, the name. What does it mean for you?” asked Strawberry.

Vocab came back on the microphone.
“Ok focus. Welcome back to our second half of the show tonight. I’d like to remind you to support the establishment and buy a beverage and/or dessert for those of you who need some more sweetness. Speaking of sweetness, you are looking mighty sweet there princess.”

A girl at one of the front tables blushed and giggled with her friends.

“So let’s see who’s up next on the mic tonight ready to bless us with their vocab,” Vocab scanned through the list. “Ok, next up we have a young lady by the name of Humility. So please put your hands together.”

The crowd snapped and clapped as Humility approached the stage.

“Thank you,” Humility bowed her head to the audience, “I’m just going to begin. This piece is called ‘The Answer’.”

“The Answer”

Why is the world so cold
Knowing life gets no younger but old
Deciding to separate
And not communicate
How can we regulate life?
The answer is in you

How can we exploit our sisters
But praise out misters
And exploit our queens by any means
Just to get that green
Are we living in a corrupt machine?
The answer is in you

When will we stand up, unite
And put up a fight for the right cause
When will we be free?
Too many of our youth is getting lost
The answer is in you
The answer was always inside of you
You knew and know exactly what to do
You see, knowledge is power
But understanding is the key
It’s time to wake up and face reality
Realize how you feel
And always keep it real
Stop selling our mothers
Because there is no other
To protect us from the storm
Make sure you love her

You ask me how, why or when
I say the answer is within
The answer is in you

Humility shared two more poems after her first. Following Humility were several more poets and MCs to bless the mic. Strawberry sat scribbling ideas and jotting down notes the entire time. When the show came to an end Humility passed Strawberry a piece of paper with her email address and phone number.
“Give me a call and I’ll let you know when I’m going up to the reserve and you can see if you’re available to come. Something else that just occurred to me was I remembered that next week at OISE, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, there is a ‘Name Conference’ taking place.”

Strawberry raised her eyebrows, “What’s a name conference?”

“Well I saw a poster for it and thought it looked interesting. It’s a panel discussion with speakers from several Canadian non-profit organizations and they will discuss the topic of starting up socially transformative organizations. Each speaker will tell a bit of their organizational history, how they chose their name and how it reflects their organizational mission. I’ve been thinking about ways I’d like to get more involved with community development initiatives in my community and I’m curious about what goes into the start up of an NGO, maybe I’d like to start my own or maybe I’d just like to work for another. I don’t know. Just thinking of ways to be more involved in the community. Especially this community here in East Scarborough where there is so many youth and so little effective programming for us young people.”

“That sounds amazing! Yes I’d be interested in attending that as well. For the past five years I’ve been engaged in community development projects as well and I have created my own non-profit organization but it is not sustainable. I’m in school right now studying issues involved with community development in the Canadian non-profit sector. This could not be a more perfect time. The universe is so wise.” said Strawberry.

“It is indeed,” responded Humility.
They both started to walk out of the café and towards the bus stop. “Are you going to the station?” Strawberry asked Humility.

“Yeah. Kennedy. You too?”

“Yes. Cool. Humility, I am super interested in how you got your name. Is it too personal for me to ask about that story?” Strawberry asked again.

“No it’s cool. Well, as you probably know, humility is the quality or characteristic of being humble; modest in option or estimate of oneself. That is not to say that I’m always humble but now, since I have been given this name, it’s how I try to be.

“It is actually a long story with many twists and turns, as all stories have, but the short and long of it happened in a summer program I attended, an arts summer program where I encountered a difficult situation that faced me with a hard choice: to stay or to leave. You would actually be interested because this program, that now runs every summer, was an arts program that helped youth to see the value of using creative activities to ignite social activism and help them to first become confident in their own skills of creating art and performing it, which made us feel good about ourselves in general, and then second, helped us to see that we could carry these gifts and skills outside of the summer program and into
our community to become leaders of the change our society so desperately needs. We painted a mural and we hosted a live musical event with a free BBQ and games for people of all ages. But the thing that was most meaningful to me was that we learned how to write poetry and music and record a CD. The leaders there inspired us with their poetry and music to write our own and then take it to the studio. I wrote my first poem in that program. And now I have it recorded. Since then I have not stopped writing poetry, not just to perform either, now I write also to release difficult emotions I am feeling. For me poetry has become such a release and this is one of the greatest lessons we learned at the program—that arts can be used to express ourselves and what we are going through. These expressions are helpful for us to release but also helpful for others to hear, read, watch because people can relate to what you do and feel, kind of like your poem tonight. I was feeling it. We can help ourselves and each other deal with our difficult experiences through the art we create.

“That sounds like an amazing program! But I don’t see where the humility part comes in.”

“Right. I just wanted to tell you how meaningful this program was for me. The only problem was that in the group of other youth with us, people started gossiping and talking behind each other’s back, disrespecting the program and its leaders. I was starting to feel like they were taking away from all the hard work I was doing because I took it all so seriously. They didn’t seem to care.”
“Hhmmm. Maybe they did but they just weren’t as good at expressing it as you were.”

“Maybe. So one day this girl started beef with me over something so stupid, over a conflict in opinions and then everyone started talking about me behind my back. And then I started to talk about them with my one friend behind their backs and somehow they found out. So one day it all exploded in a sharing circle where I got so angry that I almost got into a scrap with this one girl and I got all up in her face and the program leaders asked me to leave the room and so I stormed off and said I was never coming back. And at the time I really meant it.”

“But then as I sat at home bored for the next couple days I realized how inappropriately I acted and how I was taking out my anger from other situations in my life on this little problem in the program. I thought about how much I loved the program, how much I gained from it, how much I was missing out on by not being there. So I called one of the leaders and asked if I could come back. It was hard for me to make that call. Luckily she said...
yes and so I came back but for the program and its benefits, not to be friends with those people. I couldn’t stand them. I wanted nothing to do with them. So I stayed to myself and they slowly started talking to me again and being kind and soon I learned that they were not so bad and not even so different then I was. I actually felt embarrassed for thinking that I was better than them or something like that and in the end we accomplished all our goals like a team and made friends.”

“I felt so much better that I humbled myself and made the decision to swallow my pride and come back. I felt good about working it out and resolving it you know? Usually I would just write off people or situations like that and not business. But this time was different. I recognized that and I’m so glad I did. When I shared this story of what happened to me with Grandmother Moon and let her listen to my poem on the CD it was then that she gave me my name, Humility. And like I said, I am not always humble. Learning humility is a lifelong lesson. I am proud of my name and the challenge I went through to earn it. It makes me proud of myself.”

“What a great story, Humility. What an honour. I would love to meet Grandmother Moon. When is the Full moon ceremony? And I definitely will see you at the Name Conference as well.”
The bus pulled into Kennedy station and everyone stood ready for the bus to stop and the doors to open.

“Are you getting on the subway?” Strawberry asked.

“No, the RT. I have to go to the town centre,” said Humility.

“Ok,” said Strawberry, “I’m on my way to visit a friend in the city. I will definitely send you an email or call and we can meet up at the Name Conference. It was so great to meet you.”

“Yes, you too, Strawberry. We’ll be in touch,” said Humility as she headed up the stair towards the RT platform. Strawberry headed downstairs on the escalator towards the subways platform.

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The next morning Strawberry jolted out of her sleep and reached for her journal. She had just had a dream that she was lost in the forest and all four of the animals who guided her along her travelling journey had appeared in the dream. She wrote it down as quickly as possible while all the messages were still vivid in her mind...

July 17th, 2009

Last night the animals appeared in my dreams. It was so wonderful to see them again and they were all together. I was lost in a forest, some forest I had never been to. I wasn’t surprised to see them. It felt so natural. Funny that I have not even thought of them since my return to Canada. They have not appeared in any dreams I can remember since then.
I was turning and turning around. I was worried and frightened and I kept saying “Where do I go? Where is my home?” I kept saying it over and over and turning and turning around in circles. Then all of the sudden when I faced the south there was the unicorn and she said “start where you are and in the present be aware, take the next step and the bridge will be there” then I turned to the west and there was the snake and she said, “All your actions will be blessed when you use your thought, word and deed to manifestst” and I turned to the north and there was the raccoon and she said “Go within the heart for the direction that you seek. Use the intelligence of your mind to map your journey to the peak” and I turned to the east and there was the eagle and she said, “Trust in the cycles and trust in the seasons, with patience as the virtue all timing has its reasons”. I can’t believe I remember the words but they are just ringing through my head and I was so happy and so relieved and so thankful to see them. The forest was glowing with light and though I was lost and turning around and around, the unicorn said “Begin, begin, begin to unfold your dreams” and the snake said “Keep thought, keep thought, keep thought of dreams unfolding” and the raccoon said “The dreams, the dreams, the dreams of your heart” and the eagle said “Patience, patience, patience for the unfolding of dreams.” And I kept turning and turning in all four directions with the wind in my face and the earth under my feet and the water rushing in the distance and smell of campfire. It was so strange and so beautiful and so real! I did not want to wake up. What does it mean? Oh thank you Great Spirit for this dream.

She dotted a period on the end of the sentence. The alarm clock read 5:05 am, three hours before she actually needed to wake up. She pulled the covers back over her and fell easily back to sleep hoping for more dreams.
Chapter Ten: Name Power and Home Coming

All that is real in our past is the love that we gave and the love we received.
Everything else is an illusion
—Marianne Williamson

Strawberry gripped the metal pole for balance and she swayed in the start and stop of the subway on the south bound train to St. George station. She sat crunched between a tall man in a navy suit who smelled like Aqua Velva aftershave, blasted techno music through the earphones of his iPod while he bobbed his head, and a young woman with a double seated carriage filled by her two identical twin toddlers who crunched on grapes and stared up at all the big people. It was morning rush hour.

At St. George station Strawberry found the elevator on the main floor that transported her right into the lobby of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) where the ‘Name’ conference was scheduled.

In the lobby she pulled the tiny, crumpled paper from her pocket with directions. Her chicken scratch said the library.

“It’s on the main floor facing Bloor Street. You can’t miss it,” she recalled Humility saying. She looked around for signs that said library.
“Hey Strawberry.” She heard in the direction of the small cafe in the lobby. There stood Humility in line with a coffee in hand. “I’m glad you found your way. I’m just grabbing a coffee. Would you like something before we go in,” Humility asked.

“Oh hey!” said Strawberry. “No, I’m good. Thanks. I’m a little late. The subway was held up. Did I miss much?”

“I just got here too. I peeked in and it’s just the moderator talking about the agenda for the conference over the next two days. The panellists haven’t started talking yet. We’re just in time,” said Humility.

“Oh good,” said Strawberry and they both headed into the library.

In the library, rows of chairs faced a long table at the front of the room with four panellists, each with a tiny microphone in front of them on the table. On the way to find two seats together a woman at the information table handed Strawberry and Humility a pamphlet of the conference agenda.

“Wow!” exclaimed Strawberry in a whisper as they got seated. “There are a lot of great events and activities to join. Will you be able to attend the events?” she asked Humility.

“No, I actually can only join in today. Tomorrow I have to work all day but I really wanted to catch this first panel discussion. How about you? Will you be able to stay and participate in the full two days?” Humility asked as they squeezed through one of the last three rows to two available seats.
“No, I actually have to leave after lunch. I have a paper due on Friday. I need to just focus on that. I’m glad I could make it for this though. I don’t know much about these three organizations. I’ve heard of them but I’m interested to learn more.”

“I know, I’m looking for organizations I’d like to work for when I graduate.” Both women turned their attention to the front of the room where the introductions of each speaker were being made.

The moderator was a short lean woman with a southern accent, dark and long curly hair, and thick, rectangle and bright purple-framed glasses.

“So our panellists today come from an array of important community backgrounds. I’m just going to introduce them from left to right,” she said. “So we’ll start with you Rachel. Rachel Gouin is part of a fascinating organization called Inter Pares. I’ll let each speaker discuss the work of their organization but what I will say is that Inter Pares’s agenda is based in social justice activism both within Canadian borders as well as internationally. One of the things so rare and exemplary about Inter Pares is the co-management model they use to carry out their work. But I’ll let Rachel get into that more. Before joining Inter Pares, Rachel dedicated many years to promoting social justice for girls and young women in Canada. She is a writer. She is an activist. And her key role within Inter-Pares is to manage the fundraising and donor relations within the organization.

“Next to Rachel we have Erin Barton of Free the Children. Erin has been with the organization for thirteen years as a key individual in the organization’s growth and expansion. Free the Children
has recently, in the past couple of years or so, gained the support of Oprah, you may have heard of the ‘O’ Ambassadors, as well as many other celebrities who help this organization through continuous support in its stages of growth and expansion. Very exciting. Within Free the Children Erin is the Director of international Operations and, so I’ve heard, she is also a brand new mother. Congratulations Erin!” the crowd applauded.4

Erin blushed and bowed. “Thank you,” she said.

“And lastly, but far from least, we have Mr. Tim Jones, Executive Director of Artscape, an incredible inner-city, arts empowering organization which is literally transforming the face of Toronto. Tim has played a key role in the expansion of this organization over the past 10 years and basically, he oversees the many exciting projects of community transformation, the latest being the Green Arts Barn just over on Christie Street south of St. Clair West. I encourage you to check it out on Saturday mornings. They have a lovely local farmers market. So thank you all for coming.” She nods to the panelists and the audience.

