

Textual Lineage: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Storied Self
by

Travis Richey

Bachelor of Arts, from University of Victoria, 2004

Bachelor of Education, from University of British Columbia, 2007

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the influence of life experiences and personally significant texts on the formation of an individual's personal and professional identity. Through autoethnographic exploration, the author explores the experiences and texts that have constituted his personal curriculum, shaped the way he views the world around him, and informed the role he hopes to embody as an educator. The author argues that by sharing our stories and analysing the cultural artifacts we have connected with over a lifetime, we become more cognizant about and better equipped to take responsibility for the people we are in the process of becoming. The sharing and exploration of our lived curricular experiences, he suggests, may cause students to invest more heavily in their education and potentially foster more widely representative and meaningful school cultures.

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Dedication

For Mom and Dad, your undying faith in me and the interest you take in the stories I tell has always been a source of comfort and strength for me.

For Laurel, our stories have grown together. I look forward to the ways they will continue to grow and intertwine.

For Eli, your story began as a beloved branch of your Mom's and mine. Let your imagination cause it to grow so that it might become your own.

Introduction

The Back Story

In the summer of 2006, I ran the Summer Reading Club at the Powell River Public Library. It wasn't my first job in a library or the first in which I planned and facilitated activities for kids, but it was the first in which these two realms of previous experience came together. The summer also marked a significant step in an educational journey that has brought me here to this Master's thesis.

During my interview for the job as Summer Reading Club coordinator, I was asked how it was I thought I might connect kids to their local library. I began talking about how important libraries have been for me in my life. I spoke about how, since childhood, I had always wanted to work in a library. Only until recently had this lifelong ambition been realized. In the preceding few years I had worked at the university libraries at UVIC and UBCO and at the Okanagan Regional Public Library. Though in each of these positions my responsibilities had been to patrol the library or to shelve books, I enjoyed them because they allowed me to be near to something I have always held dear: text, and more specifically, stories. Recognizing that I had yet to answer the interview question, I went on to explain why I believed stories are so important. I described how I have always kept books close at hand, surrounding myself with them, carting them home in piles of twenty from the public library as a ten year old and as a twenty year old, and enjoying nothing more than browsing bookstores and admiring my collection of books at home. I explained that books were more than objects for me to collect and to consume. Instead, I sought to *be consumed* by the imaginative essence a book held tenuously threaded between its covers. In all my transactions with the physical text found in books, I sought to absorb stories and meanings that reflected and enriched my understanding of myself and the world around me. As a Summer Reading Club Coordinator, I told them, I wanted to share my enthusiasm for story in the hopes that my enthusiasm would rub off on the kids who attended.

This all sounded very inspiring, they assured me, but how exactly was I planning on doing this? At first, I wasn't sure I had an answer to that question. So I decided to relate a story of my own. For years, I told them, I had been searching for a book from my childhood, but had yet to locate it. As the years passed it became more and more apparent how important this book, moreover the story inside this book, was to me. I had no trouble recalling the story. I was able to relay it in some detail. It was a story about a boy who loves to build things. He builds incredible contraptions in all areas of home, some that served a meaningful purpose, while others were—essentially Rube Goldberg machines—intricate structures that produced the most trivial results. There was the helicopter, big enough to sit in, the boy had built out of odds and ends from his mother's kitchen and suspended from the ceiling. There was also a ridiculous yet fascinating assemblage of multiple moving and interconnected parts he had built in his backyard, the combined efforts of which simply provided a steady drip of water to a lone potted flower. The boy's problem however, is that his family finds his imaginative constructions to be a nuisance, so he decides to run away and build a house for himself. It turns out he isn't the only underappreciated talent in town. He is soon joined by other children whose individual obsessions have also alienated them from their families. They all seek refuge and solicit the help of the boy who is only too happy to help each of them build a home suited to their unique interests.

I described to my interviewers the lengths I had gone to in order to relocate this book. Though the story remained quite vivid in my mind, the trouble was, I could not recall the title or author, or names of any of the characters in the book. This made my search difficult, especially since the story was by no means a widely recognized classic and was quite possibly out of print. I had asked my parents and siblings, who also remembered the story, but they were unable to recall any of the details that would have made it easier to locate. While visiting my parents' home, I would often rummage around, checking and double checking all the places the book should have been and the areas I thought it may have been misplaced, but all to no avail. Everywhere I went, I

consulted children's librarians and bookstores specializing in children's literature. Everyone I encountered was eager to help but all were equally stumped. I could remember the illustrations vividly: detailed black ink on white paper, realistic renderings in the vein of Norman Rockwell, but much sparser. I also knew the colour of the book's cover: a vibrant green. I'd scan the shelves of the children's sections of the libraries I visited and worked at, sure I'd be able to pick it out from the thousands if it was indeed there to be found. But, I told them, I had yet to find it.

