Imagining Glace Bay:
An Exploration of Family, History and Place

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

This is an inquiry that explores both then and now. Father and Daughter. Temporality and Geography.

Within these pages stories are used to explore my family’s present and past; migration, settlement, memory, experience and connection to place – Glace Bay, a village on Cape Breton Island. Through narrative, poetry and photography, the contrasting experiences of having lived in Glace Bay in the past, and the struggle to connect with Glace Bay in the present, and future, are explored.

Finally, within this manuscript I examine the impact of my father’s stories and I identify storytelling as an important factor in developing a critical consciousness. My father inspired my sense of social justice at a young age and the impetus for this project was not just to document his stories for the sake of posterity, but also to exemplify the way consciousness is cultivated and passed down; across generations, despite changing landscapes, through story.
Acknowledgements

Oh my sister in life, Natasha.
Thank you for believing in these words and this story.
You read late at night and replied in the morning.
You assembled and re-assembled pages on the ground of Luke's room and made sense of the nonsense.
You reminded me of plotlines and character and impetus.
I hope to be lost in life with you forever.
Thank you.

Dear Pendrith,
Thank you for a second summer flung.
Thank you for your patience in making this book beautiful.
Thank you for endless warmth and gentleness, especially when my spirit breaks.
Thank you.

Gary,
Thank you for being an incredible supervisor.
For trusting me and this project.
For taking time and giving me time.
For just enough space and just enough guidance.
Thank you.
For my family,
Anne, Mort and Debora.

For the strength and delight and quiet sustenance
I receive from each of you.
Thank you.
Thank you again.
And again and again and again.

I love you.
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This book is about a place. The place exists and I have been there. It is on the East Coast of Canada. On the island, Cape Breton. The place is called Glace Bay and I have been there. I have walked the streets, visited the landmarks and smelled the ocean. I have been there and I have memories of the time I spent there but these memories are not the only way I will remember this place. Place is “defined not simply in terms of location and topography, but of the memories enshrined in myth and rite which render it unique” (Beckett, 1996, p. 312). These myths emerge from a history, a not-so-distant past. A legacy that enshrines much of what I know about Family, Morality, and Truth.
Within these pages two people are walking: through passages, through time, together. Ultimately I am writing these words. Some emerge from conversations with my father and others from my own musings, dreams and experience. In the margins, poets, writers and scholars have been invited to help me tell this story. Their words are meant to be read in relation to my own, “our thoughts, images and experiences may converge and break apart, deepen and disentangle connections made in-between, among, around and underneath the lines and spaces on these pages” (Luciani, 2005, p. 30).

I am writing about a common phenomenon. As humans we desire to know where we come from, the path that others took that led us to where we currently sit, stand or lean. These ancient roads may weave across great distance: over oceans, countless borders and treacherous topography. For others, the paths they walk are the same paths their grandmothers and grandfathers have walked for centuries. I am writing about learning and knowing.

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My mother’s youth was a mystery that required an atlas splayed on the ground, tiny fingers tracing the routes of ships: England, Australia, Michigan. My mother’s childhood is spread across the globe, with no one fixed address. My father’s large and boisterous family, on the other hand, was from Somewhere. They lived on the ocean, in Glace Bay – “a mining town at the edge of the earth” (Petrie, 1984). This small place flooded my childhood with stories. Whenever the family gathered, they rejoiced in remembering summers on the Mira, old friends, and stories about
Mother. I caught only snippets from these reminisces, but I gathered this much: there is where we were from. There was no doubt in my child’s mind that this was my history.

In fact, my family in Glace Bay occupied a very brief moment in time. Barely one generation lived in this place. My father and his siblings were born there and as they grew older and went to school and had families, they left. There is little in a disappearing mining town at the edge of the earth for those with professions and more so, aspiration. In the ‘20s and ‘30s and ‘40s the town was booming, and with its expanding landscape came industry and possibility. Later, as coal lost value and the mines started closing, prosperity dwindled and there was no reason to stay.

For most people my age, this time period belongs to their grandparents. My father waited a while, before settling down and starting a family. My father, the youngest of the siblings, is eighty-one years old. My oldest uncle would be over one hundred, would that he were alive today. All this to say, this time period, these memories, this important place were not the fables told in a grandparent’s home, but rather they are close: whispers from a parent, a bedtime story, a tale told holding hands on the way to school. This is the intimacy of child and parent which shapes my drive to write, to learn and to listen.

When we come together we are transgressing an invisible generation which lies between us. As I write I’m imagining a series of family photographs filled with the unborn, unaware of these stories, this past, this history. And it is sandwiched between these two silent generations, the invisible and the unborn, that I find solace.

Her relationships had an implied intimacy; after all, she was flesh and blood kin (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 59).
THIS, THIS IS WHY

The stories have been filtered over time
Immersing myself in a lost world
Trying not to forget:

The ice truck
Funeral parlour hide-and-go-seek
Miner strikes
Wartime rations
Secret societies
Bootlegger aunties
Peddlers-turn-movie moguls
Radio show poetics
Cock fights
and more

These fragments confound me
Leave me longing
Hoping they won’t leave me
That you won’t

Arts-informed research brings together the systematic and rigorous qualities of scientific inquiry with the artistic and imaginative qualities of the arts. In so doing the process of researching becomes creative and responsive and the representational form for communication embodies elements of various art forms – poetry, fiction, drama, photography, film and video, dance, music…such inquiry processes are organic and fluid and the representation of the work reflects qualities of multidimensional lives through multiple media forms (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 10)
Because I have been making my own memories
And I only have so much room

I want to sit with you
Together, tell stories
Preserve myths
Almost disappeared

Of transitory places
Of time passed
Of characters
Of history
Of family
Of birth
Of loss

We don’t have many places to look
We don’t have many knees to sit on
We need you
We need to learn from you
About us
About them
About you
About there.
Salman Rushdie (1981) speaks of broken mirrors. I align myself with him and the writers he
describes who “are haunted by some loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being
mutated into pillars of salt” (p. 11). Rushdie claims the writer who looks to reclaim the past “is obliged
to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost,” in the process the
writer inevitably creates “fictions, not actual cities and villages, invisible ones, imaginary homelands”
(p. 11). I am sure there are pivotal moments and stories and characters missing from the collage
of memories my father shared with me. I am sure when he reads this manuscript he will tell me a
myriad of stories that could have been included. We will slap our foreheads and exclaim, “Why didn't
I ask about so and so?” “Why didn't I tell her about this and that?” Some of the fragments that are
amongst the shards of mirror not reflected in this account will remain lost, others scribbled on scraps
of paper, others still will be told to children, grandchildren and friends. At moments, some memories
will be reflected and others won't. I cannot apologize for the way the mirror broke, just as I cannot
apologize for the mirror breaking in the first place. Such are the shortcomings of experience,
subjectivity, writing and research.

Imaginary homelands are not perfect reflections of the past, they cannot be. But Rushdie claims
the “broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed…it was
precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative
for me” (p. 12). When I speak of the past, when I trace my history, when I tell stories, I am not
attempting to recreate things exactly as they were. In the fragmented reflection of my own broken mirrors I see a past riddled with stories, some of them recorded within these pages: in photographs, in storytelling, in poetry, in narrative, in scholarly works, in dreams.

How do we make sense of the broken fragments that make up a lifetime, a past, a history? What is it we learn from the remains of memory? How do we interpret the past, for ourselves in the present? I turn once again to Rushdie, poet and theorist familiar with loss and who struggles with memory. He says, “Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved” (p. 12). It is my hope that within this work one might glean a glimmer of meaning; of how we come to know, how and why we share, how we begin to learn from, and interpret the past.
I hold a pillow to my chest. Through the computer screen my father’s eyes stare sincerely into my own. The video camera was perched a bit too high and the footage is tipped on a slant.

He says, “They’re all family stories. My recollective of the stories, really. It’s a good thing you’re getting me now because the memory is fast going.” He laughs, “I would have been better a couple years ago.”

My index finger taps lightly against the space bar, pause.
I take a breath. I hate when he talks like that. His memory is sharp and he is a fantastic storyteller.

I am watching the video from when we first sat down together. I sat down with my father at the bottom of our house to listen, but also to capture elusive peeks into his past. To harvest the mind’s most cherished fruit, memory. Together we spoke and laughed and whispered, watched by the red eye of the camera nestled discretely in the corner. Although aware we were being recorded, the footage reveals the comfort of family: father and daughter sitting together, easily speaking, interrupting and waiting. We were down there for hours at a time, on several occasions.

I compose myself and tap the spacebar one more time, play.

The basement is dank. It is late. Almost midnight. It isn’t unusual for us to be the last ones awake. My father, Mort, is settled in a large forest green leather chair. He has pushed the chair uncomfortably close to the television. The hockey game is just finishing. The television sound is off. He prefers to listen to radio announcers. Pictures and paintings and old family relics are stacked in boxes, all around. I am sitting on a chair with wheels, the noise of twirling and twisting from time to time is audible through the camera’s sensitive microphone.

He adjusts himself in the seat, absent-mindedly massaging his knuckles. He rubs his eyes and closes them tightly, twice. His white beard is well-trimmed, and his mustache is long. He keeps saying he wants to grow it out and curl the sides like Sherlock Holmes. My sister and I got him mustache wax for his birthday this year. He still hasn’t used it. He clears his throat several times and quickly

In the sounds of our voices we didn’t hide or withdraw from the other. Voice was our most intimate emotional, intellectual and spiritual meeting place (Cole, 1999, p. 336)
glances up at the camera, before turning to me.

“I guess I could talk about my grandfather. He came first from the Ukraine and he got to Cape Breton somewhere around 1890,” my father begins.

“Did he say why he left?” I interject.

“His story was that the Cossacks came into town, lined up the family against the barn and took the able-bodied young people and said to them, take a horse from the farm, you’re in the army now and marched them off to the Czar’s army with a knife and tin cups for eating their meals. I can just picture them jangling against his belt and riding off into the wilderness on a Clydesdale horse. He said he was trained as a cavalry fighter and he learned swordsmanship and he practiced that when he went to war.

“Apparently he left the Ukraine and somehow or other ended up in Argentina, leaving his wife behind. Again it gets kind of murky. At this moment in time, as he describes it, he’s in Argentina and he’s a gaucho, that’s a cowboy. He is a gaucho, and they’re rounding up steers in Argentina and at this point he opens his shirt and shows me this big long cut.”

My father draws a line from his throat straight down to his belly button.