4 The panel discussion was created out of the data collected from the three external interviews conducted for the research. The interviewees included: Rachel Gouin of Inter-Pares, Erin Barton of Free the Children and Tim Jones of Artscape. Their responses are derived directly from the interview transcripts.
“Now I have a couple of questions for y’all regarding the theme of the conference, “names”, but I also want to open up the questions to the audience. So as questions arise in the audience, there’s a microphone just over by the window if you could just line up to ask your questions. In the meantime I’ll start with mine. So my first question is the most basic: Please describe to us your organization’s mission, and vision. If we could start again with you Rachel. I’m sure many people in the audience, who are interested in finding out more about becoming involved in the non-profit sector, or even with your organization, would like to know more. Can you just begin, Rachel, by telling us about Inter Pares?”

Rachel Gouin: “Absolutely. I always think of the vision like the big dream, the guiding star if you will. At Inter Pares, our vision is politically focused. We see our role as activists within Canada working to change Canadian society in ways that ensure that Canada plays a role, both locally and globally, that we as Canadians in a democratic society feel comfortable with. So we confront and put political pressure on the Canadian government surrounding issues of social and environmental justice, especially where Canada is playing a negative or non-active role around the world. We also work with the government to support and reverse this role into a more positive one. For example, the English translation of Inter Pares means “among equals”. Our vision is of a world where all people and nations are treated with equality and justice. Now, our mission is to collaborate and support, both politically and financially, the struggles for justice both within Canada and across national borders. If you look on our website, you’ll see that our mission is not so traditional in that it does not lay out the ‘how’ of what we do but instead expands on the ‘why’ we do what we do. Our mission is a bunch of things, too many to list, but mainly it is focused in the belief that people from the north and south
around the world can come together and create positive social change. We embody the notion of equality both within our organization, amongst our staff, as well as with the partners and counterparts we work with around the world. Our mission conveys our ethos, or reason to be, more than it states all the stuff we do. Regardless of how focused your mission is, and I don't believe there is any one right or wrong way to describe your mission or vision, the mission should reflect your reason for being. Some people call this the vision but I see the two as heavily intertwined.”

Erin Barton: “I would agree with you Rachel that there is no right or wrong way to describe your vision or mission. If we’re speaking about names, like the names of our organizations, the names reflect the essence of both the mission and the vision. It’s true that traditionally the mission has laid out how the organization carries forth their vision. But, sometimes, like with Free the Children for example, we do that in so many dynamic ways that it is simply too much to include in one statement and that is what a mission statement is, a statement. It is one sentence, more or less, that outlines what your organization does. It is focused and it does not need to describe everything but it does need to capture the essence of what the organization works towards. At Free the Children, we envision a world where every single child has access to education and that all youth have an understanding of their leadership potential to make a positive difference in the world around them. Our mission, what we work towards, is to free children from exploitation. We do this by empowering them to make a difference in the world. So education is intrinsic to both our vision and our mission. How we go about promoting and empowering through education takes on several different paths.”

Erin takes a sip of her water as she smiles at Tim.
Tim Jones: “At Artscape our mission and vision has changed substantially since the founding of this organization. We started in order to simply provide cheap working space for artists in Toronto because, at the time, in the early ‘90s, there was an artist space crisis in the city where artists were getting booted out from their work spaces by development companies. Since then we have developed working relationships with development companies and key individuals across sectors to work together to create more inclusive communities that integrate, rather than marginalize, arts throughout the city. So the vision and mission that have evolved from these years reflect our growth and maturity as an organization. Artscape’s vision involves an on-going commitment to building a world that engages art, culture and creativity as catalysts for community transformation, sustainability, prosperity and inclusive communities. Our mission is to unlock creative potential of people and places to build vibrant, resilient and inclusive communities.”

Moderator:“Faaantastic. So, let’s talk about names now. Since names are such a defining quality of what we do, tell us about the link between the name of your organization and its purpose? More importantly, how the name speaks to the heart of the work your organization carries out both with the communities it serves and within the organization itself. Why don’t we start with you this time Tim?”

Tim Jones: “Okay. Well, Artscape was formed on the premise that the arts need to be integrated into the life of cities. Traditionally in city planning, artists have been marginalized from the centre of city life, disconnected from each other and the market place in general. A man by the name of Richard Florida wrote a book called “Rise of the Creative Class” and his ideas in the book are about the relationship between creativity and space with regards to urban planning. This book marked a
fundamental shift in the thinking of developers with regards to economic development. Florida's theory was that cities should focus on attracting, rather than marginalizing, creative people into the fabric of the inner city. Creating environments of cafes and parks, place within the cities where creative minds can be nourished ultimately serves the community at large due to the richness in culture and how it draws people to the market within the city as a result. Artscape works in alignment with these ideas and we have used them as a theoretical backdrop to our ability to demonstrate the impact of our capacity as leaders in making these ideas reality within the city of Toronto. The rejuvenation of the distillery district and the retreat centre at Gibraltar's point, on Centre Island, are two examples of our demonstrations of these concepts. Since the beginning of time, the creative drive has been and is fundamental to our being and our ability, as human beings, to solve problems and improve the environments around us to better suits our needs. This is what distinguishes us from all other life on the planet. What our projects do is try to bring artists and creative people together in critical masses to create situations that generate all kinds of community benefits. So to get back to your questions, the name Artscape, refers to landscape. Artscape is an organization that works to create an urban landscape that integrates artists into the fabric of community life in ways that simultaneously strengthen the artists and the community at large.”

Erin Barton: “Tim, I’ve been to the new Arts Barn on Christie and it is phenomenal how Artscape has transformed that old street car junkyard into a vibrant community hub,” she turned to the audience, “There’s this huge greenhouse. A lot of cool stuff happening there. Very cool.”

Tim Jones: “Thanks. Yes it is. We are very excited with the results so far and this is only the beginning.”
Moderator: “Thanks Tim. Just super. How about you Erin? Tell us about Free the Children and how the name represents the organization at its core, or does it?”

Erin Barton: “It certainly does. The name ‘Free the Children’ speaks to our values and roots within the organization. Our roots being Craig Kielburger as a 12 year boy who read a newspaper article about a youth, in Pakistan, who spoke up against child slavery and was murdered for it. Reading that story really touched Craig deeply, the injustice of it. He decided from that moment to do something about it. It started with a petition amongst his school mates, then a visit to India, then to building schools in different places all over the world. Through the beginning years, Craig made it his mission to use his story to inspire youth in his locale to get involved with global issues. As Free the Children has evolved and we are constantly learning and building on our experiences, we now take a more holistic approach to the work we do overseas. It’s no longer about building schools. We call our overseas projects “adopt a village”, which I'll be happy to talk more about to anyone interested over the break. In a nutshell, “Adopt a Village” not only promotes education in the communities we work, but it promotes the overall health of the community. We work on issues of clean water and sanitation, alternative income, personal and environmental health issues. We also have developed a social enterprise, which is now a dimension of Free the Children as well. Our social enterprise, called “Me to We”, is legally a separate entity but that works to offset the cost of administration so that the least amount of donor and grant money goes to administration costs and more money goes to the actual projects. One of the main things we take pride in is fulfilling the integrity within our relations to stakeholders. 91 cents of each dollar earned goes directly to the projects we run locally and overseas. 67% of our funds are raised by youth in the school boards taking action. Now, with
respect to our name, *Free the Children*, the organization began as an international effort to free children from exploitation or ‘child slavery’ and it has evolved into an effort to free youth from feeling powerless to effect positive social change. Throughout our evolution the focus we have will always be about freedom, liberation, empowerment and leadership for young people. Our mission is intrinsically engrained in the name of our organization.”

Moderator: “Faantastic. And Rachel? You’ve already shared that *Inter-Pares* means ‘among equals’. Can you speak to how that name applies to the way your organization functions?”

Rachel Gouin: “Yes, of course. So at *Inter-Pares*, it’s just as important for us to work as equals internally within the organization as it is for us to work equally with our partners globally. Within our organization the management structure is flat. What that means is its non-hierarchal; there is no boss. We use a co-management model to operate all parts of the organization. What that means is that everybody on staff shares equal responsibility and receives the same base salary, from the office manager to the executive director. It is a very unique model that has worked for us successfully for over 20 years. However, I will say that *Inter-Pares* began as a hierarchal organization, with an executive director and then under him were different directors of different operations, etc. *Inter-Pares* was founded in 1975, so we’ve been around for 30 years. In the mid eighties, influenced by feminism, staff within the organization began to challenge the hierarchal structure, noticing that men in the organization held positions of power and authority, while those who played supporting roles, and getting paid less as a result, were women. Staff members asserted the point that we call ourselves among equals, it is how we function with our external counterparts, and yet, within our own organization we are not functioning as equals...something is intrinsically questionable about
this. So they took it up with the Board of Directors and over a series of ten years, which we affectionately refer to as “the revolution” a co-management model was negotiated. Now, all decisions are made on a consensus basis, meaning we all have to agree on major decisions before we move forward. We have two full day staff meetings per month to handle this form of decision making. But I guess the overall point is that in order for our organization to operate with the integrity it promotes, we had to work that idea of equality from the inside out. It is not always easy to operate on consensus basis in co-management, it takes time and it can get messy if people do not taking their role in consensus building seriously. But, the satisfaction of having all voices heard and resolving issues in a way that everybody agrees on, actually saves time because the decisions we make are not subject to sabotage by staff who don’t agree with the decision we make because they had no power in the decision making process. That is just not a problem for us. It is actually a very satisfying way to work and a true sense of shared power and responsibility. We are a great team built of solid relationships. And that is what Inter-Pares does best: builds solid relationships with people working together for the same cause, as equals participating in the same struggles and victories. We are great at getting people together to start things and our co-management model helps us operate in ways that help us work with the integrity of our name both within and outside of Inter-Pares.”

Moderator: “Faantastic. Ok, why don’t we open the discussion up to the audience. So we'll accept audience questions or comments if you would just kindly approach the microphone to the left of the rows.”

A young man, with long dreadlocks wrapped on top of his head and a Che Guevara T-shirt approached the microphone. “Hi. Thank you to all the speakers for coming to share today. I think
what you guys are doing is really great and very inspiring for young people considering employment opportunities following, or even during their undergraduate studies in the non-profit sector.

Erin Barton: “Actually, I just want to add that the majority of youth we work with are from high school and elementary schools.”

“Oh. Right. Cool,” continued the young man, “So my question is for all three speakers. We hear of a lot of non-profit organizations having to start and stop their programs a lot due to funding issues or mismanagement. From the outside it seems employment opportunities within the sector are contract based or just over all uncertain as to whether an organization will make it from one year to the next. That being said, all three of your organizations have sustained themselves for over 20 years. So my question is about sustainability. What are some of the solid structures: management tools, relationships outside the organization, governance issues that keep your organization not only floating above water but actually swimming in the right direction?”

Rachel Gouin: “That’s a great question because it is a huge issue in the non-profit sector. There are many factors that compromise the longevity of an organization and funding is one of them. Even the term sustainability can be a bit tricky these days because it denotes a sense of certainty and we’re never really certain we will continue to exist. Well, really nothing in life is certain. But, do we have some plan of action to take if the organization for some reason or another goes into a financial crisis? Certainly, we do. At Inter Pares the survival of the organization is more important than any one employee and we are all aware of that. That means that each decision we make is with the health of the organization and its longevity in mind. For example, we have a reserve with enough money for
the organization to survive for one full year should anything drastic happen and all of our regular funding mechanisms fell through. So that means, no matter what, our operations will never just stop. We will have a full year to either repair the situation or fulfill the remaining responsibilities we have to our counterparts within that time. I would say the most important mechanisms we have in place to support the sustainability of our organization are: 1) a strong Board of Directors who keep us accountable. And we keep them responsible to their obligations to helping the organization grow successfully, 2) a great staff, our co-management model really works well for us; I know it does not work successfully for everyone but it does work for us and 3) diversified funding streams. That means we don’t have all our eggs in one basket and I think this is crucial for all non-profit organizations and charities. We have funding that comes in from several avenues so that if one funding well runs dry we don't have to sell the whole farm, if you know what I mean. Our funders range from granting bodies like CIDA, The Canadian International Development Agency, to private donors and foundations. This ensures a consistent flow of revenue.”

Erin Barton: “Yeah, I agree. It’s all about funding. I mean there are certainly other things that need to be in place in order for the organization to function effectively, but nothing can happen on any significant scale, the organization cannot continue to exist, without funds coming in. In order for Free the Children to continue doing the important work we do in Youth leadership here or helping to develop sustainable communities overseas we need our funding to be secure enough so that we don’t have to start and stop our core programs. Overseas we need to be able to maintain the villages we adopt so that they don’t become graveyards. So yeah, funding is key to sustainability. I think it’s the number one factor.”
Moderator: “How about you Tim?”

Tim Jones: “Funding is certainly the most crucial element to an organization’s sustainability; however, good management is right up there as well. An organization can do really well selling their idea and gaining support but if they cannot deliver, and good delivery happens through good management, then the funding streams will quickly dry up. Artscape functions predominantly as a social enterprise, which is a business model that factors people, environment and profit into all its business decisions. We now also have a separate foundation to account for the charitable work we do. So those two arms work together. We are often dealing with the real estate market, and arguably there is never really any certainty in the market, real estate or other, but as an organization, the more you grow the more resilient you get and this makes for sustainability. It’s about being flexible, being able to roll with what the market, with what the public, non-profit and/or business sectors throw at you. Organizations need to be effective planners. At Artscape we build sustainability into every project we take on, meaning that we design it in such a way that it pays for itself through the income it generates. That makes it sustainable because the project is self sustaining; however, it’s a tricky situation as well. Because we’re dealing with the real estate market, there’s a level of risk taking we must undergo for every new project. You cannot be in the field of real estate and not take risks. So it’s a matter of planned, researched, calculated risks. I would also add that sustainability involves a fine balance between staff growth and organizational health—it’s a creative challenge for these two to grow, staff and organization and have the people on board adjust and stretch themselves to the growth spurts.”