My story appeared to have had an effect. Both interviewers had listened attentively and I'd been encouraged by the smiles I saw spreading across their faces. In summation, I said that I figured all of us have stories we are looking for, stories that help bring meaning to the other stories we read and most importantly, to the stories we live out in our daily lives. In my capacity as the summer program coordinator, I told them, I would plan activities and interact with the kids in a way that would encourage them to seek out and think about the stories that meant the world to them. This seemed to satisfy them, and the interview went on from there. But my off-the-cuff response had triggered something in me.

A few days later, I was notified that I was the successful candidate. Part of what had sealed the decision for them, one interviewer later told me, was the way my eyes lit up when I began describing that book from my childhood. "We're going to find that book for you this summer", she said. And with that, my journey began.

Later that summer I found that long lost book. Using the power of Google, I entered every descriptor I could come up with in the search bar in a long line of keywords and phrases organized with multiple Boolean operators. The Internet came through for me. I was directed to a wiki where individuals do exactly what I had been doing, asking others to help them locate lost books from their youth. And there it was, described similarly by someone else looking for a very similar sounding story, and a response, which upon first glance immediately looked and felt

familiar: *Andrew Henry's Meadow* by Doris Burn. I quickly did a search for that title and confirmed it: this was the book. The library didn't have it and nor did any of the libraries I frequented. The book was out of print and unavailable online. I called up a local bookstore owner who was eventually able to track down a copy and placed an order for me. It arrived a few weeks later and I immediately brought it to my summer reading club kids, eager to share what was, for me, one of the best stories I ever read.

No sooner had I received the book, a funny thing happened. My sister found the book in our house, under the stairs, packed away in a box. Not only that, I discovered that the rights to the book had been optioned to a well-known actor, who had also loved the story as a child and hoped to write and produce a movie based on the book. That film has yet to make an appearance, but in the time since my rediscovery of it, I have eagerly shared the story of Andrew Henry, the story of how I lost and found the book that bears his name, and the significance both these stories have had in my life as I continue to excavate my intricately textual past for other hidden and not so hidden gems: stories I have lived, identified with, and think of as significant educational experiences that have contributed to my development as a student and as an educator. Today, in my role as an elementary school teacher-librarian, I continue to seek out stories that hold meaning, for the students and teachers in the schools I serve, and for me, a graduate student, as I learn more about how story continues to shape who I am personally and professionally.

My studies and practicum experiences in the Elementary Education Program at UBCO in Kelowna were coming to a close in the year following my stint as Summer Reading Club coordinator. Our final project was an independent reflective inquiry on an educational topic of our choice. I decided to look into the power of stories. As a product of a Protestant upbringing, a tradition I had been wholly immersed in but had moved away from in my late teens, stories were a huge part of how I had been educated, not only every week in Sunday school, but for four years of Christian school, and through daily after-dinner devotional readings. My family's relationship

with the Bible and the stories in it was by no means casual. It was an immersive experience to say the least. But the Bible wasn't the only book I read as a kid. I have always been enthusiastic about stories. In grade four I won a reading competition, forsaking outdoor play and television for a month to read over 1800 minutes in one month, a feat that, more than anything else, kick-started an investment in stories that lay outside my Judeo-Christian tradition. In late elementary and high school, though my reading habits had waned somewhat, my interest in stories increased thanks to the speculative fiction of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the counter-narratives of punk rock. In university I decided to major in English following an introductory course in which the professor asked us to write a reflective piece on the question: What is literature? I decided to write about the narratives, themes, and poetry of punk rock. By the time I set out to complete my post-degree program in education, some nine years later, I was well-versed in the writings of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, both of whom looked to stories, and more specifically, mythology as a window into the unconscious. Their ideas spoke to what had now become, if it had not been before, my natural inclination to actively seek meaning and understanding through story. I built on this understanding through the work of Bruno Bettelheim, Kieran Egan, and John Dewey, all of whom affirmed for me the importance of stories in education.