“He says it’s a sabre cut which he got from fighting the rustlers who came to steal the cows that were exempt from military service in the Ukraine until “the 1874 military reform, which required universal military service but also drastically reduced the length of service required of those who held higher educational degrees. Jewish parents, previously reluctant to send their children to Russian schools, now increasingly relented. The number of Jewish students in gymnasiums doubled between 1870 and 1879. (Zipperstein, 1985, p. 19)
they were gathering in the Argentine. And that was fascinating for a little boy to hear. He said he fought them off because he knew how to fight with a sword and they didn't have any other weapons. Then it shifts to Cape Breton. How he got to Cape Breton, or why or how, that's a blank.”

My father shrugs. I shrug.

This first blank is of significance. There are many more to come. Throughout our talks and throughout my travels, absence and space, surface repeatedly as themes. Whether it is a blank in memory, the passage of time, missing buildings or the space between words, these recesses proffer different responses at
different times; intrigue, sorrow and imagination, for example. And such is to be expected in this sort of project, this is the reason I am endeavouring a record. We (my father and I) are not able to store completely the infinite knowledge or books of information passed down over the generations through words. In fact, we are both prone to forget where we're going, or how we got on to a subject in the first place. What we remember are deep scars etched on to skin, the jangle of tin cups as a horse rides off into the distance.

What we remember are plot lines and action moments. We skim over details: the names of villages, the cost of passage, the whereabouts of women. We are taught to remember the man wielded a sword and we forget the name of his mother. And so within these blanks and pauses, buried in the dirt where a house used to stand, I remind myself once more what it means to be absent, forgotten, left out, erased. In the search for my own beginnings I do not forget that the land, the coal and the water belonged to Nations of people before European boats pulled into the harbour. In remembering the exile of a Jewish man, I do not forget that atrocities are being committed against Palestinian people, in the name of anti-Semitism. In following my family's stories of hardship, poverty and forced migration, I do not forget the whiteness of my skin and the privilege I glean from it.

Within the first minutes of our speaking, a story has been told. A story that ends in a blank, yet sparks a history. How or why Solomon Fine arrived remains a mystery, but he did, and he started the first of my family's homes in Cape Breton, in a small town suitably named, Homeville.
I ask my father about the other side of the family, his father’s side.

“I don’t know anything about the man, my grandfather” he answers quickly. “Other then,” he ventures cautiously, as his eyes search the ceiling for details, “He tells a story that my father’s father was a cantor in Odessa and he died leaving the mother and the three brothers. He and his two brothers were the choir in their father’s shul. My father, who had just completed his apprenticeship as a carpenter at the age of sixteen or seventeen, was a young man. I think about it now, his father died at the same time for him that my father did for me.”

My mind flips through pictures of myself at sixteen. Blue hair, platform boots, miniskirt, garterbelt and...
fishnet stockings. I realize I don’t know what my father looked like at that age.

“My father was the oldest and he decided that the best choice for him was to strike out for Europe. He worked his way across Europe doing odd jobs and got as far as Wales. I don’t know what town in Wales but one of the coalmining towns, obviously.”

“He was mining?” I asked. I never heard that before.

“He got a job in one of the coal mines in Wales digging coal. That’s what you do there. He said they had to dig the coal on their knees. They’d first chop it with an axe and then shovel it on their knees into the little cars that took it back up to the surface. He did that for a number of years.

“The company posted notices, that anybody wanting to go mine coal in the New World could sign up. Free passage and then pay them back after you got there from your wages. So my father signed up for that. He signed up for that and got onboard ship and landed in Cape Breton.”

“So how did he get out of the contract?” I asked, imagining a man from The Company waiting at the dock with a long list of names.

“He just disappeared. He said when he got off that boat there was no way he was going to go back into the mine and shovel anything.

“After he got established he sent for the family. He sent for his mother, and two brothers. His
mother arrived in Cape Breton. His two brothers got off the boat in New York and stayed.”

“Were they supposed to?” I asked.

“No, they were supposed to come here to Cape Breton but being a little bit smarter than my father they said, ‘We’re not going to dig coal.’

“But my father never did dig coal anyway.”

And so Solomon Fine and then Ben Siegel arrive with dirty boots on the shores of Cape Breton. A new century was beginning and the landscape was changing. Cars, coal and moving pictures.

Ben Siegel keeps his word and never returns to the mine. He paints houses and searches out the tiny Jewish community burgeoning in Glace Bay. Eventually, he makes friends with a family named Myers and through them he is introduced to a young, pretty girl living on a farm in Homeville, Dora Fine.

Dora was not an ordinary girl. It was not her marriage to a man much older that made her unordinary, nor the fact that she birthed seven children. Both were common occurrences at the turn of the century. My father tells a story about when Dora was just a girl, still living on the farm.
DORA

Your mother,
Mother.
“Mother would…”

A cousin,
Dodging the draft
In World War I
Fled his home
To avoid conscription

In Mother’s home
He slept for weeks
Safe and secure

When she saw police
Striding down the walk
Trampling welcome mats
Knocking and then not
Waiting to come in

Figure E: Dora’s Wedding, June 8th, 1909, from personal collection
She stashed him
Behind the Steinway
And when she
Greeted them
Official smiles and
Tipped constable hats
She promptly sat down
To play

They searched and
She nodded as
They lifted vases
Peered in closets
Still playing Joplin
Jazz piano

Finally they left empty-handed
The stowaway emerged from his
Ivory safe house
Mind dazzled by
Romping melody vibrations

Dora, did you really have to play
So loud?
When they marry Ben joins Dora on the Fine family farm. My father describes the farm in Homeville as “a godforsaken, rocky patch of dirt. I don’t think you could grow a thing on it. I recall my father showing me the fence that he helped my grandfather build out of rocks from the farm. They had to take the stones out to try and grow something. Honest to god the fence was about 3 feet high and about 2 feet wide and it stretched around the whole thing. It was a fair sized farm, and it went all the way around. I couldn’t believe that someone would do it. Anyway, they grew vegetables on the farm, to feed the family.”

From this rocky beginning my family began to sink their roots into Cape Breton soil. Solomon and Ben, arriving at different times on different ships from across the same waters. Working together to move stone after stone so their family can eat. Dora hides an absconder behind her piano, never flinching as police search her home.

Here I am one century later. I am trying to understand more about this history, the world that housed and cuddled and coddled my father. Through sharing memories we are creating a collective history, a community of people, however small, that understand who we are and where we come from. But we can only share so much. Memory has limits, for the aged and the young. There will always be empty spaces, moments lost forever, memories we are told and then promptly forget. I am on a quest to preserve memory. I am searching for stories. I am asking my father to take me back to his places, that place, Glace Bay.

Collective memory differs from history…its is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive. By definition, it does not exceed the boundaries of the group (Halbwachs as cited in Cole, 2001, p. 131)
I am sitting in an uncomfortable chair in the lobby of Kensington Gardens. My uncle lives here, my father’s brother. His only living sibling. I am sitting in the lobby, like a coward. My parents haven’t arrived yet and I do not want to go up there alone. I do not want to go up the elevator and walk past the nurse’s station and into his room. I do not know where he will be: sitting in a chair, sleeping, or propped up in bed. He might hold my hand, or try to kiss it. I will not know what to say. Loudly. I will not know what to yell into his hearing aid as he holds my hand and I sit there uncomfortably beside his bed.

Figure F: East Ocean, 2010, Sojourner Truth Parsons
The last time I was here, with my parents and sister and cousins, I was looking at the pictures perched on top of the dresser. His wedding day, his daughter’s university graduation, his grandson playing t-ball. I picked up a frame that showed his two children smiling, Jack’s arm protectively wrapped around Bunny. A photograph fell out from behind the one displayed. A picture of Irving in his wheelchair, a slack-jaw smile curled on his face. On either side of his hunched frame were skinny blonde ladies in tassled silver bikinis. I turned the picture over: *We had so much fun with you, Irving! Love from, the Sparklettes XXX.* We laughed, we laughed so hard we were crying. It was perhaps the strangest thing any of us had seen, never mind imagined. They must have been a team of dancers hired by the Home to entertain the residents. We didn’t ask. He had clearly enjoyed himself.

I imagined finding that picture now, alone. Grinning for half a moment, looking awkwardly around the room, looking embarrassedly at Irving, putting the photo back in its place before delicately resuming my place by his side.

My parents arrive, I remind them of the Sparklettes and we laugh as we go up the elevator. My father brought some pictures to show Irving. Old pictures of Glace Bay.

Irving is sitting in a chair, head tilted back, sleeping. We file in, each taking a turn to touch his body: squeeze his shoulder, hold his hand, kiss his cheek.

“Irv, look at this, it’s a picture of you and Leah,” my father passes Irving a faded photograph.
Irving, with shakey hands holds the picture in front of his face, squinting through his glasses, trying to keep it still.

“Wh-wh-who is that?” he looks inquisitively up at his younger brother.

“That’s you,” he points to a trim man in an air force uniform, “And that’s Leah. Malka. Your sister, Leah.”

“Oh really?” he asks, “And who’s that?” he points again to the outline of his younger self.

“Irving, that’s you,” my father explains, “Here, look at this one, here’s Mother.”

“Who’s that?” Irving waves the picture around.

“That’s Mother. There she is on the couch. Do you remember that apartment?”

“Who’s that?” Irving asks again angrily, squinting and throwing the photograph back at my father.

The parade of pictures and names and explanations continue. I desperately want my father to stop. “He doesn’t remember,” I cry out in my mind, “He is frustrated, he can tell he’s not getting it right.”
I remain silent. He might remember. He might have a moment and remember his mother in her wallpapered apartment before she died over twenty years ago. My father wants to share these moments with him. He wants to share these memories and these faces with the only other person who can share in their delights. He wants to look in his eyes and see that he remembers his little brother, the young boy who looked up to him, the airplanes he flew, the sisters they shared, the children he created. Irving can't. Irving can't remember and with a terrible sigh my father sits down on the bed, still clutching the photographs.

My father stares at the ground. He stares right through the pilly nursing home carpet. When he looks up, his eyes soften. I watch my father's frustration turn to acceptance. With loving and gentle hands my father reaches across to his brother. He smooths his disheveled shirt. He rights his reading glasses which were shaken askew. He sits back down and flips quietly through the pictures.

A silence fills the room.

My mother pipes up and tells Irving about the New Years Eve fondue party at Bunny's. My sister tells us the latest debacle she is having with her boss. We laugh amongst ourselves and eat peppermint patties from the large container that sits next to his bed. Irving starts to fall asleep. We call the nurse, file out the room, and leave the building.