Moderator: “Wow. That’s fantastic....”
Humility rolled her eyes and leaned in to Strawberry, “If I hear ‘That’s fantastic!’ one more time I’m going to scream!”

Strawberry chuckled, “Tell me about it.”

Moderator: “...and then we’re going to take an hour break for lunch before we come back and take part in the workshops. Okay, can we have the last question please before we break?”

A young woman with long, blonde hair, a yellow dashiki and a gold nose ring adjusts the mic to suit her height.

“Hi there. I’d like to thank the speakers as well for sharing. My question has to do with starting up a non-profit organization. Five years ago I co-founded a non-profit organization with three of my friends doing local and international work overseas with youth using the arts. We’ve been operating on a project to project basis, so the non-sustainable, start and stop kind of thing that was already mentioned. But we are hoping to become more sustainable so that we can work full time for our organization. For this reason I find you all so inspiring. I’m wondering if a) you would mind us contacting you or coming into your office to speak about this topic a little more and b) if before we wrapped up you could give the young people today a little advice on starting up or working within a youth-led, grass roots non-profit organization working toward creating positive social change?”
Tim Jones: “I can start this one ladies. I think the most important thing to begin with is a strong vision. Vision is most important. Be focused in what you do so that you can measure your impact. Being able to have a strong demonstration of the impact your organization has on society is what attracts great support, like funders, strong Board members and staff. In order to demonstrate your impact you first have to understand it so having a plan to both understand and demonstrate the change you are effecting as an organization is very, very important. There are consulting groups that can help organizations with this and there are grants you can apply for to hire these consulting firms. The key is to frame your case for support so that you create opportunities for people to invest in what you’re doing rather than simply catering to people’s needs. Not that there is anything wrong with addressing people’s needs in society. The problem is there are so many needs and so many organizations to compete over funding with to respond to these needs. If you can frame your case in such a way as to attract people who can invest and receive a return on their investment, some benefit to them, some type of win-win situation, people are more likely to want to get involved and this will attract people with money to help sustain you. Lastly, a strong Board of Directors is crucial too. You need experienced people to help the organization build strong connections. Not being able to do this holds a lot of organizations back. You want people on your Board with connections to the social service world, business world, legal world, any world that has direct influence or benefit to your work. I would really stress to young entrepreneurs or organizational leaders to have the confidence in knowing that you can invite people to participate in the development of our organization without fearing that you’re going to lose everything you’ve created. If you carefully
select a strong and supportive board it can be one of the single most effective methods of having a strong organization. So strong board, demonstrate impact and clear vision. That’s my advice.”

Erin Barton: “First of all, congratulations for starting your own non-profit organization. It’s amazing to see young people making leaders of themselves and taking action. My advice is to make sure that the people that you serve have a voice in what you do. For example Free the Children serves youth, so we make sure that young people have a strong voice in shaping and guiding the work that we do. Youth keep us in check and provide us with key information for our program development. When you listen to the voices of the people you serve this ensures effective programming so that you can, as Tim so importantly stressed, demonstrate your impact. Funders and all supporters want to see that you are making the difference you say you will. Also I’ll bring up the notion already discussed about diversifying income. It is really important cause like Rachel’s pointed out, you don’t want to put all your eggs in one basket and then if it falls through you have no income. And then lastly, have a really clear leadership structure. Make sure everybody knows clearly what their role is. Many people start organizations with really good intentions but if you cannot develop the structure to work those good intentions into the organization, from my experience anyway, it usually falls apart and cannot keep up with all the demands and responsibilities to run itself effectively. So my advice is clear leadership and structure, diversified funding streams and honouring the voices of the people you serve.”

Rachel Gouin: “My advice?...hmmmm....I guess my advice would be this: as organizations, we often spend a lot of time thinking about what we’re going to do but we hardly spend enough time thinking about how we’re going to do it. My advice is to focus on the how and make sure that it
aligns with your vision and values. An organization that is successful operates with integrity and it is one of the single most important reason why stake holders, whether, staff, volunteers, funders, community partners, want to be involved. Process is important. Ask yourself: how do we want to act? How do we want to form relationships? How do we want to connect with certain issues?”

Moderator: “That’s fantastic!...”

Humility cupped her hands over her ears in a light roar, “Ahhhh.” Strawberry giggled.

Moderator: “...everyone in the audience who made it out today. Have a great lunch and we’ll see you in the workshop rooms after the break.”

Strawberry and Humility picked up their bags and merged with the other seated guests toward the library exit doors.

“Wasn’t that great?” said Humility. “I mean minus the ‘faaantastic!’ part? I would love to work for any one of those organizations.”

“Yes, it was so interesting to hear their insight,” said Strawberry, “Like you, I just want to sit down with them alone for a couple of hours to ask more questions. I don’t think I’ve told you but I have been doing some volunteer work overseas and in East Scarborough for a number of years now through a project I developed called POR AMOR.”

“Really? You started your own organization?” asked Humility surprised.
“Well, yeah, I guess I did. Yes. And it was funny ‘cause when that first girl from the audience asked for advice and said a bit about her project I felt like she was telling my story. The majority of my work in POR AMOR has been volunteer work, with the exception of the local work I’ve been doing in East Scarborough for the past couple of summers with the Boys and Girls Club. I’ve always had to have a part time or fulltime job to keep myself sustained while I do this work that I love. But what it has meant for my project POR AMOR is that it is not sustainable and very much a start and stop kind of thing.”

“Wow! I’d love to hear more about it. Do you have time for lunch, Strawberry?” Humility asked.

“I wish I did but I really have to get back to my work now. I would have loved to stay for the rest of these workshops. Do you know which workshop you’ll go to?” asked Strawberry.

“No I’m not sure. It’s hard to choose. I’m glad you could make it for this though. I wanted to tell you too that I’m still trying to get a hold of Grandmother Moon to see if the moon ceremony is still a go so I can introduce you to her and you can ask about your name.”

“Oh yes, great. Please let me know. And give me a call soon or I’ll call you or something. I’d love to hear how the workshops went and just reason in general about life and writing poetry about it,” Strawberry winked, “I haven’t been in the spoken word scene for a while so it would be nice to have someone to frequent the open mics with.”

“For sure. Sounds fab. So we’ll be in touch. You can Facebook me too,” said Humility as she took steps in the direction of the cafe.
“Ok peace girl,” said Strawberry as she took steps towards the elevator.

“Yah, peace,” said Humility.

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That night at home, after dinner, Strawberry sat on the edge of her bed and reviewed the notes she had been making while listening to the panel discussion at the name Conference. She started to write a verse of a song called “Community Love”. After she sketched out a few lines she scratched them out then jotted down a few more. Eventually her jottings and scratches formed a first verse that went like this:

“Community Love”

Verse 1
Community Love is what we’re reppin’ today/
So if you came to have beef
We’re passing love your way/
Cause it’s POR AMOR and we stand for love/
Community unity raining blessings from Above/
Or down below on Mama Earth we do sow/
Our seeds for existence gone within an instant/
Like a bullet takes a life,
Like you’re caught in the strife/
You may never have a wife,
Better now your human rights/
Can I be frank with you?
They’re brainwashing you to act the fool/
So we kill one another, yes, he is your brother/
Filled with so much hate/
Better watch what you ate/
Dining at the table of deceit/
Watching negative images
Until their mission is complete/
To make you hate yourself and bust that Heat/
In all directions, what is the lesson /
Them ways bring no blessing,
Them ways bring no blessings/
Destroying, but I choose to rebuild/
Like temples in Kemetic hills
Better turn off them ‘Hills’/
But back to my original point
Kemet, is what we now call Egypt/
Where Africans ruled over land so prestigious/
First drum, first beat, first community complete/
Mapping the stars, now we watching idol stars/
Beware of the SARS and heal up them scars/
It’s time to make a change,
Yo it’s time to make a change/
Educate yourself so you have knowledge of self /
And learn
My people, your people, we’re people
Here’s people at the spot/
Everyone feeling good because love is what we got/
Free food, good vibes you saying this is live/
This is how my crew chooses to be alive/
Positivity—so yo, I want to hear you reppin’ with me/
Strawberry practiced the rhyme to a CD of beats she had as she tried to find the beat that suited it best. She couldn’t decide between two of them. The phone rang. She pressed pause on the stereo and answered.

“Hello?”

“Hi. Strawberry?”

“Yes?”

“It’s Humility. How you doin’?”

“Good. Good. How was the rest of the conference?”

“Aw, it was amazing. I went to the Artscape workshop and we collaged about the relationship between place and creative space and how to further develop spaces conducive to our own creativity and inspiration. So good! I’ll tell you more about it later. I can’t really talk right now. I need to step out and take care of something but I wanted to tell you two things. Which do you want first? The exciting news or the super amazing news?”

Strawberry chuckled, “What?” her forehead crinkled while she smiled, “the exciting news.”

“Okay, the exciting news is that there is a poetry festival taking place on Bloor Street all next week so there will be an open mic at a different spot every night of the week. There’s going to be poetry slams and guest speakers, some people are even talking about how Talib Kweli is going to make a guest appearance on Thursday.”
“Really? Talib Kweli?”

“Yah man. Can you believe it?”

“Sweet! Let’s see what poppin’. I don’t have every night free but I can certainly do Thursday and maybe another day.”

“Sounds good. Now, the super amazing news. Are you ready?”

“Yes, yes, yes, what is it?”

“Well, I talked to Grandmother Moon tonight and...”

“And?”

“And, she said unfortunately we will not be having a full moon ceremony this month. She has to be out of town during that time.”

“Ok, and that’s super amazing because?”

“Because, I also had the opportunity to tell her about you and how you’re trying to find out the meaning of your name”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah. And she knew what it means.”

“She did?”

“She did.”
“And?”

“Strawberry, in the native traditions of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island is used and represents one of their most important medicines.”

“Strawberry means medicine?”

“Not just any kind of medicine. Strawberry is medicine for the heart. Strawberry means ‘heart medicine’.” Strawberry sat on the edge of her bed while her eyes bugged open, jaw dropped and arm hairs stood straight up.

“The strawberry is shaped like a heart and is a feminine plant. It is a very useful plant because it’s one of the only plants where all elements of it, the seeds, the outer skin, the inner flesh, the vine and the leaves are all useful for something different. But most importantly, she told me, Strawberry is medicine for the heart.”

“Wow. I can’t believe this is the first time I am hearing of this. Heart medicine. Love is heart medicine.”

“Yes! And your organization is called POR AMOR, ‘for love’. I cannot think of a more perfect name for you in light of all you’ve told me about the work you do in communities!”

“This is super amazing. I mean this is faaantastic!”

“Oh please, don’t go that far,” they both giggle. Humility continues, “Yes. It’s amazing. Now I hate to drop that bomb on you and leave but I do have to run so I’ll a just leave that with you to contemplate. I’ll be in touch by email. Have a good night Heart Medicine.”
“Good night Humility. Thank you so much for this gift. It makes me think of my Grandmother. She named me and she also died of a heart condition. Oh Grandma!” Strawberry frowned. “Now I really want to meet Grandmother Moon.”

“It’ll manifest, don’t worry.”

“In its proper timing,” Strawberry added.

“Indeed. Ok peace Strawberry. Have a good night.”

“You too. Peace.” Strawberry put the receiver back on the cradle and sat still and quiet. She did not move, just sat and smiled to herself. The paint on her walls seemed brighter, her cheeks hurt from smiling so hard, her mind jogged over moments in her life where she had made others smile or feel good, her work with children and youth, all of her wonderful friendships, memories and stories of her grandma, the love she felt for her family and her organization, POR AMOR.

Her chest swelled and pounded—not in an uncomfortable fight or flight kind of way, more like in an expanded, excited, energized and vibrant kind of way. She felt tears flow to her eyes but they were warm and humbling. She put her hands over her chest, closed her eyes and whispered, “Thank You.”

She looked to the page in her journal where she’d been writing the song. She picked up the book and started to write the second verse...

Verse 2
Community love where we be feeling good/
Catchin' warm vibes walking through our hood/
Children at the playground, youth on a mission/
Elders telling stories and the lovers they be kissing/
Community love, below to above/
We're sending out vibrations
From the street to the club/
Strengthening society by blessing up community/
We're healing separations
Cause we're standing strong in unity/
Working with the youth, talking 'bout human rights/
Knowledge of self to empower our enlightenment/
We got mad gifts, God sent/
Children of the light taking back entitlement/
Troddin' through the earth
We recognize our mama's worth/
Support community where we gather at the hearth/
Celebrating life through the rights of our birth/
Everybody needs love
Everybody deserves/
L-O-L-O-L-O-V-E
L-O-L-O-L-O-V-E/
Using blessed love to create our common destiny/
Raising up our fists to bun down the negativity/
Healing separations
Cause we're standing strong in unity/
Less hatin', Less imitatin'/
We be soul shakin', we be creatin' more celebratin'/
Yo, we be creatin' more celebratin'/
Hey, hey, we be creatin' more celebratin'/
Strawberry tucked herself into bed and, under the light of her night table lamp, continued to journal and write until her eyes could not stay open a second longer. With her journal collapsed over her stomach, she drifted and she drifted and she slowly drifted off into sleep and into a dream...

*And Strawberry is deep inside the forest, around a fire where Rita and the four animal helpers all stand singing and dancing and laughing.*

“Where are we?” asks Strawberry.

“We’re at a celebration,” says Rita.

“We’re celebrating life,” says the snake.

“POR AMOR! POR AMOR!” says the unicorn.

“Harmony and peace of mind,” says the raccoon.

“We’re celebrating knowledge of self,” says the eagle. “This is a coming home party. Welcome. Welcome. From the east.”

“From the south,” says Erina.

“From the west,” says Soraiya.

“From the north,” says Ra-Chelle.

“May you feel it,” says Erina.

“And do it,” says Soraiya.
“And know it,” says Ra-Chelle.

“And believe it,” says the Goldi.

“POR AMOR. POR AMOR,” the animals chime. “Feel it, do it, know it, believe it, feel it, do it, know it, believe it,” they repeat.

“The circle is never ending. We are circles within circle, never beginning, never ending, always one and always journeying around and around the centre,” says Strawberry’s grandmother whose face is no longer Rita’s.

They all fix their eyes on the roaring fire, blue, yellow, red flames dancing and turning. Turning and dancing. Strawberry stares into the fire. Inside the fire she sees a pitcher of strawberry juice. She puts her hand in the fire and she is not afraid and her hand does not burn and she lifts out the pitcher of juice. She begins to pour glasses of juice for everyone. She looks up at the moon and it is full and she bends her head back and keeps her eyes fixed on the dark black night that glitters with star light. She turns her body round and round, from the south to the west to the north to the east. She gives thanks. She turns herself back to the fire. All wait for her to make a toast.

“To heart medicine,” says Strawberry.

“To home coming,” says her grandmother.

“But where are we?” Strawberry asks again. “I’m not home. I don’t even know where I am.”
Goldi flaps her wings and rises up, up, up, then swoops down to land on Strawberry’s shoulder. She leans in to the young woman’s ear and whispers,

“Home is where you dream of, my Dear. Welcome back. Again and again.”
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Appendix: The ‘Ologies’
Epistemology of my Methodology Revealed Chronologically:  
The Emergent Process of Coming to Know Through Arts-Informed Research

The world is not finished.  
It is always in the process of becoming.  
—Freire, 1970

The Heart of the Matter

(En)Compassing Heart is based on my lived experience as a co-creator of POR AMOR Community Enhancement Initiatives. Strawberry’s character is an embodied representation of the organizational journey of POR AMOR. POR AMOR Community Enhancement Initiatives is a Canadian non-profit organization focused on empowering young people to take active leadership roles in their community through artistic portals of vision and sound that serve to catalyze and inspire social activism. POR AMOR was founded by four young women, myself included, in 2003. Initially this organization was formed to exclusively serve marginalized youth in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic through various social development projects. Since then however, POR AMOR has evolved to include community development work with adults in these communities as well as community arts projects with young adults in the Kingston-Galloway community of East Scarborough.

My research embodies a critical analysis of POR AMOR with the intention of navigating our organization forward into a state of expanding, transformative and sustainable community work. POR AMOR becoming a sustainable organization is tied to a larger dream of living in a vitally inter-
connected and sustainable world. It is about creating an organization that plays an effective role in the social transformation needed to achieve this kind of world. The inquiry tracks the journey of POR AMOR and its founding members through the evolution of our intention to move this initiative forward into a sustainable vehicle of social transformation. Within the thesis I have documented and examined our route of navigation through the transition of voluntary community activism to paid employment, while keeping the social value of the organization ethical, liberating and vibrant. It is a heartfelt navigation through both oppressive and transforming societal structures that are, for various reasons, part of an increasingly competitive and unstable Canadian non-profit sector.

(En)Compassing Heart is a story about movement; the movement of my personal processing and our collective co-creating as we move forward in our organizational growth. I move this inquiry through three inter-weaved methodological lenses: The framed lens of arts-informed inquiry layered with the complementary lenses of qualitative case study analysis (Stake, 1995) and appreciative inquiry (Reed, 2007).

According to Coles and Knowles, founders of the Centre for Arts-Informed Research at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), the central purposes of arts-informed methods in qualitative research is to “enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible”. It is a form of research that develops in relationship to art and the possibilities inherent in using creative/artistic processes and representational forms into social science inquiry (Coles, A. and Knowles, G., 2007, p.59).
Within a collage of arts-informed theories, expressions, resonations, my own intuitive direction, written and visual representations and knowing, I have both digested and experimented with various art forms throughout this research. I allowed myself a playful, imaginative and passionate attitude towards qualitative data before settling on the forms of poetic and narrative inquiry. As a result, I developed an ability to trust in the process of unfolding knowledge within my use of various artistic forms and it has proven testimonial to the ability for the arts to both enhance and inspire my research explorations and findings. Arts-informed Inquiry, as a methodological lens, has also allowed me to reflect on my notion of epistemological concepts, learning to consider, with confidence, what my heart shows as much as my mind tells within my research processes and representations.

There are seven defining elements to arts-informed research: 1) It involves commitment to one or some particular art form(s) and this form serves to frame and define the inquiry through to the final ‘text’. 2) There is methodological integrity to the research in that the relationship between the form and substance of the research and the inquiry process is evident. This relationship is reflected in the text and is in line with the emergent nature of qualitative research methods as a whole. 3) The creative inquiry process of arts-informed research is defined by openness to the natural process and flow of events and experiences, including serendipitous events. 4) The subjective and reflexive presence of the researcher is obvious in the text; the artistry of the research is predominant. 5) Arts-informed research is not exclusively about the researcher. Although there is a strong reflexive component to evidence researcher presence, the researcher is not necessarily the focus of the inquiry. 6) There must be an explicit intention for the research to reach communities and audiences both within but perhaps more importantly outside of the academy. Choice of artistic form(s) will
reflect this intention. 7) The use of arts-informed research is tied to moral purposes of social responsibilities and epistemological equity—that is, it is not art simply for art’s sake. The art is explicitly meant to “evoke and provoke emotion, thought and action” (p.62).

“Quest for Questions”

On my quest for a research question
I built a new construction
Searched for methodological instruction
That lead me to sense making inductions
This is an exploration
How to proceed from here to there
An exploratory compass to guide me into awareness
Of the rareness of my collective created data substance

A question guides the inquiry to meaning
My new structure displays our dreaming
Past work captured in photos
Intuitive heart use and who knows
Where this data will guide me next
But it is my proper compass
I used my heart to sift through the substance
Of my data
Case study strata
I sifted through layers, wrote, listened and pondered
As I wondered what it would take for my collective
Dream to stand
On its own two feet
What research question could guide me
From the whole to the parts
To the glue that emanates from the heart
Love has glued together the pieces of my data collection
I have researched the effects when my girls and I get together and dream

What does this inquiry mean to me?
It’s inspired by gardens of experience growing out of me
The experience of growth in this society
The frustration and privilege of capitalistic hierarchy
My grandma, Great Mother Love for me
My island experienced philosophy,
The painful and joyful hypocrisy
Of all the Love that’s affected me to
Be the questor
Researching questioner
Where’s my methodology?
I believe it’s always been inside of me
And ironically
With a little ‘t’
The truth for me is in the questing journey
Based on POR AMOR’s her-story
How do we move forward sustainably?
That is how is it that we question we
In ways that nourish growth through self discovery

Did I use the right questionnaire
To awake a comparative thunder
Of our organization to others
Whose journey with similar wonder
Can now rest under
The protective roof of a sustainable organizational structure
And now where do we begin?
Again, I'll start with within
And the relationships of my kin, family and friends
Relationships that support me to reach this
Stage in my destiny
How do we look at the possibility of bringing Love
Into to the centre of community
How do we learn to piece ourselves together peacefully?
And do work that works through us meaningfully
Within this research community
A form of research that builds on the best of we
So that we can nest it
A form a research that carries the vision forth
Wished to be manifested
A form of research that builds on those fountains of Love
That have already been invested
Into our organizational unity
A form of research that can truly mean something true to me
And we and those who search
For justice socially

Using guided conversations to reassemble the pieces of
FOR AMOR on a foundational security
Are we ever really secure?
Is sustainability as it were
Simply a moment in time that in the present blurs
The past and shapes the future?
I mean this love needs a sustainable future
I don't' believe any rubric will help me
Calculate these kinds of next steps
So I step within
And I begin with the core beginning
Alpha and omega Love of Creation
Love has created all nations
And Love is the glue of all enduring relations
And in this inquiry I can appreciate the dedication it takes when people are Passionate about creating positive change
It is with these people I seek to exchange Ideas and Inspiration

Even as the heart, like spandex, pulls and stretches
Wherever my heart-full compass points me next is Where I go
All the answers I don’t have to know
I am trusting that this heart-full inquiry will show me What to build on next
I am sure if I follow the rainbow that honours All paths and perspectives
Even those unchosen lessons for the wisdom they provide
I’m using this arts-inquiring analysis to comprise my questing Navigating, self-relating
Self-Initiating adventure of Love
Form out of the margins into the centre

If I believe that energy vibrations are influential
And that Love is the highest form of energy
Not some airy fairy concept, but something life essential
What guided conversation then shall
Give meaning to the realities constructed out of potential
When shall problems transform into possibility
Future organizational resiliency
The perseverance through organizational alchemy
A refocusing of the brilliancy
Of what’s already been a planted seed
Bridging what has been to what may be
The artful exploration of my passionate inquiry
Into the heart of this co-constructed life work journey
Back to the heart
Back to the start
To build strong what’s been weak
Reinforcing what’s worthy to keep
We’ve built a movement inspired by love and peace
We’re building this movement of love piece by peace.

Commitment to Form

From the onset of my research, it has been important to me to find creative and inspiring methods that engage my passion for the subject of POR AMOR, that fuel my motivation to learn and come to know new things about POR AMOR and the role I play within the organization.

In Carl Leggo’s “Poetic Ruminations: 26 Ways to Listen to Light” he unpacks the metaphor of listening to light as a means of learning the language of the heart, language that speaks of passion, drive and inspirational evocations. Finding inspiration in the everyday, he states his desire for “heart-full" research, research that finds its place “where the researcher returns when overwhelmed with the riches of the infinite world, searching for sense by scribing sentences in the sensual sea swirling under the skin”. In this place his ruminations allow him to float between opposite poles of a spectrum where he embraces the contradictions of knowledge, where he becomes “the agnostic believer, the sceptical optimist, in a network of loners”, where he is situated in the ambiguous greys of conventional black and white knowledge boundaries, the place where light has not conventionally
shone. In this place he’s extracting spirit and emotion to reveal the heart of his writing and research (Leggo, 2001, p 173-195).

The epistemological forms of reflective journal writing and, more particularly, poetry, became vehicles to help me examine my forms of meaning making throughout the inquiry, helping me get to the heart of what I think and facilitating my exploration of the dynamics that have co-created the organization and activities of POR AMOR. Through poetry and journal writing I embody the spirit of what I have come to know. Consequently, these creative forms also carried Strawberry along her path through the narrative of (En)Compassing Heart.

Stories provide meaning out of the details of our experience. In Knowing Her Place, Lorri Neilsen offers her ‘intellectual autobiography’, asserting that behind every inquiry is a story and that perhaps all inquiry is story (Neilsen, 1998, p.131). I have come to believe that inquiry is full of multiple stories. Stories inside stories. How I use poetic literacy to read and write my understanding of the world is a part of my story as I reach for our story. I tell this story of POR AMOR with the aim of being true to the organic processing of my poet self since poetry has been a reciprocal part of my relationship to words and world; I have used words to form poetry and poetry has used words to form me. Naturally poetry became key in defining my research processes and representational forms.

I use poetry to actively and reflectively engage people, myself included, within the communities I serve. The emotion that generates my poetry moves me in a dynamic dialogue between head and heart, one that births inspiration and action together into my life. This dialogue is a conversation that is a crucial negotiation between my rational and emotional selves.
In Suzi Gablik’s *Reenchantment of Art*, she draws attention to the way modernization has placed the arts and social purpose in opposition; artist being individualized and separate from the rest of society, and follows with her acknowledgement of the two categories: aesthetics and social purpose, as slowly merging into one (Gablik, 1991). No longer perceived or received as something separate, now we start to see art as being about society. My use of the arts to explore POR AMOR’s organizational journey is about making connections from a place that feels, a journey from the heart, into the heart, through the heart and because of the heart. A journey expressed in ways that both question and heal opposition, disconnectedness and separations perpetuated by oppressive systemic structures. Through the forms of poetry and reflective journal writing I have creatively processed and represented my sense making of these structures and how they have effected the intentions and works of POR AMOR’s organizational movements.

**Methodological Integrity**

Neilsen contends that conventional understandings of knowledge have offered little insight into the heart, spirit and imagination we comprise. We are fooling ourselves, she elaborates, if we think fiction is less trustworthy than knowledge to offer guidance and understanding. As educational inquiry, a conventional knowledge producing vehicle, enters a time of the liminal, that threshold space of abundant possibility and imagination, “we are always becoming but at least now we are a lot more willing to accept that we are working on shifting ground” (Neilsen, 2002, p.209). We are
coming to know as we become. This acceptance allows room for more knowledge discovery and expression in a continuous evolution of what we come to know.