That night I dreamed a dream I dreamed before. A dream that left the child me covered in sweat, breathing heavily. When I opened my eyes, tears poured out from behind the tightened muscles

For many people, family constitutes not just a presence but an absence as well. Missing people. Ghosts of the past. People who live in our heads. Lives once known that have been lost (Berger & Quinney, 2005, p.13)
that kept my eyes squeezed shut. I awoke with the same panic I felt as a child: a lingering sense of helplessness.

The dream begins in a desert.

The dream begins in a desert. It is a desert because there is nothing, not because of sand, wind, or camels. Slowly, as if mounted on the back of a bird, we move closer to a far away tree. The air is cool and stagnant. The tree is alone and as we approach we can see its many branches, gnarled with time and reaching out.

High up in the branches is a tree house, a simple one-room piece made with old boards, fading, knotted, and nailed together hastily. A glow streams from the pane-less window and as we peek in a candle-lit dinner table lies directly under us, covered with empty plates and glasses, dirty napkins, bottles of wine and eaten birds. It smells like a holiday, and a smile naturally begins to form in the corners of our mouths. There is music playing and swirling throughout the room, it is picking up children and putting them on our shoulders. It is twirling, holding little hands, and laughing heartily in an overstuffed chair. We hear heated conversations and an eruption of giggles. There are white hairs and dark hairs and baby hairs. We have the feeling that if we were to grab a pillow and lie down quietly in a corner, no one would notice, and if they did, they wouldn’t mind. We could watch their warmness and drift comfortably to sleep.

Jung makes a “distinction between big and little dreams. Little dreams are limited to the affairs of everyday life, while big dreams have such a lasting impact on individuals they are often remembered for a lifetime. Big dreams are rich in the symbols of myth and religion – archetypes – that arise from the collective unconscious of humanity rather than from the personal unconscious of the individual”

(Young, 1999, p. 18)
Eventually I realized I knew this family, I was part of it. I belonged here, with these familiar people. In fact, I had been here the whole time. I danced and threw my arms around welcoming necks. I swung and kissed and hugged and laughed. Candle glow sparkled across the room and even though it was small, it felt like there were endless laps and cheeks and shoulders.

I was back at the window, taking a moment away from the celebration to stare across a clear blue sky expanding on all sides. Far in the distance I could see a dark cloud moving closer. It seemed to be moving incredibly quickly, engulfing everything it passed over. I could see the darkness approaching, and nothing beyond it from where it came. No one else seemed concerned. It was making me anxious and I stood at the window, my little fingernails digging into the wooden pane, scratching slowly as I leaned forward trying to get a better look. As it approached it started to take shape. The head of a crow was speeding toward us - its body, an expanse of nothing, trailed behind it. Like an ocean or a heavy black blanket.

There was only a moment before panic set in. The giant crow’s head thrust itself forward, its steely eyes fixed on a point far beyond us. I could hear movement. I could hear screaming. I knew something awful was about to happen. Family members looked out the windows and then at each other. There was a brief second of quiet.

A giant claw plunged through the wooden roof, through the small rug on the floor and out the bottom of the house. Another claw came crashing through the window. I was flung head first through the broken glass. My body crumpled as I hit the ground. I looked up to see the tree
lifting. The house was broken but hanging on. I could just make out tiny forms of people, clinging to doorknobs and ragged pieces of wood.

The bird soared, un-phased. It happened in one smooth motion. The sky went dark above me and I squinted into the abyss. The world was black, enveloped by shadow. When I could finally make out a pale light in the distance, it was dim and grey. The darkness lifted, replaced by a cold dull sky. I was alone. The ground was hard and although it looked like sand, not a grain lifted when I scuffed my running shoe against it. I touched my hand to the floor. It was chilly. Hard and lifeless, it was as if the wind had smoothed the dangerous points on the surface of a pockmarked planet.

I did not scream, I did not cry, I did not wander. I knew there was nothing out there. The dim of the sky, the cool desert floor, even the wind felt eerily still. I sat down. I held my legs and pressed forehead to knees. I tried to conjure the face of family members and the feeling of warm liquid sliding down my throat. I couldn’t. I tried to remember a name, a laugh, a smell. I couldn’t.

The ground grew cold against my small bare legs. I stood slowly, brushed myself off, forgetting for a moment there was no need. I stared in the direction the bird had flown. It seemed forever had passed and there was nothing more to come. I cried. I stopped when I realized it didn’t matter.
The dream reflects my anxieties over memory, its fallibility, the inevitability of the bird, of darkness, of blanks. The dream acts as a reminder. A reminder of the precariousness of the people and structures that keep me grounded. An entire generation I took for granted is aging, their memories fading, and I haven’t learned enough. Finally, I have left the uneasy space of being completely lost in youth. As a grown person I feel supported and nourished by my family and history. The swoop of the bird, that plucks mind and body, is beyond my control. I do not want to feel at war with the bird. I do want to protect my tree, my home, the walls: the foundation. I do not want to be alone, I want to hear and talk and walk with my family. Learn from their lessons, trace their paths and pass on their stories.

You know they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and liveable acreage. Occasionally the river ‘floods’ these places. ‘Floods’ is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.

(Toni Morrison as cited in Neilsen, 2007, p. 256)

and so far removed am I from the ocean that even my dreams take place in the desert.
Glace Bay did not spring from salty air. Glace Bay was chipped from cliffs and dug out of the sea. Coal was the Earth’s fuel at the turn of the 19th century, and coalmines were as good as gold. Glace Bay could be rich they thought, except that it is so cold.

The French named it Baie de Glace, Ice Bay, since it was encased in ice during the winter months. They mined the coal in Glace Bay and brought it to build their fortress further south in Louisbourg, a port that could be used year-round. The French used that fortress to defend the land, but the English still prevailed (MacDonald, 2009).
By the late 1800s there were several small unproductive coalmining companies throughout Cape Breton. Mining companies suffered, as they couldn't operate during the cold winters. Thousands of workers were laid off until the ice thawed. The mines were in a decrepit state and there was no money to modernize and get them running properly (MacDonald, 2009; Mellor, 1983).

A Cape Breton businessman, A.C. Ross, had the foresight to imagine merging the small companies into one large company. He envisioned a railroad that would connect Sydney and Glace Bay to Louisbourg, so coal could be exported throughout the year. He approached an American business mogul to fund the company and in 1894, with the help of the Nova Scotia provincial government was successful in creating the Dominion Coal Company. Dominion was granted a lease of ninety-nine years and was given an exclusive monopoly for coal mining on the island of Cape Breton. Mainland Nova Scotia was excluded from this agreement. “Thus, in one swift stroke of the pen, the enormous natural resources of Cape Breton had been confiscated from the citizens and handed over to an international consortium of doubtful reputation” (Mellor, 1983 p. 2).

I must take pause here in the midst of our history lesson. The deal between the government and private businessmen that signed away Cape Breton fortunes, is just one of the points of contention between Cape Bretoners and mainlanders.
“Cape Breton is Cape Breton and Nova Scotia is Nova Scotia,” my father looks me sternly in the eye, to make sure I’ve taken in this Truth. “Halifax is Nova Scotia and Glace Bay is Cape Breton. There is a difference. We looked at Nova Scotians as different people. Well for the Cape Bretoners that live there, they probably still see that difference. Even for those of us who are long gone, it’s an important distinction to make.”

My father taught me many lessons and his position as a Cape Bretoner, informed much of who he is. I learned, just because it says so on a map does not make it so. I learned, poorer groups of people are often exploited by the powerful.

“The Dominion Coal Company recruited workers from all over Europe and the Canadian government added the Cape Breton coalfields as an option for pioneers looking to settle the New World. By 1901, the population in Glace Bay boomed as thousands of Scottish and Acadian immigrants, Irish and English immigrants, Polish immigrants, Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe and Black Caribbean families poured into the small town” (MacDonald, 2009).

Other lands will love me
And charm me for a while,
Yet ever turns my truant heart
Back to my Breton Isle.
In the whispering of the winds,
The music of the sea,
I hear Cape Breton calling,
And I know she’s calling me.

Where the friends are truest,
Where the skies are bluest,
Where the waters smile,
Back to my Breton Isle;
For, though in other lands I roam,
The hand of memory leads me home.

In dreams I see her wooded hills,
Her meadows fair and wide;
Visions of my own dear land
Come to me o’er the throbbing tide.
I see her cliffs like loving arms
Held high above the foam;
Cape Breton stands with outstretched hands
To bid me welcome home.

(Walsh, 1915, p. 65)
The first time Glace Bay was reported as a town of over one thousand people was in 1891 (White, 1979, p. 8). The town just kept growing. It grew and grew and grew:

1891: 2,459
1901: 6,945
1911: 16,562
1921: 17,007
1931: 20,706

Glace Bay and the surrounding areas experienced accommodation shortages, overcrowding, lack of sanitation, disease and labour strife. The Dominion Coal Company erected hundreds of miners’ houses and large boardinghouses to shelter the excess. “The company had no commitment to the workers. They were easily hired and easily replaced. The owners owned, the workers produced. The owners profited from the workers’ production and the owners paid the workers a bare wage to continue the process” (White, 1979, p. 7). The prosperity of the town was growing, but doing so at the expense of the low-paid miners.

Schools were built, electricity was introduced, a town council and mayor were elected. The future of Glace Bay looked so promising that the first mayor proclaimed: “While coal is King and the basis of the industrial prosperity of this country and the world, we have every reason to feel that at no distant date, Glace Bay will take its place among the leading cities of Canada…there is employment for everyone willing to work, wages are good and good order is maintained. Our people are law abiding, hospitable and progressive!” (Mellor, 1983, p. 7).
Ben and Dora Siegel move from the family farm in Homeville to boomtown Glace Bay. They start out as proprietors of a small ice cream shop that was housed in a building owned by Dora’s aunt, Slava.

Slava was a giant woman, built like an ox, with large hands and sausage fingers. Her masculine face and towering figure stood in deep contrast to her husband, Mendel. Mendel was a thin, sickly man who sat hunched in a corner, studying Torah all day long. Mendel barely spoke to anyone, barely lifted his eyes from his books.

Slava owned the building on Commercial Street that once housed my grandfather’s ice cream parlour. Slava owned the building because she was a bootlegger.

“It is said that Slava would have a water bottle tied around her waist full of whiskey. She would accept money from a guy and he would hold out his cup and she would throw her leg on his chair, hike up her skirt, squirt whiskey into the cup and pass it back to him. From that business she was able to send two of her boys to medical school!”