Arts-informed Methods

Without knowing it, since I was eleven years old, much before the beginning of this research and my reflexive inquiry within it, I intuitively used art, especially poetry and journal writing, to come to know and engage topics that matter to me. The thesis journey has helped me recognize that. Without knowing it, perhaps driven more by a feeling than any form of certainty, we, the four co-founders of POR AMOR were drawn together first in friendship, then in community work based on our common passion for the arts as a way to know and engage the sharing of knowledge through inspirational means. As I have come to know, through my study and experimentation with arts-informed methods of inquiry, the powerful effects of arts as an epistemology has emerged for me as something I now do know and can name.

POR AMOR means ‘for love’ in English. It is difficult to discuss the concept of love within academia. Although love is a universal concept, it is heavily abstract and loaded with ambiguity. It is challenging to put into words a concept that is so emotional, hence my use and comfort with poetry and gravitation towards arts-informed methods of inquiry.

POR AMOR Community Enhancement Initiatives is rooted in the arts and reflective art creation. The various community development endeavours we have facilitated were birthed through and still
remain a creative response and active connection to some of the social and environmental problems experienced within the communities we work. From our artistic showcase fundraising events to our arts-based educational workshops and community projects, we use our creative skills to find innovative ways to deal with some of the specific community development challenges we face.

Through arts-informed research processes, I have represented the journey of POR AMOR, from its beginnings to present state, in lyrical, allegorical, archetypal and visual forms to make this research as accessible and representational as my creative mind allowed within the span of time available for this thesis completion. My collage of written and visual genres, both in the processes and representation of what and how I have come to know in my research has been grounded in my belief of the multi-local, multi-dimensional, multi-perspective and cohesive abilities of art to connect and hold many, if not all, fragments of a particular phenomenon under the same light.

In David Korten's book, The Great Turning (2006, p. 34), he explains, “Love is a binding spiritual force that opens our minds and hearts to life’s creative possibilities. Our ability to respond is a result of human creativity”. To creatively imagine solutions to problems is our response-ability, that which equips and enables us for our “great work”. The hermeneutic quality of art to work as a strong connector between diverse and sometimes contradicting phenomenon, similar to love’s ability to combine opposites in relationships of nurturance, helps us to hold together all various issues within the community at once and look at it within a larger frame. This is an important reason why artistic and creative activities have been prevalent in virtually all POR AMOR community endeavours.

Case Study Analysis
Within the overarching framework of an arts-informed methodological approach to qualitative research, case study, as a secondary methodological lens seemed an obvious second layer of the analysis since POR AMOR is a specific case within the larger phenomenon of innovative grassroots non-profit organizations in Canada, specifically Toronto, striving for organizational stability. In The Art of Case Study Research, Robert Stake defines a case as “a specific, complex and functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). It is something particular and we come to know it by what it is and what it does.

For Stake, the emphasis of every case is on its uniqueness. The uniqueness of POR AMOR is that, through the use of arts as a vehicle to inspire acts of social transformation, we have attracted an interest in all ages of people and culture to our creative project activities and funding events. Our case is unique because it started with four friends, a common bond of passion for social justice, and a frustration with the current system and its lack of heart, spiritual integration, and honouring self discovery through creative processes. We began using art as a channel to express our frustrations and our dreams. A door opened for us to evolve with the momentum and inspiration of that first movement. We have not stopped moving since.

Taking into account the relationships between the founding members of POR AMOR, between POR AMOR and other community agencies, educational institutions, businesses, government agencies, the communities being served and funders in general was important for me to represent in order to include a holistic account of our organizational functioning within the confines of this case. The challenge of documenting and describing these relationships is a tribute to the ‘messiness’ of qualitative research because of the necessity to include the microcosm, POR AMOR, within the
macrocosm (societal context), the non-profit sector, and even greater, society as a whole. The benefit of directing the research lens of my Master’s degree on my own passionate pursuit for sustainable organizational success is to help us transcend some of the systemic challenges within the sector.

As impressionable beings internally influenced by external factors in the spaces we dwell and commune, our cultural surroundings have great influence over the ways we grow. Upon commencing my journey with POR AMOR, as both spoken word artist and overseas community worker, my mind set then and now has been very much opposed to the main stream, fast paced, bottom line, dog eat dog, capitalism of the modern city. Searching for ways to surpass or transcend the destructive attributes of North American culture, I search for opportunities of gratitude, for things to value and appreciate, for like-minded people trying to make the situation healthier and more just. That's why the discovery of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Reed, 2007) as a third and final layer to my methodological lens arrived as a perfect fit for the aims of my research.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry explores ideas of what people value. It is a lens that encourages transcendence by encouraging us to rethink our ideas and question our underlying assumptions. The focus is on success and not failure—what works and not what hinders. It is a building up on the positive attributes of an organization already in existence. It encourages us to get up from our chairs, turn around and face the fire projecting the shadows in Plato’s cave. As we look behind the smoke
screen clouding our vision of how to proceed, we find the doors that are already open to walk through.

A philosophy in its own right, Jan Reed, author of *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change*, argues that Appreciative Inquiry is also a world view with particular principles and assumptions as well as practical processes for engaging people in co-creating an organization’s future (Reed, 2007). Appreciative Inquiry complements POR AMOR’s quest for sustainability both as a research lens and tool for building the capacity of our community development work through its practicality, accessibility and subjective nature.

Firstly, Appreciative Inquiry is a practical method. An example to illustrate this is the notion of “provocative propositions” which prepare an organization for action based on past success. Having a plan of action based on evaluating positive attributes of what has been done already allows for movement from the abstract to the practical, a movement of focused exploration leading to intentional forms of expansion.

Secondly, Appreciative Inquiry is accessible to me. The ‘poetic principle’ is a concept within Appreciative Inquiry that emphasizes how people read and write their world, moving through the process of exploration in ways that are accessible to them. For me, my poetry makes information accessible because it is how I move in process from abstract understanding towards specific and practical comprehension. The poetic principle complements how my thought processes evolve from the macro to the micro and the spaces in between. Narratively, the poetic principle has been pivotal...
in my effort to use narrative and poetry as a dynamic underpinning of writing our POR AMOR her-story in ways that make the research accessible and relevant amongst young adult audiences.

The methodological lens of Appreciative Inquiry is comprised of four main components that also complement the practice of expanding and grounding POR AMOR as a sustainable organization. They are: discovery, dream, design, and delivery. These stages emphasize and honour the work we have already done both practically and theoretically as we embrace alternate forms of creating change that promotes healthy community living.

The ‘constructivist principle’ of Appreciative Inquiry highlights the premise of social constructivist theory; which is as well a major epistemological feature of arts-informed methods of research, that there is not an objective capital ‘T’ truth “out there” but that reality is a personal and constructed concept that happens based on environment, relationship, and experience. We are all constructing our individual realities in relation to each other and so reality is actually a co-construction of lived experiences. Our thoughts about the world are influenced by our interpretation and construction of the ways we live out and tell the stories of our past, present and future (p. 26). These stories we tell shape the ways we think and act in our world. Within Appreciative Inquiry, we tell the story framed intentionally to move into the future in ways that promote positive growth and enhanced potential based on the appreciation of positive activity that has all ready or is currently taking place.

Early on the path of my thesis journey, I created and exhibited an 8.5 foot standing structure (see figure 43) as an artistic representation of POR AMOR and our vision to have the organization exist and thrive sustainably. This structure became one of the key inspirations for (En)Compassing Heart,
the novel. It was a construction of pieces, each piece a singular representation of a formative component of POR AMOR, pieced together like a puzzle that connected into a freestanding structure, a prototype representation of our organizational sustainability.

At the time of its exhibition, the structure I created to represent POR AMOR seemed enormous. POR AMOR as an organization represents our dream of a world where life is sustained by love. That dream is enormous. The structure I created was the first arts-informed method I used to represent the dream (vision) and movement (mission) of POR AMOR. The structure literally poked through the ceiling. The miracle of life is enormous too. Still we watch, everyday all over the world, that dream manifest over and over. Why should our dreams be any different?
Figure 45
Erin Hahn representing the South point on the compass and the emotional qualities of the POR AMOR collective

Figure 46
Erin’s visions of sustainability for herself and POR AMOR

Figure 47
Tanika Riley representing the West point on the compass and the physical qualities of the POR AMOR collective

Figure 48
Tanika’s vision of sustainability for herself and POR AMOR
Figure 49
Rachel Larabee representing the North point on the compass and the mental qualities of the POR AMOR collective

Figure 50
My visions of sustainability for myself and POR AMOR

Figure 51
Melissa Gimousis representing the East point on the compass and the spiritual qualities of the POR AMOR collective

Figure 52
Melissa’s visions of sustainability for herself and POR AMOR
Figures 53-56 were an arts-informed method of data collection where each POR AMOR co-founder was asked to select photos from a shared archive of project photos to represent the most pivotal moments in the POR AMOR journey according to each person. Through this activity I was looking for points in the journey that we all agreed were pivotal. In all four of our collages there were places where we all chose the same photo to use. I used the moments captured in our duplicated photos as points to explore further within the inquiry.
The spandex material stretched and tugged over the heart represents a series of tensions: struggling for sustainability, manifesting our organizational visions/ideals into reality, one vision being pulled in four directions amongst us and multiple directions within the complex social and environmental context of our society. It is also the tension of running projects locally and internationally and also the tension of succeeding in my research pursuits to improve our organizational structure. It is the tension of striving to have something worked so hard at, for what seems like so long and yet is still only beginning to really form, sustainably. The challenges of breathing life into a dream, keeping it growing and expanding to include many new breaths and hands, hearts and minds, cultures and communities, artistic forms; to be sustainable and diverse, supportive and supported. Keeping this creative tension in the heart of this creative piece helped me to gain a greater understanding of the multiple dynamics involved in the evolution of an organizational entity. It also helped me to hold a vision of our organization in connection to the larger and more encompassing phenomenon of organizational and community development. Through this first creation of data representation the compass metaphor arrived as what I needed to
navigate my way through the proceeding steps of my research journey in to the heart of POR AMOR and my reasons for engaging myself within this organization.

“Fabric of Life”

It’s tight this fabric of life
Pulling us to be true to ourselves
What does your heart say?
Pushing us to conform to the norm
What does status quo say?
Pushing us to dream—sky’s the limit baby
Pulling us down to reality
—Yeah right lady—
Live in two places and have a family?
Come on get real!

I’m pulled, I’m pushed, I’m stretched
I’m drained.
Is this all about the marginalized or is this about me too?
Or am I the marginalized seeing my pushy pulpy extended self floating
from need to want to...
I’m not trying to save the world
I’m trying to save me from becoming one of those who make the world need saving
Striving to simply be
Present
But my mind’s at the library, on the internet, in the computer lab screaming through my fingers that can’t seem to type some linear, epistemological articulation
But I know

My heart is in the forest, a baby’s eyes, on the mountain, at the seashore,
In the naval of a belly dancer in Morocco,
On the guagua, at the colmado, in Kensington Market
Nose to the grind
Ears to the ground
Pen to the paper
I’m a dancing, singing, concept flinging poet with so much substance
Where’s my form?
“Oh form?” I call

I am an individual in a group in a society in a system
My heart is here and on the island
My eyes are full of tears as I contemplate the pain I’m come home to
And the joys I’ve been blessed to feel
Oh form...where are you?
I am locally abroad
When abroad I love my local
I am split, stretched, brilliant, condescended, oversensitive, unrealistic
You can call me naïve but my eyes are starting to wrinkle
And I’ll take it all as a compliment
That I smile too much ;)

The quilted chaos that appears radiant in flashes
Flustered in forced articulation
Sensed like rainbows flowing from prisms
Relevant in the right networks
In the thoughts, wishes, intuitions that form my embodied knowledge
I don’t know who I am in my shifting definitions any more than
I see pieces of me in you
And you and you and...
Together we form this complete messy wonder that shines a soulful mystery
Deserving of opportunities for us to dream it all into reverence

This fabric of life is pushed and pulled and strengthened,
Extended, frustrated, negated,
Complicated and all I really want to do
Is spend my life making expressions of the wisdom I have humbly accepted
That I don’t know it all but we all deserve to seek
And dig
And dream and wish
So I work to accommodate a telling of someone’s truth
At least my own
And even as I don’t and could never possibly know it all
I stretch and I pull and I touch and I’m here
And I hope
That one day all these tiny pockets of making it make sense will form into a Meaning we can all celebrate
In the name of Love

Like my journal entries and poetic processing, the structure (Figure 43) captured the creative tensions amongst us as we aim to stand as a sustainable and effective organizational entity. Creating this piece helped me come to know, on more pertinent levels, some of the connections between the
organizational vision and what has helped and hindered the work involved. It also revealed to me, through the process of continuous creation and reflection, the connection between what I was creating visually in this structural piece and what I was working to understand through my analysis of POR AMOR and its structural place within the non-profit sector: both are attempts to create a structure that is free standing, that is sustainable; one an artistic representation supported through design, the other an organizational structure supported through its model of governance.

Recognizing these important connections, I arrived at my research metaphor: (En)Compassing Heart, using the heart and positive emotions to navigate discovery and purpose, of self and organization, in attempts to establish sustainable and liberating work in communities.