Ben and Dora eventually sell the ice cream parlour, opting instead to follow their old friends, the Meyers, into the wholesale business. They start a wholesale and sell bulk goods to smaller groceries in the area. Later, they also own a garage that was one of the first car dealerships in Canada.
Unfortunately, the promising future set forth by the mayor was not so easy to accomplish. The markets for coal and steel were unreliable, and in order for the company to survive it had to remain profitable. “With falling markets lowering profit margins, costs of production would have to be reduced drastically, and cost reduction would be directed against miners’ and steelworkers’ wages, which were already far beneath the poverty level” (Mellor, 1983, p. 13). Workers were not earning enough to get by and in order to survive they were forced into debt by purchasing their food, clothing and even their mining tools and explosives from the company store. “When you owed money to the store, which was most of the time, the company would take it out of your pay.” (The People’s History, 1979, p. 4). Miners often had no real money leftover from their paycheques and could not shop at a private grocery. Their debts piled so high that they had no chance of paying them off. They were indebted to the company for the rest of their lives.

As the conditions for miners grew worse, their debts mounted and their families grew hungry, unrest permeated throughout the town. Unions fought for higher wages, an eight-hour day, payment in cash rather than credit and for adequate health and safety regulations in the mines (The People’s History, 1979, p. 6).
Strikes perforated the landscape of Glace Bay in the early 1900s. Dominion and later BESCO (British Empire Steel and Coal Company) launched brutal attacks on workers’ unions. They laid off the most active union members, hired hundreds of armed private police, used the Canadian militia, employed scabs from across the region and evicted strikers from their company-owned homes, cut off food and fuel supplies through their company stores and even killed several striking miners (The People’s History, 1979). Exploitation causing abject poverty and destitution was followed by union vigor. Union leaders, such as J.B. McLachlan gained the status of local heroes.

J.B. McLachlan was both lauded and condemned. He led parades and gave speeches on street corners. He rallied the workers to join the United Mine Workers of America and was fired from the job he had been working since he was seven years old. He stood his ground against soldiers and exposed corruption from his position as a journalist. He watched men be dragged from their homes by police and batons used against desperate women. Priests denounced him. Workers adored him (Frank, 1999). Charlie MacKinnon wrote a song about him, it went:

Jim B. McLachlan, the leader of men;
J. B. McLachlan united them and then
Held high the torch of freedom for all,
And asked his fellow miners to never let it fall.
(as cited by Frank, 1999, p. 2).
J. B. McLachlan was known for the impassioned speeches he delivered in the local cinemas. He was delivering just such a speech in 1925, as Ben and his eldest son, Nate, were stocking molasses in the warehouse. Giant barrels four feet high.

On this particular day, McLachlan was pacing the wooden stage of the Russell Theatre on Commercial Street. Hundreds of miners anxiously sat in their seats.

He threw off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. His pipe issued a stream of smoke. Restlessly, he moved back and forth, his red moustache bristling with anger. He stopped at the centre of the stage, focusing the coal miners’ attention on what he was about to say (Frank, 1999).

“Only a few short years ago the miners of Nova Scotia were on their knees, afraid of the boss, while he kicked them in contempt. The miners were reasonable then; today they are off their knees, and stand erect and organized, drilling and disciplining themselves for the day when they shall be in the saddle.

“The workers of this land are our comrades and brothers, the capitalists of this land our robber enemies, the complete extermination of the latter our aim (Frank, 1999).
“Brothers, stand with me now as we cry out the words of comrade Shelley:

_Rise like lions after slumber_  
_In unvanquishable number;_  
_Shake your chains to earth like dew_  
_Which in sleep has fallen you –_  
_Ye are many – they are few._"  
(as cited by Frank, 1999, p. 353)

The workers rose to their feet and joined McLachlan in chanting, ‘We are many. They are few. We are many. They are few.’

McLachlan held his hands in the air and the room quieted.

“Are you hungry?” the question echoed off velvet walls.

The room erupted in hollers and yelps.

“If I were hungry I know where I would go,” McLachlan boldly declared. “Follow me!”

He marched off the stage. The workers thundered with applause as they followed him down the street.
Ben and Nate, still counting barrels in the warehouse, heard a commotion from way down Union Street. They hurried to the front of the building, and peered out from behind the large wooden doors.

The clamoring strikers barreled up the road, J.B. MacLachlan leading the pack, they whistled and hollered and waved placards towards the sky.

Ben and Nate rushed out of the building. They ran across the street to the railroad station. Standing, arms at their sides as hoards of hungry men rushed towards their store.

The miners ransacked the building. They pushed over the giant barrels of molasses, seven hundred sticky pounds of it flooding the floors. They emptied grain sacks and stuffed flour in their pockets. Beans spilled. Cans crashed. One man took a knife, punctured a container of peaches and shoveled them hurriedly in his mouth. He pocketed the rest for his large Irish family.

Nate looked pleadingly up at his father. “What are we going to do?”

Ben looked down at his young son. Calmly, he picked up his hand. “We’re going to the bank and we’re going to take out a loan,” he said. “We’re going to clean up this mess. We’re going to move on with our lives. And if it happens tomorrow, we’ll do the same.”

They stood together and watched as the destruction continued. A man ran from the store, a trail of
pinto beans leaking from his full pockets. Another man cradling a can of tomatoes, hung his head, as he hurried past Ben, never looking him in the eye. Others stood on the periphery, watching the mess, until boredom won, and they too walked away.

It didn’t last long, and they never returned. As promised, Ben borrowed money, cleaned up and moved on.

Ben and Dora helped in the miners’ striking efforts, collecting money and food to distribute to hungry families. They also accepted chits from grocers that the union distributed to striking miners. They weren’t worth a penny. All this happened before my father was born. These are the stories he grew up with.

My father told me, “That’s where I got my sense of community and giving back because both Mother and Father were devoted to doing things for the community.” I feel similarly.
In the search for where, or place, or there, it is useful to find a map; lines on a page that show you where to go and what to look for. However, maps are not always truth tellers. Those who live within assigned borders do not always appreciate their titles. Maps made by surveyors to plan routes or shortcuts outline topography and landmarks, but cannot detail how a person interacts with place. They cannot know the significance of an alleyway or field.
A place “does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls” (Calvino, 1972, p. 11). A map on its own would not be enough. I could look at the streets and the banisters and the steps, but they would be empty, meaningless. If I were to really know Glace Bay I would need a guide. I would need to hear the whisper of experience as I drifted from one place to the next.

We sat down to make a map that would lead me to my father’s youthful places. We lay a large sheet of newsprint down on the table in my parent’s dining room. We lay markers and pens beside it.

“After you’ve told me about these places, I will visit them,” I explain, “I will go to these places that you mark on the map, this memory map. I will visit all of these places.”

We began with the centre of the universe. And like most children, the centre of his universe was his home.

“The centre of my universe in Glace Bay? That would have to be the house on Minto Street.

“Soon after my parents left the farm, my maternal grandfather and grandmother joined them in town. My father bought two houses on Minto Street, nine and eleven. We lived at eleven and they lived at nine. I grew up with my grandparents next door.
“My grandparents had a barn and in that barn they had a horse, a couple geese, a hen coop in the yard and a cow which gave us all lots of milk. My grandmother made cheese from that milk. In their kitchen there was always a hanging bag dripping with curds. Excellent!” my father laughs heartily at the memory of salty curds.

“As the youngest in the family I could always retreat to my grandmother’s house. There, to be comforted and my tears dried and fed lots of fresh butter on fresh bread, you can’t beat it I tell you. She made fabulous pies, I can taste them right now.”
The visceral memory of the pies and the curds brings back several memories of my father's grandmother and grandfather.

“My grandmother was quite remarkable. She was a very learned woman in the Ukraine. She could speak Hebrew and Yiddish, although I only talked to her in English. It was very unusual for a woman to attain the status she had in terms of Talmud and being able to hold her own with the people who would come by the house at suppertime. There were always great conversations of which she was an integral part. The language in the house was a combination of English and Yiddish. Nate got some Yiddish. Louis got a little bit of a Yiddish. I got none. Zero.

“My grandfather had a marvelous memory, he was fantastic. He did the whole Yom Kippur service from beginning to end and he couldn’t see a word. He was completely blind. He belted it out and he had a great voice. He was just a layman but he had a lot of weight in the community because he and my grandmother started the first shul in Glace Bay, out of their house on Minto Street.”

The map we made that day is like no other map. The X which marked the centre, the home, were the first two lines we etched onto it. With the two houses on Minto Street side by side, the vastness of the universe is narrowed to a centre. In the sprawling body of space, he named this place, his home, as the heart.

When internalized maps are made explicit, as they are in the memory mapping project, they present important prompts for narrative exploration. (Nash & Garrett-Petts, 2007, p. 127)
Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan believes it is difficult to speak of space without relating it to place. “Sooner or later,” says Tuan, “we pull our eyes away from the horizon and turn them to the dirt under our feet and the neighborhood which surrounds us; we look at the dot on the map and find ourselves wondering what the place looks like and what kind of people live there. Space contains place, but it also misrepresents place; space is an object of thought, whereas place is a centre of meaning constructed by experience” (as cited in Ryden, 1993, p. 37).

The concept of space is abstract and ambiguous. Open space has no anchor. It ‘has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed’ (Tuan, 1977, p. 54). The physical manifestation of space is best understood in relation to something it is not - it is not place. Space is not a fixed edifice, with wooden walls and people inside the walls. It is from the comfort of experience, within a home, within a town, that a place is born. Memories are made and time passes.

The map we made reveals the world of my father’s youth. After the X there were other lines and circles and stars and scribbles. We named them as we penned them in: the mine, school, the shul, the cottage. The only roads we needed to draw were those that brought us from one place to another.

The map on it’s own, however, is inadequate. The map is inadequate because it remains a two-dimensional illustration. This monoplane flattens not only the rustle of leaves or the chimney of an old steam engine; it squashes experience, emotion, dreams. The map may not describe personal experience, but it can strive to act as a catalyst for telling stories and for remembering places.
The map tells me where certain hills are, but I retain in my legs the physical memory of what it feels like for a child to climb them. It tells me where certain buildings are, but I know what they look like inside and out—and not just as a photograph freezes an image, but what they look like at different times of the day and year...The map reminds me how dirt roads run off into the hills north of where we lived, but what it doesn’t tell me—what I have to superimpose on it from my own experience, my own memory—is how one sunny fall day my father and I went exploring those roads in his beat-up old convertible, how I wasn't quite sure if he knew where he was going and didn't really care, how I wanted that afternoon and that car and those roads to go on forever. (Ryden, 1993, p. 20)

We are back at the table. I ask where we can go from his home on Minto Street.

“Well here we are on Minto Street,” my father takes the pen and points to the X that marks his childhood home. He slowly draws a line up from the X, “Minto Street moved up the hill and would run almost all the way to the 1B mine.” He draws a small circle a few inches above the X.

“This was the big mine where they were working a mile and a half under the sea, bringing up coal. A mile and a half, can you imagine that? A mile is a long way. It would run straight under the sea a mile and a half.”

“Did you ever go down into a mine?” I ask.

Any exploration of place as a phenomenon of direct experience cannot be undertaken in the terms of formal geography...It must, instead, be concerned with the entire range of experience through which we all know and make places (Edward Relph as cited in Walter, 1988, p. 118)
“No, I would never go down into the mine. The picture of the outside of the mine is downstairs, with the ponies. Do you remember seeing that? The ponies would be down in the mine all year long and when the miners vacationed, all the miners had the same two-week vacation, they would bring the ponies up.

“After a couple of years the ponies were all blind. But they’d be up there milling around out in the field near the mineshaft. There’d be fields filled with blind ponies.”

I do remember the photograph. I remember imagining fields of blind ponies; ponies stepping on ponies, ponies bumping into ponies, ponies walking protectively side by side.

I remember thinking, how could they? How could they keep the ponies down there for so long? Eventually, my mind would turn to the miners themselves. If the ponies were blind, what happened to the men and small boys that chipped away at the earth by lamplight all day long? The answer was obvious. They were sick. They emerged from deep within the sea, blackened face and blackened lungs. They would cough and cough and cough. They were sick. They died. They left large families in the care of their wives, who tried to make a lot out of little.

My father never went down into a mine. His experience of the pits were the ponies on the surface, his friends whose families worked in the mines and the stories they told.

My father told me a story about a boy who worked in the mine. The boy was twelve years old and
had been working in the mines for years. His job was to lead his pony along the railroad tracks, pulling loads of coal. The boy filled up a little car full of coal, navigated his way through the mineshaft and then helped empty it. After it was empty, he lead his pony back down to begin the process again.

One day the boy was entering the mine when the earth began to shake. Pieces of coal came loose from the walls and started raining down on the boy’s head. Soon rocks fell from the ceiling. They had nowhere to go. The boy and his pony were buried alive.

On the anniversary of that date, miners heard the rumble of cars coming down the rails. They stood aside. A little boy appeared, leading his pony. The boy and the pony walked by the spot where they were killed. For years the ghost boy and the ghost pony walked right by the miners and then disappeared into the air.

At the other end of Minto Street, away from the mines, my father drew an alleyway that ran from Minto Street all the way to Commercial Street.

“This is a little street that comes down and intersects Minto Street. We would use it to cut around and get over to Commercial Street. We called it Sneak Street. And that’s the Sneak Street I used to take to get to school. It was a dangerous street for a kid to go through because there were some real rough types. So I would wait for my friends coming down the hill and then we’d go through
together. There were a couple of big guys that I befriended as quickly I could who would walk me through Sneak Street. Big guys like Billy Baird.

“I remember Billy came down to our place one day and he said, ‘I got to show you something.’

‘What do you got? What do you got?’ I asked him. He opened his shirt and he had a whip coiled around the waist of his shirt and he said ‘Anybody messes with us, gets the whip.’

“I said, ‘Oh Jesus, Billy. I don’t want to be a part of this’. But he was good for protection.

“Baird would have been an Irish name. I grew up with the Irish and the Scots and whoever else came along. There were probably more Scots than Irish. The Irish would go to catholic school and the Scots came to our school. So we always played against the Irish guys because they were catholic.”

My father has lots of stories about Irish kids fighting Scottish kids but he was a friend to everyone. He told me, “If you asked me at that time, ‘What is discrimination?’ I wouldn’t have understood what you meant. I read about it, but it didn’t have a real impact. They were all my buddies.”
My father describes the Jewish community in Glace Bay as being a small but vibrant community.

“It was a small community but numbers attract number, and little by little it built up. The town was growing and there was room for various stores, and as merchants they gravitated there. The shoe store, clothing stores, groceries. Not one was a miner. They all came from elsewhere, Eastern Europe, from Poland, from Latvia, from the Ukraine. There was a great migration at that time during the 20s and 30s and that was the height of the community. I’d say at it’s best the community consisted of about 120 Jewish families.

“Like I said, the first shul was in my grandparents home but the community saved their pennies and eventually they were able to build the little shul. That was another focal point of my growing up years. Mother would put on plays during the high holidays. We’d all have our parts to act and sing.

“During grade school I went to cheider (Jewish school) in the Talmud Torah, the building right beside the shul. We would go there from four o’clock in the afternoon until six. It was pretty good, we went out and we played, but it was something you had to do so
it was resisted mightily. That’s where I had the eventful fight with the rabbi.

“Rabbi Petrushke hyphen Prince. I’ll never forget him. He called on my friend Tiny Bunyuk to answer a question and when he got it wrong, he hit him. He hit him for not studying hard enough.

“Tiny Bunyuk was one of about four or five Bunyuk kids. He was brilliant. He was the smartest one in the class but he was a little bit younger, a little smaller. He hit him right in front of the class.

“I remember getting up and I slugged him. I hit the rabbi. I punched him. I clobbered him in the mouth. And I was screaming at him and we were fencing off and I was screaming at him, ‘Leave him alone!’

“But anyway, I clobbered him and of course then I went home and the phone call preceded me. The first one I ran into was my grandfather of all people. Oh Jesus.

“He said, ‘Come in here.’

“I said, ‘Ohhh zaida, you don’t even know what happened.’

“He said, ‘You hit the rabbi?’ in his thick Yiddish accent.

“Well I tried, you know, to describe what had happened. ‘He hit Tiny Bunyuk, and you know Tiny, he’s not very big and it wasn’t fair. It wasn’t fair he hit him.’
“My grandfather got up. Slowly, he put his arm around me. He held me close and he said, ‘I don’t like him either,’ and with a chuckle, ‘Good for you.’

“He was a good guy, my grandfather.”

My father drew a railroad on the map. The railway was operated by Dominion and connected Sydney to Glace Bay to Louisburg (MacDonald, 2009). My father took that train when he went to the family cottage on the Mira, a pivotal part of his growing up.

He says, “We’d jump on the train with the little pot bellied stove in the middle there and bench seats. The railroad conductor would come along and take your tickets. I look back on it now and it seems like something out of a cartoon. Amazing. The steam engine chug chug chugged along. The S&L Railway. The Sydney and Louisburg Railway. We called it the Slow and Lazy.”

My father points to a ragged rectangle he’s drawn on the map, “Our cottage would be here,” he says, “and Charlie Tutty’s house would be right behind it. And that was a significant place too.” He draws a circle behind the rectangle.

“Saturday nights there would be a little kaeleigh there. Charlie would get the fiddle out and play
it on his knees. There would be two or three other fiddles. Just fiddles, a lot of toe tapping and banging on chairs. They’d play Celtic music, downhome jigs and stuff like that. He and his buddies would square dance. Somebody else would tap dance. It was a wonderful time.

“Just down from the Tutty house there was a hill and at the bottom of the hill there was the icehouse. That’s the other place that we hung out in the summer. Charlie would cut blocks of ice from the pond in the wintertime and he’d fill that icehouse. Then, we would slide down the sawdust on these huge cakes of ice. It really doesn’t get better than that. Playing hide and seek amongst the blocks of ice in the heat of the summer, just think about it. Marvelous.
“I would go out with Charlie Tutty in the early morning to fish and check his nets. The odd time he’d bring us over a monster salmon. That’s when Mother made pickled salmon. God, that’s a delicious dish. We have a recipe here. It’s to die for. You put the salmon in a huge glass container and fill it full of vinegar and spices and garlic and onion and it would just sit there and marinate. Melt in your mouth. It changed the nature of the salmon drastically. Oh god what a taste. We should try that some time, pickled salmon.”

**Pickled Salmon**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 sliced onions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 slices salmon (3/4” thick)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ½ tsp. salt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ tsp. pepper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 cup H₂O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾ cup white vinegar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ½ tsp. sugar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 tsp. pickling spices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 bay leaves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Place 3 of the onions on bottom of saucepan. Arrange fish over it. Add salt, pepper, H₂O. Bring to a boil. Cook over low heat for 20 min (until fish is cooked). Arrange alternate layers of fish and remaining onions in bowl. Combine strained stock, vinegar, sugar, pickling spice, bay leaves. Boil. Pour over fish.

Allow 4 days to marinate before serving.
“One of the key parts of my growing up years was the boat that I helped my father build in the basement of the house on Minto Street. It was a little rowboat and I lived in it during the summer. We rode from the front of our cottage down to the Mira gut. It took about three quarters of an hour to row and then we put it up on the beach in the gut. One day, Irving left me with the boat while he went to get us some ice cream.

“I was there at the shore holding the boat. The waves got higher and higher. I'll never forget it. I was never a strong swimmer. When I was six years old, one of my brothers tossed me off the side of the railroad bridge, which made me fearful of the water for most of my life. There I was, all alone.
“The waters were really rough and I was holding on to that boat for dear life. I had pulled the rowboat up as high as I could and the waves were still coming in. I remember thinking, ‘Oh that Irving, I bet he saw his buddies down there. He’s probably forgotten about me and I’ll get pulled into these waters and drowned.’

“I was there for what felt like hours. Oh god, I would drown first before letting go of that boat.

“Eventually Irving came back with the ice cream. You know, it was probably half an hour. He had run into his buddies and lost track of time. Together we rowed back, it was a terrible ride. The waves were really choppy.”

Together we drew the map. Then, I set forth to discover these places for myself. To touch the earth and see the land with my own two eyes. Maps are powerful artifacts. They have “perennially inspired people to journey to the lands that they represent, to translate their signs and symbols into lived experience” (Ryden, 1993, p. 24). It is on this premise that I got on a plane, borrowed a car and drove to Glace Bay with my treasure map.

It was not my first time in Cape Breton. My father, my mother, my sister and I went there in 1996. I remember looking for raspberries behind the house on Minto Street because my father said there used to be a field of bushes back there. I remember swerving along the Cabot Trail and imagining the teenage version of my father hurtling down the same hills one dark and stormy night holding

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A map can be “a powerful expression of dream and desire – a product of imagination in early times, a magnet for imagination at all times. Maps were once drawn, and even today are interpreted, according not only to what is objectively out there but also to what we wish were out there, or hope to find out there” (Ryden, 1993, p. 24)
a flashlight out the window so the driver could see. There were no highway lamps back then. Their headlights stopped working. They had to get to the bottom of the mountain.