I decided to display not only the front of the structure but the back as well to demonstrate the ways the pieces of the structure connected together. I also attached photos of all the people who have sustained me throughout my life and especially during the formative years of POR AMOR.

Gablik forecasts that our emerging cultural paradigm is one that reflects a will to participate socially: a shift from objects to relationship. Objects and materialism do not sustain us—life does, people do, pets do, trees do, water does. To me it became essential to acknowledge and appreciate these relationships, to represent these connections and highlight the importance of acknowledging connectivity amongst people, the love glue that sustains us all.
Creating this piece helped me become aware of the connections already in place that fuel and inform my thesis work (i.e. the connections amongst my body, mind and spirit, the connections I have to my family, to society and the systems in place, my connections to my three POR AMOR colleagues, and my personal connection to the POR AMOR journey of evolution). As a result, I became aware of the essential need of support networks, feeling and being connected to ourselves, to each other and to life’s vital processes. As I struggled with the design technicalities of the structure, I came to know that a big part of keeping our organization sustainable is largely facilitated through these connections. The channels I created to slide the arrows into the heart represent the connections amongst ourselves and the other community, educational, governmental, economic structures with whom we collaborate to create projects and programs that are strong, resilient and long lasting.
Figure 59
The legs that hold the structure standing upright represent the networks of support, the connections amongst us within POR AMOR as well as the connections that serve as supportive for our organization within the Canadian non-profit sector.

Figure 60
The base of the structure represents POR AMOR creating a secure foundation through the development of a solid organizational/structural framework that supports our sustainable expansion of effective work in the field of community development.
Figures 62-64 represent the path I used to document the flow of the POR AMOR organizational journey through time and space. This path is inspired by the Appreciative Inquiry methodological lens whereby the works of an organization become analysed through the examination of its past successes and challenges, its present circumstances and its future goals, dreams and visions.

Figure 61
The heart of POR AMOR represents our organizational vision (the Dream).

Figure 62
A cobblestone path representation of POR AMOR’s organizational past successes and challenges

Figure 63
A triple-layered representation of the methodological lenses (arts-informed methods, case study analysis, and appreciative inquiry) I have used to analyse the organization of POR AMOR in the research
The Creative Inquiry Process is Defined by an Openness to the Flow of Events and Experiences

Art crosses boundaries of convention into the realm of imagined possibility. Creative expansion of what it means to know paves the way for new experiences, insights and liberation. Freed from contained ways of knowing that lock understanding into systemic service to the powerful privileged of society, art opens the gate for knowledge access to spill out from the central towers into the margins, the space where social equity may finally engage accessibility and shake off the shackles of systemic oppression.

Knowledge must be subjective because research processes are. Research is not created in a vacuum but instead by real people of diverse perceptual lenses. According to Cole and Knowles, ‘the art of writing inquiry’ focuses on engaging research that honours the self—our individual and unique responses and processes. They emphasize the point that “when writing is a form of inquiry and inquiry a form of writing, we write to arrive at meaning rather than to record it” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.213). The art of writing inquiry is finding powerful ways of telling our story, expressing not the truth but a truth that transcends our own form of truth telling. Since art is very much an intuitive
response to the complex interpretation of one’s sense making, we use these intuitive responses and representations as we discover what we know. The subjectivity of any research endeavour is an integral part of the final product. The specific processes through which a given human (lens) perceives data shapes the form of how that information is communicated. In this way, arts-informed researchers are just as concerned with the processes that create and inform research as the final product of that research.

How research takes its shape, much like how a piece of art does, occurs as the creator leaves space within their work for intuitive visions or hunches that let the form emerge while they reflect and engage the qualitative data and theories of contextualization. This form shapes itself through the dance of the inner and outer worlds, the integration of knowledge out there to knowledge within the embodied response of the researcher to that information. The uncertainty entailed within qualitative research demands a level of trust in process which can be nerve racking and particularly amazing at the same time. What is called to task is a level of confidence in our ability to be agents of change, in our ability to name our realities in ways that are flexible and resilient, allowing the process to reveal itself piece by piece.

The data collection of (En)Compassing Heart took place first internally, amongst my fellow POR AMOR co-creators and second externally, amongst directors of other, sustainable, non-profit organizations and social enterprises with similar mandates. I wanted to begin collecting data amongst us to get a greater awareness of where we are and have been as a collective and then look outwards towards examples of organizations that we could learn from and aspire towards.
I decided to divide my research into four phases as a result. In the first phase I collected journal entries and lyrical art pieces from all four POR AMOR members (including my own creations and journaling). The topics of these collections were based on the photo collages we all created for my first arts-informed structural piece (figures 53-56). Comparing all four photo collages together I looked for images that spoke of key moments in our POR AMOR journey that were repeated in all four of our collages. These images served as a starting point for each of us to begin our written reflections. I chose to reflect on these moments this way in order to process and represent moments for us that allowed us all to have an equal voice in what got put under analysis.

The second phase involved taking the ideas from our journal entries and incorporating them into a plot structure to tell our POR AMOR organizational Her-Story. It was at this point in thinking about the narrative form of telling this story that Hope, Timmel and Hodzi’s parabola model of how to build social movements within community based organizations came to mind and I received the inspiration to map our story onto the parabola structure (see figure 65).
Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers
(A. Hope, S. Timmel & C. Hodzi, 1988)

This diagram (figure 65) is part of a three-part series of exercises and activities in the “Training for Transformation” handbook for community workers. This handbook is designed to assist workers in the field of community development by encouraging and supporting the development of empowered and creative communities. It offers several exercises and activities to help people in communities start and develop their own social activity movements. The parabola model is used in this book as a model for groups already involved in a common commitment to something. It stresses the importance of common vision with values and clear goals. I chose to use it as a means to
compare and evaluate our past efforts within the history of POR AMOR as its purpose is to help people understand the life, growth and decline of groups.

My first connection to this diagram was that it is located in the handbook in a chapter called “Building Movements”. Syncronistically, our POR AMOR slogan, developed prior to my acquaintance with this handbook, is “Building Movements Piece by Peace”. Another point of resonance and connection with my research intentions is that the model begins with a dream (or goal) that works through the wave of the parabola and ends with a new dream (new goal). Right away the handbook’s use of terms like “building movements” and focus on “dreams” were personally meaningful and serendipitous signals to me that this diagram would prove useful to my research in some way although at the time of coming upon it I was not quite sure how. So I cited it and put it away.

After the idea came to me to write the POR AMOR her-story into a narrative form and to have Strawberry as an allegorical figure to represent our collective journey, I began to contemplate the plot structure and how the arc of the narrative would take place. It was then that I remembered and revisited the idea of this parabola model. From there my ideas for the flow of the story seemed to map themselves perfectly on to the shape and ideas of this parabola model. The parabola model became useful within the work when I was able to map the narrative across this model and apply its principles to the stages of POR AMOR’s organizational development and evolution.

Serendipitously, the allegorical character of Strawberry, as a young girl going through a rite of passage journey, came to me late one night along with her animal spirit guides. I integrated this
inspiration into a visual image of the POR AMOR her-story plot line, making our story an allegory that moves along the cycles of the parabola structure. I presented these ideas to my three co-founders and collected data through the conversation that emerged amongst us. We all agreed this would be an interesting way to tell our story.

- **Ch 1** Introduces Strawberry and her activism (her dream)
- **Ch 2-5** depicts Strawberry’s/POR AMOR’s organizational journey abroad as she moves in the four cardinal directions and encounters a different animal spirit guide (a different co-founder) in each direction
- **Ch 6** represents my transition of reintegrating myself back into North American society and university after living for 3 years abroad in the Dominican Republic doing community work through POR AMOR
- **Ch 7** depicts an encounter with Paulo Freire and his pedagogy on community development as part of the theoretical background for the research
- **Ch 8** represents a wider presentation of the theoretical background through means of a round-table discussion where the theories and literature of the thesis take on actual characters and talk to each other
- **Ch 9** represents moments and experiences in our annual, local POR AMOR summer project called Youth 4 Human Writes. In this chapter I begin to show a glimpse of some of the more recent community work POR AMOR has been doing in the city of Toronto with young people
- **Ch 10** represents the knowledge and findings from the entire thesis journey, especially the knowledge gained through the external interviews with Tim Jones of Artscape, Erin Barton of Free the Children and Rachel Gouin of Inter-Pares.

In the third phase of data collection, I conducted my external interviews. I incorporated ideas from my research on the dynamics of appreciative inquiry as research for social transformation and used these, as well as other ideas regarding effective organization frameworks and issues of sustainability that came up for me both in our conversations within the internal data collection sessions as well as my research into issues of sustainability within the non-profit sector. I used these ideas as a guiding framework for my questioning of the external interviewees. My selection of external interviewees was based on narrowing down which Canadian non-profits I felt either held the most similar mission and vision to what POR AMOR attempts to achieve as well as practices of
organizational functioning that could potentially be useful and effective for our own organizational expansion. Put in short, I chose organizations I thought we could learn the most from. I was not looking for answers to solve any problems within POR AMOR but rather ideas and inspiration to help POR AMOR move forward intentionally in an expanded and effective capacity as a healthy organization.

Artscape stood out to me for its focus on arts as the basis for transformational community renewal and sustainable practices. I love their attention the relationships between art, community development and environmental health. I also love that they are a social enterprise as opposed to only a non-profit or charity.

I chose Free the Children for the effective methods of youth engagement and empowerment on issues of human rights both in international as well as local contexts.

And lastly, I chose Inter-Pares based on their effective and flat organizational structure that operates on a power-shared basis with all decision made by consensus.

After these interviews I incorporated all the ideas into Strawberry’s journey.

The following is an actual chronology of POR AMOR’s organizational movement that highlights its journey along the parabola wave and provide actual facts to the fantastical journey that Strawberry’s character represents for us:

**July 2003**  
*Spectrum Wednesdays begins*

**November 2003**  
1st trip to Puerto Plata, meeting the Board of Directors at Integracion Juvenil (I.J.), designing workshops for 6 months at I.J.
January 2004  
1st benefit concerts at El Mocambo

February-September 2004  
I.J. project implementation

February-June 2005  
Monthly live showcases at the El Mocambo

September 2005  
POR AMOR website launch

December 2005  
Rachel starts teaching at the International School of Sosua (I.S.S.)

January 2006  
Project launch of P.E.H.C.E. (Personnas Esecial Hacen Cosas Especial) in partnership with Ensename a Pescar (local community organization)—expressive arts workshops for youth

February 2006  
Project launch of Amamos Amamantar—prenatal care workshops for young and expecting mothers

May 2006  
I.S.S. and POR AMOR collaborative Fun Fair fundraiser for MICPROMNA (local community organization)

November 2006  
‘Fire on the Roof’—1st benefit concert in D.R. to raise funds for the burning down of MICPROMNA founder’s home

December 2006  
1st annual Navidad Solidaria (Puerto Plata Christmas Food Drive)

March 2007  
Project launch of M.M.A. (Mujeres Moviendos Adelante)—Candle making empowerment workshops for women

July 2007  
Project launch of Outdoor Escape—first local POR AMOR project in Toronto

September 2007  
Beginning of my Master’s degree and deciding to make the critical analysis of POR AMOR my research topic

December 2007  
2nd annual Navidad Solidaria; educational presentations to Centennial staff networks

January 2008  
D.R. projects put on pause

February 2008  
Deya Vance (Director of POR AMOR Dominican Operations in Puerto Plata) arrives in Canada on one year work visa

May 2008  
POR AMOR Intimate Fundraiser
July 2008  Project launch of Youth 4 Human Writes summer project in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough

August 2008  1st annual ‘Community Love’ event in Kingston-Galloway area

January 2009  Project launch of Auset Circle

April 2009  Educational workshops with Centennial students on topic of Advocacy and Social Justice

July 2009  2nd annual Youth 4 Human Writes summer project; Heart to Heart fundraiser at the El Mocambo to help raise funds for Deya’s brother, Juanito, to get a heart pace-maker; Deya first visit to Toronto

August 2009  2nd annual ‘Community Love’ event in Kingston-Galloway area

September 2009  Thesis submission of (En)Compassing Heart
The last phase of the research process was the writing of the narrative and the learning process involved as a result of this telling.

**Subjective and Reflexive Presence of the Researcher**

Nielsen also provides an effective analogy of the writer/researcher as a prism consisting of various socializing forces—the home, the school, the teacher, the community, infusing in all roles in her personal and professional decision making. With the world as observable from multiple perspectives, there is movement from “one truth” to what she calls the “traffic accident” model of truth in which you ask enough witnesses and, consequently, what really happened becomes evident” (Neilsen, 1998, p.38). The truth becomes the construction of all roles and participants, a collection of their multiple perspectives.

Although Strawberry is an allegorical representation of POR AMOR’s journey, as opposed to simply my own, and although the development of her character and the evolving details of her storyline were continuously informed by the details and discussions we had within our internal data collection phases, there is no doubt that my presence as the author of our story is evident within the telling. Strawberry’s poetry is my poetry, her experiences back in the city of Toronto and graduate school are representative of my experiences and knowledge gained within the department of Adult Education and Community Development. I am a documentarian and an archivist in this research. I am
the story teller and the others are my key informants and contributors. The story is told in my own voice but it is a collective story that I am telling. This telling is in line with my intention to represent my co-creators in this work, a collage of our four interpretations and dreams of what POR AMOR may become. I have tried to act as the prism to shine light on the diverse paths of what it has meant and felt like to be a creator and actor in the works of POR AMOR. Inevitably the uniqueness of my story telling sheds light from a distinct angle that reflects the signature of my artistry and creative expressiveness. Had any of the other three young women told the story, no doubt, the prism would be refracting a rainbow of its own unique shape and hue.