I returned a second time last summer. On a cross-country media literacy project, I was teaching video production to teen girls. I made my friends stop so we could look at the town. There wasn't too much to see. I felt lost and there was no point in walking around aimlessly. We camped on the Mira, spent days on the grassy shore, licking salt water off our lips and looking for hidden beaches.

For this research, map pinned under my arm, wheels beneath my feet and a camera in my lap, I embarked on a different kind of expedition. I had only the map to guide me. I did not buy a manufactured one at the tourist information booth. I was not exactly sure what I was looking for.

The memories were his, the place was his. The map was ours. I was moved by the map to adventure and discovery. I wanted to capture my father’s childhood places but I also wanted to experience them for myself. I did not know what would happen when I found these places. If anything, I wanted to imagine him there. I wanted to be where he had been.
We are speeding along the Number 4 towards Glace Bay. My friend, Paul, is driving the car. We haven’t said much to each other since passing through Sydney. We both have the visors flipped down to block the sun pouring through the windshield. My feet are propped against the dash. I hug my knees and gaze out the window.

“Are you okay?” Paul asks me gently.

“Mmhm” I answer, still staring out the window.
We continue to drive. Each motel and family restaurant we pass looks familiar. I find myself reverting to habits I developed as a child during long road trips. I compulsively tap my foot each time we pass a telephone pole.

“Is there anyone there you want to contact? Did your dad tell you if anyone he knows still lives there?”

“No, there’s no one like that” I answer absentmindedly, without missing a single tap. Pole. Pole. Pole. Pole. Telephone poles line the horizon. Dependable wooden markers that prove we are moving forward.

A sign tells us we are ten kilometers away.

We pass large empty fields and decrepit pastel houses. I wished that when we arrived we could knock on the door of some pleasant elderly woman who would serve us tea and tell us about living next door to my grandparents. Then, she would take us on a walking tour and tell us about the old days, pointing with her cane as we passed important landmarks.

There is no one left in Glace Bay. No one from my family. I know there are tombstones in the graveyard carved with familiar names. Ben is there. He died in 1945, at the age of sixty.
As coal became less important, the mines closed down. Miners and their families left the town to search for employment elsewhere. Most of my father’s siblings left the town to find greener pastures. They went away for school. They had families. They moved to Sydney, Halifax, Montreal and Toronto. My father lingered for a long time with his mother and oldest brother, Nate. They lived together in a house on Catherine Street. They ran the wholesale until it was no longer profitable. Eventually, they too left for the city. They bought a house in Toronto and made a life there.

The car sped soundlessly down the small two-lane highway. I wanted to explain my silence.

“The last time I was here, I arrived, and had no idea where to go. I walked up the main street, Commercial Street, and bought a postcard. I sat on a bench and scribbled a note to my father. I went to the post office to send it. The portly middle-aged man behind the counter asked me what I was doing in town and I told him it’s where my family was from. He recognized my last name. He told me all the Jewish families had left. He remembered that his father bought a car at my family’s garage. His father would be the same age as mine. He shook his head. Things have changed, he said. This used to be a very special place though you wouldn’t know it now, he said. He said, it was a wonderful place to grow up.”

Finally, we arrive in Glace Bay.

We begin our journey where he did. On Minto Street. We navigate the small one-ways, consulting the map. Minto intersects with Sneak Street which curves down to Commercial Street. We find it. Park the car. Walk up the hill.
11 MINTO STREET

Turning the corner of Minto Street

Caught breath

Light flitting across telephone wires
Light steps on concrete blocks
Light colours on cardboard siding

Overgrown grass riddled with dandelions
Raspberry bushes infiltrating
Barbed wire borders

As we step, we count:

5 Minto Street
7 Minto Street
9 Minto Street

Looking past number nine
Into a patched lawn: nothing
Stepping across a small paved street
to see if...

13 Minto Street.

Walking back to number nine
Boarded windows like eye patches
On the face of an old
Family service building

This was the house where
Cheese curds hung
Utter-like, dripping
Promising to replace honey tears
On flushed pink cheeks
With salty brine

And home,
That patched lawn nothing,
Seems to whisper in its flatness:

*What did you expect?*
I can’t help but feel saddened that 11 Minto Street doesn’t exist. That it has been erased from the landscape. I can’t help but feel disappointed by its absence.

I try to find solace in the empty lot. The razed lawn, as with other unknowns and blanks, leaves room for imagination. I affix meaning in space. I impose my father’s home, his stories and his experiences, onto vacant dandelion dirt. The past is not obvious here. I followed the past here. The past was breathed through his mouth and I brought it with me, here. I did not need the past to stand in rotting wood and panel siding glory. I carried the past with me. I animated the town with the past as I walked through its streets.

We walked up Union Street and located approximately where the wholesale used to be. Union Street is a wide street with separated lanes for traffic. Down the middle is a raised grassy path, overgrown, and hiding train tracks. I walked along the tracks, imagining mobs of strikers, old-fashioned cars and my father playing cops and robbers in woolen trousers. I remember him telling me about how butter and sugar and meat was rationed during the second world war and how lucky they had been to have food to eat and food to share.

We followed Sneak Street over to Commercial. I pictured my father’s small frame walking confidently between tall redheaded boys hiding whips. My father used Sneak Street as a shortcut to school. It was a dangerous alley because liquor was smuggled from the wharf, down Sneak Street and into the back doors of Commercial Street (MacDonald, 2009).

*Her role within the memory mapping project also developed and clarified...walking became her trusted process, the research method which both creates memory and taps into embodied knowledge* (Nash & Garrett-Petts, 2007, p. 130)
As we walk I remember my father telling me a story about a local bootlegger named May.

“One of the bootleg joints that I went to visit was May Poole’s. May would have all kinds of different ways to get a bottle. If you just wanted to go in to drink some booze you go in the kitchen. She’d give you a shot and you’d pay for it. It was upfront in that regard.

“If you wanted to buy a bottle it got a little more complicated. You’d have to do a little song and dance. May would say to go wait by the school or some designated parking lot. After a while somebody would walk up or a car would pull up and tap on your window and slip a bottle through.

“One time I was going into May Poole’s place at 2 o’clock in the morning. There was a party going on and I went in to get a bottle. Going up to her house there was a little laneway with bushes on either side and I’m going on up that laneway when all of a sudden there’s this hissing noise from the bushes, hisss hisss hisss. I stopped and listened and it happened again hisss hisss hisss. So I went over to see where the hissing noise was coming from and hiding behind the bushes were three or four mounted policemen. They were all hunched over and I looked down and said, ‘What the hell are you doing here?’ because I knew these guys. When I was a teenager I knew most of the cops and the mounted police because in a small town, if you make it your business, you can do that. It’s always good to have an ace up your sleeve.

“They said, ‘We’re going to raid the place in just a few minutes. Don’t go in. Wait ‘til we’re finished.’
“I went back to the car and waited a half an hour or so. They raided the place and charged May. It was just a formality. They’d do this every once in a while and she was back in business half an hour later. They wouldn’t take her away, they would just charge her and then I’d go back in to arrange getting the bottle.”

The hardest place to find was the synagogue. We asked a few strangers on the street, but they didn’t know what it was, never mind where it was. Finally, after asking some older locals drinking draft in the legion, we were pointed in the right direction. It was down a small road, nestled next to a Greek Orthodox church. It was dark inside and abandoned. There were doors but no stairs. The simple stained glass windows were intact. The building looked sturdy.

I recalled my father telling me about how his grandfather smoked cigarettes. I thought of the stern black and white pictures of his grandfather and how much they would change if there was a cigarette hanging out the right side of his mouth while he blew smoke out the other.

“When my grandfather started to go blind I can remember giving him drops, for glaucoma. He smoked like a chimney and I was commissioned to keep an eye on him and make sure I had a match ready to light his cigarettes. He was a dangerous guy with a match.

“During the high holidays he sniffed snuff which is tobacco. Snuff sniffing is one way of getting around the rules. You know you’re not supposed to eat anything and you’re certainly not supposed
to smoke during the holidays. So he and the various elders they all sniffed and snorted tobacco. And with great sneezes all around. I tried it once, I couldn’t handle it. You can sneeze your brains out.

“Some of them also chewed tobacco because in the back of the shul there was always a series of spittoons. They were sniffin’ and chewin’. I remember those spittoons and watching them spit the juice out. Yeah, they were all very holy.”

I found it strange to imagine a religious man with a smoke in his mouth. I found it even stranger to imagine a group of old Jewish men spitting into buckets during a high holiday service.

We walked and walked around Glace Bay and never saw a mine. We saw old buildings and old signs. We saw new buildings with no signs. We saw a girl my age smoking outside of a call centre. I thought about what it would be like to grow up in Glace Bay today. I did not know what that would be like. My father would not know what that would be like. I thought about the things that are still the same. Ocean. Boats. Fish. Trees. Landscape. I considered all the things that had changed. People. Buildings. Mines. Concrete. Landscape. I wondered how this project would change if my father had come with me. I might have heard some more stories. I might have heard some stories again. I might have seen my own furrowed brow reflected in my father’s as we searched and searched for places that are no longer there.

This link between walking and thinking...has substantial historical roots. Indeed, the language of education reflects this connection: we take a “course” in order to move forward; “education” means “to draw out”; “curriculum” refers to a path or trail through knowledge (Nash & Garrett-Petts, 2007, p. 131)
"‘Landscape’ is ... a subjective notion, and being subjective and open to many understandings it is volatile. The same place at the same moment will be experienced differently by different people; the same place, at different moments, will be experienced differently by the same person; the same person may even, at a given moment, hold conflicting feelings about a place. When, in addition, one considers the variable effects of historical and cultural particularity, the permutations on how people interact with place and landscape are almost unending” (Bender, 2006, p. 303).

I am still not sure what we accomplish when we chase ideas and memories that have no grounding in the current moment, in the current state of a place. Perhaps we are searching for those scratches on the wall, to touch the worn wood of a banister. Perhaps we are looking for ourselves and masking it with an imagined desire to learn about someone else. Perhaps there is something sacred in a landscape, and to experience it, is to know it. Even if it is a small knowing. Even if you have to fill in the empty spaces. It is an experience that a person can keep, conjure up, hold close when it feels like everything familiar is changing. When the bird swoops over. When you're all alone. When your tree is ripped from its roots.

Landscape links “topographies, events and lives, the local and the global, individuals and communities, the poetics and politics of mapping, writing, photographing and painting, politics and power, histories of domination and resistance: in short a bundling of physical attributes and social relations, a spatio-temporal ‘frame’ for action and thought” (Tilley, 2006, p. 19)
A piece of land, a landscape, is an anchor; it holds steadfast and true, while people may come and go. I have a connection to Glace Bay. I have many memories associated with it. I am carving my own hieroglyphs on its shores. Ultimately, that might be what I have gained, what I have learned. I have learned that to share in a history, is to inform one’s present. I am the person I am because of my father. I have a history with a place, because he lived there once, but also because I have been there.

The following photographs serve as a record. They capture an experience, a landscape. They speak their own language.

*Life history perspectives seen through the lens of visual artists may enrich the complex rendering of stories and personal life histories in ways that are multertextural, multilayered, and multidimensional (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 213)*
The photographs stand independent of, or in inter-dependent relationships with the texts, and represent a rich and complex web of knowledge that would be too complicated to translate into textual form…

these visual do not reflect reality, nor do they reflect the words.

(Guyas, 2007, p. 63)
There are many seams to any photograph and it was in the experience of my active reflection upon the threads of the image that patterns of understanding were formed

(Halifax, 2007, p. 9)
Given the ephemeral nature of lived experience, the central challenge of method is to find ways of capturing and representing aspects of experience that lend themselves to a story that is sensible, satisfying and useful both for those who tell it and for those who hear it (Neilsen, 2007, p. 23)
Ruins reveal themselves as ruins only in juxtaposition to an implicit idea of what they once were
(Pandey, 2003, p.109)
When research texts are presented as open they are not considered as vehicles for the display of a set of fixed meanings created by the researcher; readers/viewers are engaged as co-creators of the text

(McIntyre & Cole, 2007, p. 316)
The art of my visual inquiry brings together a sense of the poetic in a coexistence of human/nature (Thomas, 2007, p. 50)
Places and landscapes anchor memories because we do not remember in a disembodied placeless manner.

(Tilley, 2006, p. 25)
The photographs that I choose to work with further are those that seem willing to have a conversation with me, or those that require attention and keep me troubled.
(Guyas, 2007, p. 71)
I believe that one can never leave home. I believe that one carries the shadows, the dreams, the fears, and dragons of home under one's skin, at the extreme corners of one's eyes, and possibly in the gristle of the earlobe.

(Angelou, 2008, p. 13)
CHAPTER EIGHT

Streams of Consciousness

Our stories shape us,
form our beings,
building from the outside in.
Partially remembered,
the rest we fill in.
Personal myths we may not be aware of.
Ideas are passed on through story.
Ideals are thinly veiled memories.
Stories occur in places.
Memories are grown under foot.
Shards of broken mirrors litter these pages. My father’s stories and my own stories are among the debris. My father’s Glace Bay has evolved into a different place. I have experienced what it is like to walk its streets. As a person returning. As a person from away. There are people and shops and communities in Glace Bay but they are not my family’s communities. They are not my own.

And that’s what we do, we move. We move from place to place – forward – moment to moment. In the wake of time we leave histories and pasts. Although profound as an experience, the act of returning to Glace Bay confirmed my suspicion that the magic of story lies in its telling not in its location. Glace Bay remains sacred to me as a site of rite and myth; stories and experience flood the wharf and the school and the shul and streets. Stories connect people across generations, across place, across experience. Stories bridge time and space. Stories have the ability to breathe history alive.

The act of storytelling expands the twilight zone between history and memory, “between the past as a generalized record which is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as a remembered part of, or background to, one’s own life. For individual human beings this zone stretches from the point where living family traditions or memories begin - say, from the earliest family photo which the oldest living family member can identify or explicate - to the end of infancy, when public and private destinies are recognized as inseparable and as mutually defining one another” (Hobsbawm, 1989, p. 2). My father’s past and my own present are entangled within this twilight zone. My father and I share memories of people and places even if we were NOT in the same place at the same time, even if the people are no longer alive. The act of storytelling

What actually happened in the past, in those places, is, less important than the fact that those things are remembered, retold, and re-valued in the current moment. While the historical moments narrated are always already past, it is the cultural moment of the telling of the story that binds...family together” (Syring, 2000, p. 68)
extends my family’s twilight zone even further; the transference of knowledge, of memory, allows for future family to engage in future rituals. To learn from our pasts.

History and memory are also imperative in connecting family members in a shared sense of community as “both employ imagination and experience to look into the past; both are subject to revision; and both are indispensable in forging and maintaining connections to the past and to each other” (Mendible, 2008, p. 242). History and memory become especially potent when pasts are not captured elsewhere. Books do not have the ability to conjure every experience; they cannot summon every ghost from its grave. History is decided by those who write it down.

I found it incredibly difficult to find information about Glace Bay and the people who lived there during the early 20th century, this brief yet transformative generation. I read mildewed books and sat hunched over microform in the basement of libraries to learn basic information. The day-to-day lives of youth, of community workers, of merchants, and of the Jewish community were decidedly absent from the texts I was able to find (i.e. MacDonald, 2009; Mellor, 1983; White, 1979; Frank, 1999). Reclaiming a voice, an impassioned experience, is an important addition to knowledge about a particular time, in a particular place. This preservation of experience also made me realize that “storytelling was more than an entertaining pastime – that it served to unite generations of displaced and fractured communities across time…that my father’s stories were meant to safeguard not only our family’s but an entire culture’s history” (Mendible, 2008, p. 242).
Glace Bay, for me, has come to represent family – communal, close, caring. My father represents the time when my family lived there. Geography and Temporality. It is not my desire to go back in time to a particular place or to idealize it. It is not nostalgia that I take away from this endeavor but, rather a set of values that can be applied to my life, today. Thus the personal blends into the political – his stories bestow a vision of how to act and what community can be.

As a child grows she negotiates the world as it was painted for her, and as she perceives it. The stories we tell, the photographs we keep, the songs we sing and the artifacts we treasure impact those around us. I grew up listening to my father tell stories. The stories he told helped construct my identity; “they shaped and sustained certain values, forged a communal and individual sense of self, and transmitted a vision of the past that helped guide me towards the future” (Mendible, 2008, p. 240). His stories were full of lessons.

I see my father standing up to the Rabbi on behalf of Tiny Bunyuk and I see him challenging authority on behalf of those who are not able. In his father’s support for the strikers I see him standing in solidarity with those who are exploited. I see my father’s sense of community extend from the miners to the ponies, from the strikers to his family. I see corporations forming monopolies and complicit governments vying for financial gain. I see a community that stands behind its members. I see thousands of lives made precarious by the whims of capitalism; their

Nostalgia is a desire “to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition” (Boym, 2001, p. 22)

We are inheritors of a multiplicity of voices and can only think of ourselves as a mixture of, an amalgam of voices, voices that were first shaped in the context of family (Washington, 1991, p. 1)

Lived experience can be understood through the stories people tell about it. Stories are ways not merely of telling others about ourselves but of constructing our identities, of finding purpose and meaning in our lives (Berger, 2005, p. 5)
physical bodies, their employment security, their ability to feed their families. I see women being equal to men and women taking charge of their lives. I see the earth being abused by industry.

My father’s life reflects these morals. The youth he worked with as a confidante and social worker filled my childhood with characters I will never forget: Rudy who lived down the street in the Don Jail, Cam who left his family and returned to the reserve, and Mona who had seven children, no money and no help. He organized to build community centres, youth drop-ins, and meal programs. There was more than one occasion I witnessed a reunion between my father and a person he used to work with. During one chance meeting, amidst embraces and tearful catch-ups, a woman turned to me and said, “Your father changed my life. He brought my family back together. My brother was in jail, my parents weren’t speaking to any of us. I thought we would never be a family again. I thought I lost them all. Now we are so close. It’s all thanks to him.”

It was invaluable to learn how to be good from someone who does so much for other people. It was an honour to sit and listen and preserve his stories. I can remember my father placing Emma Goldman’s autobiography (1934) in my hand when I was eleven years old. Her passion mirrored my father’s, her dedication to ideals, to fighting government, rallying workers and building movements. She also opened my eyes to a liberated sexuality and revolutions bursting with art and music. In my much smaller life I have lived in the West Bank where I saw Israel commit human rights violations daily. I have taught workshops in First Nations communities on this very land some of us call Canada, where young girls identified racism and substance abuse as systemic evils plaguing their communities. I am committed to fighting for the rights of queer, trans, bisexual and gay people. I continue to look for the hidden members of my larger community. I continue to engage in struggles that seek to transform the world.

Lifelong learning is often “described as though it is neutral, ahistorical and uncontestable, with little account given of a wide range of different histories and competing ‘fields’, including... the personal and political learning that takes place in, for example, trade unions, women’s groups [etc.]” (Grace, 2009, p. 2)

‘Critical consciousness’ refers to the process by which humans, as knowing subjects, achieve a deepened awareness of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality (Chovanec & Lange, 2007, p. 134)
Pool hall counsellor Mort Siegel is ‘like a daddy’ to North York teens

T

here's a lot of truth in this story. About teenagers. Although it starts out being about an old guy. His name is Mort Siegel, he's 52, and he runs the weirdest pool hall and video arcade up in North York.

As of now Mortie and his gang are Jonny's Beautiful People. It's the least I can do. You'd see why.

To go back a bit, Mort was working for the Children's Aid Society helping kids in crisis. Then they said, “Mortie, get thee to Fleming Park, and help the folk up there start a neighborhood service centre.” So he did.

Then they said, “Mortie, up Don Mills Rd, a bit there's the Peanut district. You got 20,000 people in highrises, a zillion single parents, 3,500 kids more or less attending two junior highs and a high school, black, brown, white, yellow kids, and nowhere to go Spells BIG trouble. Mortie,” they said, “if you thought Fleming was hard . . .

Kids will come

Mort is the first to admit the pool hall wasn't his idea. It was Mayor Mel Lastman's. Mort went begging to Mel for funds. Told the mayor there was a pool hall coming free in the basement of the Peanut Plaza, and he wanted to rent the space for a youth centre.

Canny Mel, recalling where he'd hung out as a kid, said, “Why not keep running it as a pool hall? That way the kids will come.”

A year ago this week, with jollies clicking and machines zapping, Mortie’s pool hall, otherwise known as the Peanut Neighborhood Youth Centre, opened its doors.

The kids came all right. From 10 in the morning until the doors close at 7 p.m. it’s pandemonium. Hey, wait a minute. I said to Mort over the noise of Defender and Superman coming through his fancy office wall, aren’t these kids supposed to be in school? What do the schools think about it?

“I think some of the people at the schools still aren’t quite sure how to take us,” said Mort. “But they understand kids. And I’m sure they understand it’s better for them to be here than grabbing a six pack and taking it down the ravine.”