Freire’s characterization of love as dialogical reiterates the notion of the negotiations that take place in a reality that is co-constructed out of multiple realities. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire discusses the necessity of people to love life and people in order for real transformation to occur. (Freire, 1970). The only way to find the true common line amongst people is through dialogue that is open for each interpreter to present an honest and heartfelt case. In this shared reality, power is also shared and the lines between oppressor and oppressed are abolished.

The Researcher is Not Necessarily the Focus of the Inquiry

Even as I am the researcher, my being present throughout the telling, this research is not about me. Even as it reflects my views and my representation of the views of my colleagues, it is not about us. More importantly, it is about people like us, who care enough about the sacredness of life to see its degradation take place within the contexts of their own life and act upon it, and act upon it
in ways that create sustainable solutions for the rest of our lives and the lives of the generations to come. This research is about and for people who care about life.

Emotion has, for centuries, been marginalized out of the arena of research and academics for more rational positivistic forms of telling. I turn to forms of inquiry that are full of heart and feeling because to leave emotion out of my research is to leave me out and I want to be here. I am passionate about that. I seek inspiration and resources in researchers like Leggo, who seeks the “language of his heart in research” (Leggo, 2001), in researchers like Nielsen (1998) who look for inquiry that pierces with wild emotion, in researchers like Gablik (1991) who push for art, the emotions it generates and processes, to be an integral part of our motivation to heal the social and environmental injustices of our time. I turn to poetry in my research because emotions, like words poetically woven together, take on their own heart beat and sound, creating symphonies of multiple meanings, layers and interpretations, because they too have important stories to tell.

In the initial stages of my inquiry, one of my professors advised that the best way to push your thesis work forward is to ask yourself where your heart is located in your research topic. As I began to reflect on my decision to conduct a critical analysis of POR AMOR, the following journal entry enhanced my reflexive quest,

I care about this topic because I believe that everybody should have the right to realize their potential. POR AMOR is about creative sense making; addressing social injustice through the development of creative and inspiring solutions. All the needless suffering I see in the world in the name of profit, economics and security doesn’t make sense. I know my biggest strength comes from engaging my spirit
through creative processes so I continue to draw on my inner resources in order help others draw on their own. For me this happens through art and that is why my colleagues and I share an interest in the relationship between art and resiliency. I want to focus my life’s work on alleviating some of the difficulties and injustice that oppression imposes on people’s lives, mine included, through my work within the organization of POR AMOR, work that acknowledges, expresses and utilizes the amazing and limitless powers of Love in all its creative realizations.

--Larabee, Journal Reflection, Oct. 25/07

There is no doubt that we live in a very unique time in history. Facing issues like global warming, economic recessions, a growing gap world-wide between rich and poor, hitting peak oil, never before has there been a greater need for the human population to transform our way of relating to our selves, each other, and the Earth that provides us the nourishment we need to sustain our own lives, literally. Thomas Berry coined the term ‘The Great Work’ as the title of his most well known piece of writing to address this unique moment in history.

Berry describes the human being’s need to transform or re-invent themselves, by means of using their creative faculties in collective reverence of life and cosmological recognition of universal patterns within life systems. Concerning the ethical imperatives of our times he explains,

The creative process, whether in the human or the cosmological order, is too mysterious for easy explanation. Yet all have experience of creativity...In both instances something is perceived in a dim and uncertain manner, something radiant with meaning that draws us on to a further clarification of our understanding and our activity. This process can be described in many ways, as a groping or as a feeling or
imaginative process. The most appropriate way of describing this process seems to be that of dream realization. The universe seems to be the fulfillment of something so highly imaginative and so overwhelming that it must have been dreamed into existence.

--Berry, 1999, pp.164-65

As Berry highlights the common human experience of knowledge pursuance inspired by a dim intrigue of that which connects to us in ways beyond our clear understanding, it is from here that we begin our journey of coming to know—we are drawn to pursue such clarification as a feeling that pulls us like a dream waiting to be manifested into our reality so that we can understand, if we so choose, how to create it.

Berry draws upon the archetypal symbol of the “great journey” to describe this creative and shared dream realization as the journey of coming to know. This is our journey. As we engage the path of knowing or coming to know we begin our movement from the centre, or purpose for engaging the journey in the first place, to the margins; moving from the ‘heart’ of the matter to the peripherals and spreading love always along the way.

**Explicit Intention for the Research to Reach Communities Both Within and Outside the Academy**

Because academic research has not conventionally been accessible to audiences outside of the academy, arts-informed research aims at presenting research in forms that are interpretable and
ultimately available to the communities it serves. Decisions in form are crucial to how the research is read by audiences and how accessible its findings can be. This is why I chose to use narrative and spoken word poetry to access a youth audience. In my experience, these forms speak to them in ways prose essays or lectures do not.

Rosie McLaren uses a pastiche of writing styles to form her expression of processing meaning from lived and aesthetic experiences. She notes that “traditional forms of research writing generally fail not only to capture the non-abstract forms of linguistic devices, but also to provide an account of how artistic and aesthetic experiences shape our lives, and thus influence research practices” (McLaren, 2001, P. 62-82).

The arts-informed structural piece I created (Figure 11.1), composed of photo collages and written pieces, became a necessary form of data representation to express a holistic and visual interpretation of our organization in a way that words fell short of communicating. Also, my poetic performance presentations are meant to resonate deeper with the oral tradition of live performance and audience engagement than an explanatory speech of my research methods and findings. I want the images and poetry to speak for itself as much as possible, providing space for the reader to engage their own subjective viewing.

Having two youth editors, Shykara Beals and Thomas Robinson, one male and one female, both emerging artists previously involved with POR AMOR community enhancement projects and live showcases, also helped me stay grounded in my intention to reach the hearts and minds of young people with this story. Their insight into the narrative helped me pursue a telling that balanced in
reach and resonance with young people and my colleagues within the non-profit sector and academy.

The Use of Art is Tied to Moral Purposes of Social Responsibility and Epistemological Equity

Watrin explains in “Art as Research” that the artistic blend of disciplined critique, technique and passion embrace the fullness of lived experience to reconstitute meaning in much the same way as more conventional forms of qualitative research methods do; the unique hermeneutic qualities of art facilitate the creator and viewer to be held together almost instantly in the space where meaning occurs (Watrin, 1999). She describes the parallels between art creation and qualitative research. She asserts that qualitative researchers maintain that knowledge is a human construction that focuses on different interpretations of reality while artists and hermeneutic researchers as well, maintain that human knowledge is always interpretive (Watrin, 1999). Throughout this research, my course work, class discussions and experimentation with form of the narrative and poetic representations of my findings, I experienced a continuous, embodied recognition that epistemology is intrinsically subjective and that I know much more about my topic than I had thought before I began the research process. Cole furthers this notion, describing the expansion of qualitative research to include the arts, as research ‘becoming’ more than a simple reliance on words and numbers to relay knowledge but that through the arts, readers can be engaged, connected to and moved by the experience, invited to think and feel within the encounter provided by the researcher (Cole, 2004).
While Gablik discusses her perspectives on cultural paradigms in transition and the roles these play in emerging social transformations, she describes the complementary aspects of artistic creativity and social action as a reflection of the evolving relationship between personal creativity and social responsibility (Gablik, 1991). I use art to serve me and the response-ability I have to engage the purpose of my inquiry. I want to conduct research that matters, especially to me, since I am the principle engager. I want to conduct research that keeps me and my dreams of a sustainable world motivated and energized.

The marriage of art to social action that I have portrayed in this work is reflective of POR AMOR’s essentially creative relationship to the communities we work in. According to Freire, our social and communal activism is demonstrated through actions motivated by emotion. These creative processes, both within our project designs and my research method, have also served essential to my being as a creative, emotion-full researcher examining issues close to my heart and path. Creativity inspires me to tell our story poetically, paragraph plus stanza, with the aim of reaching a wider audience. I aim for a telling that both transcends me and my organization, POR AMOR. I aim for a telling that echoes a human, universal desire for people to come before profit and for love to be moved out of the margins and into the centre of community life.

The academic potential of this study is geared towards “quality of life education” (O’Sullivan, 1999) as a means of learning to develop the types of work, organizations and institutional curricula that enhance our lives and put our values, such as love, joy, and peace, back at the centre of our learning and everyday experiences. These are educational experiences that feel good from the inside
out. It’s about using positive emotions as a catalyst for engaged community enhancement work; bringing our human vitality into the centre of our everyday efforts within our personal lives and the work we do in the community, both professionally and voluntarily.

**Trials of the Inner Compass**

Just like the concept of love, there are so many perspectives and interpretations tied into the concept of sustainability. It is fair to say that sustainability represents long-standing self-sufficiency, security, the ability to continue to exist and thrive. This is the hope we have for POR AMOR and as widely encompassing as the concept is, so is our reasons for wanting to achieve this state. Sustainability is important for each member because not only does it involve meaningful employment opportunities, it also works to create communities that cradle nourishment and empowerment in the face of technological and ecological alienation.

I chose the path of a Master’s degree in Adult Education and Community Development to tackle some organizational challenges of growth and sustainability within POR AMOR and found arts-informed research as the most effective methodology to use for my research goals at the same time as honouring who I am and what motivates and stimulates me to keep moving forward. What can be said for certain is that the arts-informed research path, the one that taps into the creative processes of deep seated and heart-full knowledge, is unconventional. My professors are trail blazers. I intuitively and without hesitation reached for this method to carry forth the torch they have ignited since it resonated so deeply with the ways I come to know. Initially, my senses told me that arts-informed research methodologies would provide a form to explore my data in ways that free me to
incorporate my meaning making systems of metaphor, collage, and written inquiries, allowing my ‘heart-full’ research to emerge in ways that extract the inspiration that drives me from within. Arts-informed research has allowed me to learn to comfortably use my embodied knowledge, my passion, my spirit and emotions like a compass taking me from the edge of systemic boundaries of knowledge and experience to the heart of manifesting dreams into reality, sustainably.

My narrative inquiry, (En)Compassing Heart, is my description of the values embodied throughout the her-storical development of POR AMOR. POR AMOR’s/Strawberry’s journey is inextricably interlaced with my personal journey. Through writing our story I realize more than ever, more authentically and more heart-fully that fulfillment truly must and does happen from within. Strawberry has led me inside myself when I thought I was the one carving the way for her. Hmmm. As I have personally evolved and expanded my thinking I can now appreciate certain benefits and positive aspects of being in modern city, North America and even the system of academia. I appreciate the many opportunities and resources available for dream manifestation and organizational support of our POR AMOR efforts. In Canada it is viable and possible for people to dream and manifest because, comparatively speaking and in more ways than one, we are free and supported, to a degree, in pursing issues of social and environmental justice—we have the second largest non-profit sector in the world, second to the Netherlands (Scott, 2003). This environment is ripe for this type of research because although most do not create and pursue projects like POR AMOR, they admire the integrity and they support people who actively work to create positive social change.
As messy, ambiguous and transforming this journey has been so far, the passionate purpose behind the movement of my compass, behind the beatings of my heart, this inquiry has become a way to uphold my belief in the invaluable pursuit of self discovery and purpose. It is one more step, one more block, one more piece in building this movement to embody and hold secure the idea of love, the heart medicine, and the matters love can heal, help and create within community enhancement initiatives.

The next steps (new dream) for POR AMOR now is to take all the information and insight acquired through the creation of this theoretical analysis of what we’ve done and more importantly what we like about what we have done that we would like to move forward into the future of our organization. We have some great resources, supportive networks and building tools to help us begin to shape the next steps in our development. Most recently we have developed our guiding principles which act like an organizational compass to keep us grounded in our values. And also we are planning out the details of a weekend retreat to participatorily develop and design the structured frame of our organization in areas of—governance, distinctly defined roles, the development of social enterprise stream, an expanded fundraising strategy, updated web presence and strategies to have greater presence within educational institutes as advocates of arts-based education and processes of self discovery. These will be the initial steps I am taking to apply the principles and make good use of the work put into (En)Compassing Heart. The rest of the dream I will come to know as it unfolds. For now I stay present in the excitement of manifestation through creative processes.
Protagonist: Strawberry

Strawberry is an allegorical representation of POR AMOR. Her journey is our organizational journey told through my perspective. Part one of the narrative represents the POR AMOR organizational journey. Part 2 represents one part of the POR AMOR’s organizational journey, that is, the part that journeyed with me through the academic research process of examining POR AMOR within the broader context of Adult Education, Community Development, and the Non-profit Sector within Canada.

Throughout the journey, Strawberry represents the cultural malady, faced by many young adults, of being disconnected from the self and internal guidance as a result. This type of malady breeds internal states of disharmony within external environments, experienced through emotional states of anxiety, depression and hopelessness. Strawberry longs for direction as she works to cross her personal and cultural thresholds into adulthood and response-able participation in her community. Strawberry's journey is a quest for purpose; a self initiated rite of passage to discover who she is and what gifts she may utilize in the four dimensions of herself. This critical analysis of POR AMOR is “Its” rite of passage into the realm of professional and compensated opportunities to meaningfully contribute to efforts of community development, accomplishing our vision through the power of our mission.
Strawberry’s journey is one through the gateways of knowledge of self where she awakens to the realization that all the power and guidance she needs to flourish and thrive is transferred to her and within her through the mysterious process of spiritual, non-physical acknowledgement. As she awakens to the guidance of her heart she can then believe in the power of her Self. She can follow her own inner compass. She learns to trust that this internal direction will lead her to places she may contribute her work efforts within the community in ways that are meaningful and sustainable to her being.