But why would a street-smart kid be caught dead in Mort’s place talking to some sissy social worker? The fact is, replied Mort, “the kids are hungry for a place to socialize. Filipinos, Serb Indian, white, East Indian, they come here because we have no friction. It’s their turf and it’s safe.”

Soft counselling

Safe — that's an odd word to use when you're talking about the tough kids you see swaggering and poshing around plazas. But when I went into the pandemonium with Mort I felt it right away — nobody was putting on a tough act here. The nearest I saw to violence was when a teenager who could have eaten five-foot-four Mort for breakfast put a gorilla arm around his shoulder and gave him a breath-taking hug. “Hi Mort,” he said mildly.

Mort calls it “befriending” or “soft counselling.” He and his three floor workers make change, play pool with all comers and sit in at dominos. No big pressure. A kid will start talking about the hassle he’s getting at school. First thing you know he’s spilling stuff about the trouble at home with his mother.

Or maybe it’s the 16-year-old girl who met Mort at his office door just as I got there. Her dad ordered her out of the house. Somebody, she said through her tears, “called me a slut.” So much hurt everywhere. They say it themselves: “When I’m here I’m not in trouble.”

He’s a friend

Mostly Mort and his workers offer the thing we all want. Somebody to talk to about it. There’s a sex education program taught by a public health nurse where they use the real words for things. The provincial government has put three youth employment people into the centre so kids can learn how to go about job hunting. The list goes on.

What’s Mort like? I asked the kids when he’d gone back to his office. “Like, he’s a friend,” said a sandy-haired boy playing pool. “I can sure talk to him better than I can to my parents.”

“He’s like . . .” said an attractive 18-year-old, looking for the word. “He’s like a daddy.”
I have developed a critical consciousness of my own volition that finds roots in the stories I was
told – even though I live in a city far away from the ocean, even though I am not part of a religious
group, even though the coalmines have long since closed, even though many of his characters have
long since passed. I walked my own path that led me to activism and social justice work. It was
my own choice, “but it was a choice implicated by the stories and memories I internalized as my
own – personal and cultural narratives born of family lore, historical events, hearsay, and personal
experiences. Historical memory nurtures our sense of belonging; it fosters connection and kinship,
a shared vision of an imagined home place that is indispensible in shaping personal…identity”
(Mendible, 2008, p. 244).

I am aware of the transformative nature of storytelling. My own life reflects how consciousness can
pass from parent to child. The consequences of being privy to this knowledge do not escape me –
the evidence is in this chronicling. These are stories I want to share. These are stories I want to share
with my current family and future family and even those outside my family because they invoke
a heightened sense of self-awareness, a sense of place, a sense of historical locatedness and critical
consciousness. I want to create an example of what it could mean for other families to explore
where they come from and how their pasts have influenced their presents, and shape their futures.

As Chovanec and Lange (2007, p. 133) observe, “Most adult
education literature is concerned
with the transformation, rather than
the formation of consciousness.
Very few studies address the
possibility that one might acquire a
social consciousness early in life.”

After conducting a study with
Canadian and Chilean
activists Chovanec and Lange (2007,
p. 134) were surprised to discover
that many of their participants
“attributed their formation as
socially conscious citizens to the
early teachings, values, and
examples of significant family and
community members.”
IN REFLECTION

I sat with my father
At the bottom of our house
And he told me stories

I heard them
I breathed them
I consumed them

We are made vulnerable
Through fragments:
Emotional, political,
Personal, communal
None more important
Than the other

I look back through these pages
With care and love
Touching photographs
Reading poems
And recounting stories
We live in landscapes filled with ghosts, of people we once knew, who give life to a place even in their absence. Our memory of place is filled with visions of the physical terrain, whether it is the asphalt of streets of an urban milieu or the scenic beauty of a mountainous landscape. We experience these physical environments as if they were people, for they are embodied with a soul, the soul of our selves and the lives of others who have made us what we are or hope to be (Berger, 2005, p. 13)


I came to study education to learn more about the work I was already doing. I was teaching youth and adults to tell their stories using video, theatre, art and photography. Telling stories can be a political act and this was true for many of the people I worked with; teenage girls across Canada, Palestinian kindergarten teachers, Iranian ex-political prisoners, and Arab youth living in Jerusalem. Having their stories valued and expressed was both fulfilling for the individual and succeeded in providing a counter-narrative to dominant media portrayals.

The more I asked other people to tell their stories, the more I began telling my own. It was important for me to share with my students why I was engaged in political struggles, how I came to do the work I do and why I thought art and storytelling (and in particular their art and their stories) were significant. It was important for me to have done the difficult work of publicly sharing personal stories since that is what I was asking them to do.

I wanted to engage in a project that examined my own history, which explored my own roots, and investigated how I came to understand society and the political world. I kept thinking about my father and how much of an influence he has had on me. I started thinking about consciousness and activism and how powerful and amazing a gift that is to pass on to others. I was inspired by the radical education I learned about in school; Paulo Freire (1970), Moses Coady (1939), Augusto Boal (1985) and other popular educators were concerned with using adult education to help oppressed communities learn about, organize against, and confront oppression, initiate dialogue and develop critical consciousness. The cultivation of knowledge and consciousness is difficult work and I felt thankful that my father was able to foster a sense of social responsibility within me at a very young age. I think the way parents and caretakers influence the consciousness of youth is an area that is under-researched and deserves additional study.
The desire to engage in this personal inquiry also coincided with a pivotal moment in my family history. My uncle’s dementia was worsening. The number of people in my family who could remember our history was dwindling. I wanted to learn more about where I came from and the people who influenced my father. I wanted to trace this lineage and community spirit. The more I thought about these roots the more I connected them and the beginning of my own consciousness to the town of Glace Bay, where my father grew up. He taught me many lessons and I wanted to learn, preserve and explore the stories he told me and examine their influence on my life.

I was inspired by the courses I took with Ardra Cole that used arts-informed research methods to broaden the scope of academia – allowing research to be accessible to the community and people it involves and impacts. The literature and examples of arts-informed research projects (e.g. Luciani, 2005; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Kunkel, 2000) were inspirational. I knew I wanted to be part of a legacy of scholars and educators that valued the art process, accessibility and creative dissemination techniques. I struggled to find a method of inquiry and also a form of knowledge translation that honoured the magic and poetry of my father’s stories and that also involved the arts.

The research involved in this text was intensive. So much effort is poured into a project and then goes unseen. Many of my processes were described within the text. Others were alluded to.

First of all I interviewed my father. The interviews were unstructured and they were videotaped. I asked him about growing up in Glace Bay, the places that were important to him, the people that influenced him and the reasons for the family coming and then leaving the town.

In between proscribed sittings my father would share snippets of remembered events, produce an artifact, an old picture. He
gave me a CD my cousin had compiled, an archive of photographs. Amongst the images: my father’s parents on their wedding day, his brothers and sisters, marriage certificates and the bridge at Mira Bay.

One of the first poems I wrote for this project emerged after looking at the photograph that introduces Chapter 1, Unknown Pair (figure A). The poem reads:

UNKNOWN PAIR

It is exactly this photograph
“unknown pair”
two clasped hands held in the centre -
a boy who looks like my
grandfather
and a dark-haired girl
with hallowed eyes –
a vacuity of history,
(inspired possibility).
A pause in time.

It was from there that the concept of fragments and blanks first surfaced. I have been writing poems since I was a teenager and I often use them to describe how I am feeling, to gain clarity about a situation or to reflect deeper about something that puzzles me. Throughout this text I use poetry sparingly; I only included poems I felt offered something to the piece, an insight, a vision, or a feeling.
Poems and narratives comprise the bulk of this text and often they bleed into each other. The narrative is poetic, poems tell narratives. Allowing myself to speak in my true voice without academic jargon was both freeing and challenging. I felt more committed to the words, more invested in the finished product.

The memory maps were used to explore my father’s impression of the town, his places of significance. It was also used as a catalyst for further storytelling. The memory map research was based on the work of Marlene Creates (i.e. Creates, 1991), an artist who applies rigorous research methods to her art practice. Creates (as cited by Knowles & Thomas, 2001) describes her work:

This series focuses on a set of hand-drawn memory maps and spoken texts in which my relatives in Newfoundland express memories about themselves and the land on which they were born…these narratives and memory maps are accompanied by photographs of my relatives and of the landmarks I was directed to in their stories. I took the photographs of the places to rhyme with the memory maps they drew for me. The series also includes my own memory maps and stories of my experiences as a visitor to my ancestors’ land.

J. Gary Knowles and Suzanne Thomas (2001) applied Creates’ artistic research methods to a study that sought to understand students’ experiences of school. It is based on the work of Creates, Knowles and Thomas, and others (e.g., Sbrocchi, 2005) who have employed the memory mapping method to theses and studies in the education discipline that I drew much inspiration.

Following the map, I took over 150 photographs in Glace Bay. When I returned to Toronto and analysed them it struck me how the multiplicity of images from each locale made each individual photograph more evocative. They became more powerful with every additional angle and perspective; multiple voices on one page seemed to make the whole stronger. Triptychs naturally began assembling themselves and I allowed that process to proceed of its own volition.
I researched not only what my father said, the content of the interviews and memory mapping, but also my own experiences and interpretations. The freedom of allowing additional voices to guide me in the margins allowed me to use external sources without breaking the flow of the narrative. Sometimes jarring, sometimes informative, sometimes haunting, the mix of poets, historical facts, film scripts, novelists, and academic sources all combine to add to the knowledge, the learning that takes place when reading the text. They are integral to the piece, but allow the reader the choice of reading them alongside or after they are done reading the page. They contribute to the learning that takes place within paragraphs, they add ideas and nuance to the stories I am telling.

I took the time to work on the format, the layout of the final product. I take the form of the book seriously. I wanted the pages to be precise, the words to be legible, the form of the page was as important as the words written on it. The photographs and the text and the quotes work together to synergistically convey a complex and multi-layered story.

I was self-conscious about being so deeply implicated within the text. It was difficult to confront my vulnerabilities; about writing, about learning my history, my neuroses about memory and age, examining my own relationship to my father’s stories. I have a difficult relationship with my father’s Jewish background and feel uncomfortable with talking about Judaism without speaking about the conflict in Palestine and being forthright about my own position. The process of creating this project was a negotiation; I wanted to honour his beginnings, our history – his voice and experience and my own. In fact, I do not even scratch the surface of telling about his life. Even for exploring a childhood, 90 pages are barely sufficient. I do hope that part of the magic of his stories is captured, that our history is honoured and that the process was equally beneficial for both he and I.
Works Cited