Strawberry is an embodiment of four young women who have co-created POR AMOR and who continue to co-direct the organization with passion, heart and a firm stand on issues of social justice. She, as we, navigates her way through unmapped territory, learns to follow her heart from a place of dissatisfaction to satisfaction and bumps up against all the sharp systemic edges that arise along the way. Many, though not all, of the details of Strawberry’s path are factual details of POR AMOR’s organizational her-story. It is important for the reader to note, however, that as a result of representing our POR AMOR journey into allegorical form, this account is both non-fiction and fiction. The factual components of our-story can be elicited in appendices to follow.

**Silent Antagonist: System**

There is no actual character named System. But ‘the system’, our social system very much plays a present, consistent and antagonistic role throughout the story. I thought it important to acknowledge that. The system is ever present yet illusive. It is a character we can never fully disconnect from even as it has the tendency to leave us feeling disconnected. The system in many ways directs us. It directed Strawberry on her path and has directed POR AMOR as well; we strive for
the top of, to fit into it, or to struggle against it. In our patriarchal society it embodies masculine
directional energy. We are starting to change it; the Earth is forcing us to change. She’s had enough
and so naturally the system is being forced to change as well. Young people can play a lead role in
this transformation through their passion, energy and innovative creativity. We can help them
change the system for the better. In the land of structure, which is the system, we'll do better if we
learn how to connect and work with it rather than defined ourselves in opposition to it. In the end if
the system is like a sick entity in need of healing, we are all a part of the system and so we all need to
help with its healing. The best thing we can do is heal ourselves—bring on the strawberries I say.
Healing the system through honouring paths of our interconnection, through loving our selves, each
other and the Earth is a good way to healing the dichotomy, split and fragmented parts of ourselves
back together into a whole, harmonious us. We can honour the system by honouring our heart which
will ultimately be the greatest transformer of all. Healing the system means healing ourselves
enough to recognize that we all have the power to manifest our dreams.

Supporting characters (starting with the POR AMOR Co-founders and then in order of appearance)

Erina, the Unicorn

This character represents Erin Hahn. She is a fire sign and her direction is south, her dominant
dimension is Emotion. The lesson Erina gives to Strawberry is the gift Erin brings to our collective.
She is a warm-hearted and joyful woman who makes people feel valued in her presence. Through
POR AMOR, Erin aspires to improve the health and wellness of youth, both locally and
internationally. Erin believes in holistic health care and the inclusion of education, nutrition, and
emotional awareness to improve disease prevention and overall wellbeing. Her love for children and
cultural diversity is expressed through her aspirations and dedication to POR AMOR. A holistic health practitioner, a registered nurse and a graduate of McMaster University, class of 2003, with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, she presently works in paediatric medicine and has successfully prepared and facilitated many POR AMOR healthcare initiatives. When we lived in Puerto Plata Erin's nick-name became Erina. According to her astrological sign, one of her animal spirit guides is the horse. Due to her inspiring ability to manifest what she desires in life I decided to give that horse a magical golden horn.

_Soraiya, the Snake_

This character represents Tanika, Soraiya Riley, aka MC Insight. She is a water sign and her direction is west, her dominant dimension is Body. The lesson Tanika gives to Strawberry is the gift she brings to our collective. She is a fearless trail blazer with insurmountable optimism. Through POR AMOR Tanika aspires to re-educate youth and families regarding environmental and cultural/historical issues that affect our communities across the globe. Tanika’s projects and workshops aim to rebuild the reciprocal relationship we have to Mother Earth. Tanika also encourages young people to believe in themselves and their goals through empowerment and social responsibility workshops. Tanika earned her Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Toronto in Environmental Science and International Development. She is also an active hip hop artist who uses music to reach out to youth with positive, socially conscious messages. As well she creates and conducts workshops in music/media. According to her astrological sign, one of her spirit animal guides is the snake.
Ra-Chelle, the Racoon

This character represents me, aka Raydiance. I am an Earth sign and my direction is north, my dominant dimension is Mind. The lessons I give to Strawberry is the gift I bring to the collective, an unquenching determination to put my intellect in service of the heart and the powerful medicine of love. Through POR AMOR I aspire to offer inspirational creative workshops for youth, helping them to develop positive self-images and comfortable creative expressions. My workshops are aimed at tapping into the deep healing effects that result from an individual’s exploration of self and unique creative expressions. I am a graduate from the University of Toronto, with an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and soon a Masters of Arts in Adult Education and Community Development. Aside from and within my work with POR AMOR I am a spoken word poet. I did not choose the racoon to represent my character because of my astrological sign. I chose the racoon to honour the spirit of one little generous bandit with whom I had a powerful and personal encounter. The racoon has since become one of my animal spirit guides.

Goldi, the Eagle

This character represents Melissa Gimousis, aka Goldilok1. She is an ether sign and her direction is east, her dominant dimension is Spirit. The lesson Melissa gives to Strawberry is the gift she brings to the collective. She is a strong and silent demonstrator of faith, reverence and patience for the ways of the Great Spirit. Melissa is a secondary school teacher focusing in areas of Geography and the Social Sciences. Her role within POR AMOR is towards the practice of maintaining equilibrium with the earth and our inner and outer selves, through versatile projects/workshops surrounding environmental consciousness, knowledge of self, and artistic expressions. Melissa also supports POR
AMOR through media design regarding program awareness and products. Melissa is also an active hip hop artist who uses her verbal abilities to communicate positive messages to our community. According to Melissa’s astrological sign, one of her spirit animals is an eagle.

**DJ B-Scout**

It was in Neil Perryman, aka DJ Last Boy Scout’s basement studio when I was inspired with idea of starting ‘Spectrum Wednesdays’. I asked if he would provide the sound, he did not hesitate, and from there the dream evolved. I wanted to honour him in the story for that.

**MC Testament**

Matthew Jones one of the most blessed MC’s I know used to travel all the way from Mississauga to Pickering every Wednesday to bless us with his rhyme. I want to honour him for that.

**Rita**

Rita Gautschi, founder of Gracias charity, is truly the grandmother of POR AMOR and a very dear guide and friend. It was Erin who found Rita and Gracias online and contacted her. She invited Erin over for tea to discuss volunteer opportunities at I.J. Erin asked me to come with her. From the moment we stepped through the front door of her quaint home in Brampton, Ontario, our lives would never be the same. Every detail about Rita in the story, except for what takes place in dreamtime, is a factual representation of her role in the birth and growth of POR AMOR. Thank you for welcoming us into your dream, Rita.

**Strawberry’s Grandmother**

This is a fictional character to represent the important wisdom and guidance of our elders and ancestors.
Strawberry’s Parents

These are not any of our parents in particular. They represent all of our parents.

Deya

Erin and I met Deya Ernestina Vance in November 2003 when we went to Puerto Plata to meet the Board of Directors of I.J. to propose our workshop ideas. At the time she was the social worker for the centre. Since then we have continued to work with Deya as our Dominican POR AMOR Director above and beyond our work at I.J. She played a pivotal role in the creation and implementation of our various Dominican projects such as: P.E.H.C.E. (Las Personnas Especial Hacen Cosas Especial)—a creative self expression project for youth ages 7-12, Solidaria Navidad—our annual Christmas basket delivery, and M.M.A (Mujeres Moviendo Adelante)—a female empowerment workshop of dialogue and candle making. She is our valued colleague and dear friend.

The Children at Integracion Juvenil

The characters that appear in Chapter 4 during Strawberry’s volunteer experience at IJ are a representative mish mash of several real accounts that occurred during our work there. I have changed the names and included three episodes in one single representation, but at some time in some way it did all occur.

Lydia

All the details associated with this character are true.

Abbas
Abbas is the owner of the historical El Mocambo Concert Hall in Toronto and also the founder of Serving Charity, a registered Canadian charity. Within the narrative it is true that he came down to Puerto Plata to help support POR AMOR and our work to help the character of Altagracia, who was a real person whose real name remains concealed. Abbas has been a pivotal support for POR AMOR in his generous offering of the El Mocambo as a space to host our benefit concert fundraisers. Some of the details of Abbas’ character within the narrative are fictive in order to fall in line with the narrative arch but for the most part his representation within the story over all is factual. He is a tireless server of humanity and his good deeds and nature are nothing less than honourable. We are thankful for his support and friendship.

**Altagracia**

This character is representative of a real partnership that POR AMOR engaged in. She was the founder of a grass roots community initiative in her neighbourhood and Erin facilitated various workshops, in particular Amamos Amamantar (We-Love-to-Breast-Feed). Due to the misunderstanding that occurred between her and our collective, as represented in the narrative we are no longer in communication and therefore I have protected her identity in order to honour her non-consensus of appearing in the account.

**‘Open Minds’**

All the details associated with these characters are true. The band no longer goes by that name nor do they have the same original members.

**Michelle**

All the details associated with this character are facts in the her-story of POR AMOR
Kelly

All the details associated with this character are facts in the her-story of POR AMOR.

Bill

All the details associated with this character are facts in the her-story of POR AMOR.

The Service Canada Clerk

This character is completely fictive.

The Homeless Compass Thief

This character is completely fictive.

Professor Freire

This character in the story is a fictive representation of the renowned critical theorist, Paulo Freire. The details of his presence in the story account for the influence of his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and its influence within the theoretical background of my research. I have paid particular attention to Freire’s ideas regarding critical consciousness development for transformative education and the notion of dialogue as an essential and necessary component for social action and transformation to create vibrant communities and a love filled world.

Elsa

Although Freire’s wife was named Elsa, this character is completely fictive.

David

This character in the story is a fictive representation of David Korten and specifically refers to his work, *The Great Turning* (2006) and its influence within the theoretical background of my research. I have put particular emphasis on Korten’s ideas of “Love (as) a binding spiritual force that opens our
minds and hearts to life's creative possibilities. Our ability to respond is a result of human creativity” (p. 34) and how to creatively imagine solutions to problems is our response-ability, that which equips and enables us for our “great work”.

**Joanna**

This character in the story is a fictive representation of Joanna Macy and specifically refers to her work, *Coming Back to Life: The Work That Reconnects* (1998) and its influence within the theoretical background of my research. I have put particular emphasis on the parts of Joanna’s book that discuss reconnecting to our Earthly selves—healing separations from self, community and Earth with practical tactics for facilitating this in groups.

**Ed**

This character in the story is a fictive representation of one of my Professors, Dr. Ed O’Sullivan and specifically refers to the conversations that took place in our ‘Introduction to Transformative Learning’ class as well as his published work, *Transformative Learning Studies: Educational Vision for the 21st Century* (1999) and its influence with the theoretical background of my research. In particular I have emphasized the idea and practice Ed discusses in his work of ‘Quality of Life Education’—taking a critical eye to what and for what we’re teaching youth.

**Kofi**

This character in the story is a fictive representation of another of my professors, Dr. Kunle Akingbola and specifically refers to conversations that took place in our class, ‘Teaching, Learning and Working in the Non Profit Sector’ as well as the literature reviewed for the course as it pertains to the theoretical background of my thesis. Although I did not use the many useful details of all I
learned in class within the narrative, major parts of the literature and topics in the course on issues of governance, fundraising, capacity building, HR, strategic management, sector trends will be used and applied to the discussion and activities of future POR AMOR strategic planning and organizational structure (construction and re-construction) meetings.

**Humility**

This character is representative of a youth participant, Shykara Beals, in our first annual summer project, Youth 4 Human Rights that took place in the Kingston and Galloway community of East Scarborough in 2008. This project was a collaborative effort between POR AMOR, the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club, the Focus on Youth TDSB initiative project and Amnesty International. The story of Humility’s naming is based on an actual encounter and lesson she experienced during the program for which I have given her the name, Humility, in the story based on my experience of watching her learn this lesson. The poem she reads at the open mic where she meets Strawberry is a poem she wrote during the project which was also included in a recorded musical CD compilation that the youth created. All other details featuring this character are fictive. Not only does this character represent the experience of Shykara but it also represents all the helpful, humble, courageous and lovely young people who have played outstanding roles in the success of POR AMOR projects through their ability to engage us reciprocally in the learning process of effective community development initiatives.

**Moderator**

This character is completely fictive.

**Rachel Gouin**
This character in the story represents my first external interviewee in the process of my data collection. All three of my external interviews involve either directors or executive directors of Canadian non-profit organizations and the conversations were geared towards my understanding of the appreciative aspects of each organization as well as the methods by which these executives managed various aspects of their organizational operations to fuel the overall sustainability and success of their organizations. Rachel works in the fundraiser and donor relations team for InterPares. All accounts of Rachel’s speech during the panel discussion are derived directly from her response to my guided interview questions.

Erin Barton

This character in the story represents my second external interview in the process of my data collection. Erin works in the department of Development for Free the Children. All accounts of Erin’s speech during the panel discussion are derived directly from her responses to my guided interview questions.

Tim Jones

This character in the story represents my third and last external interview in the process of my data collection. Tim Jones holds the position of Executive Director within Artscape. All accounts of Tim’s speech during the panel discussion are derived directly from his responses during my guided interview questions.