I began my working towards my Masters of Education in Curriculum Studies at UVic in the summer of 2011. I knew I wanted to explore the link between culture—the producer and palimpsest of stories—and curriculum, the pedagogical program of teaching and learning in schools. I found myself able to draw this connection after dwelling on Marshall McLuhan's (1964) famous maxim “the medium is the message”. I concluded similarly that “culture is the curriculum” (Richey, 2011), insofar as culture is embedded in and determines the understanding we draw from curriculum. The question I then faced was: whose culture? In reflecting on my own school experience, I recognized that school tended to impose curriculum objectives on students and teachers. Yet, what I actually remember learning has more to do with interactions I had with

my teachers, classmates, and friends and what I was *personally* interested in at each stage of my life. Relatively very little of what I recall learning had to do with any prescribed curriculum I may have been exposed to at the time. When considering this, I wondered how much more meaningful school might be if instead of setting the learning agenda and imposing parameters on the kind of learning culture students and teachers can create together, we encouraged them to focus more on the culture(s) in which they are situated, that saturate their daily experiences, and connect them to one another. Why aren't we asking kids: What is it that intrigues *you* most, makes *you* most curious, and speaks truth to *you*? Is it not here, in the immediacy of life, in our preoccupations, in the times and spaces in which we engage freely with the world around us and create meaning that connects us to the world that we learn the kinds of lessons that last? Isn't direct experience the best education? I concluded that first paper with:

“An individual's identity is an entanglement of relationships and cultural creations. Tracing the lineage of these relationships and creations is the purpose of education insofar as doing so reveals the knowledge and experience relevant to an individual's past, present, and future. Culture is the curriculum of the individual and his or her connection to the world.”
(Richey, 2011)

An education system that can resist the urge to systematize curriculum and give students the opportunity to examine the curriculum of their daily lives, that is, the living, breathing culture that surrounds and sustains them intellectually and emotionally, recognizes as Dewey did, that experience *is* education. If this is so, why do we delimit the educational experiences of our students with prescribed curriculums? Should we not enable them to become better at reflecting on and learning from all of the experiences that arise, organically, in their day to day lives?

Experience and narrative are intricately related. Like narrative, experience is made up of continuous sequences of events determined by cause and effect. As individuals pay close

attention to certain experiences over others and compose unique narratives that help understand and explain our experiences. Though each of us is uniquely situated, our paths run parallel and intersect in a variety of ways like threads sewn together to create a fabric that reflects our collective experiences. This fabric is a uniquely human *textile* that represents all human experience and understanding. As individuals, we draw on a variety of narrative threads—texts—within this fabric, from life history to culture to interactions with others, each of which helps us navigate and situate ourselves on the continuum of experience in ways that make sense to us. We draw our understanding from the stories we connect to and share our understanding with one another in the stories we tell, both of which constitute texts.

Research Problem

Well into the 21st century, it is generally agreed that engagement and motivation hinges on the ability of students to make personal and cultural connections to the curriculum (Callins, 2006; Dooley, 2008; Gay, 2002; Shields, 1999; Witmer, 2005). However, the imposition of curriculum and prescribed learning outcome denies the importance of the unique personal and cultural experiences of each student (not to mention their teachers). When students are not personally invested in the curriculum they are far more likely to disengage (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). Disengagement precludes the possibility of a truly genuine school culture that reflects the attitudes, interests, and cultural realities of its participants. British Columbia's proposed education plan, with its emphasis on "personalized learning" implies a shift in perspective (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2012). But how prepared are students and teachers to make this shift?

Culture is credited as a determining factor in the formation of identity (Grimson, 2010). However, we now live in a world that is "multicultural", which means that individuals have access to information and ideas outside of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, and family traditions. As a result, we can no longer presuppose a relationship between an individual's readily

identifiable culture and their personal identity (Grimson, 2010). Today, people locate themselves across a much broader scope of cultural expressions (Grimson, 2010). However, research has yet to address how and why individuals draw on culture to inform their understanding and to what effect. A curricular endeavor based on the examination of the multicultural identity of the individual might be the type of student-centred paradigm that most effectively engages students in their education.

Purpose of study and Significance for Knowledge and Practice

The purpose of this study is to illuminate and understand the ways in which life history and cultural influences—the significant texts of our lives—contribute to the formation of our identity. Because there will be as many answers to this question as there are people to which it is posed, I propose to investigate the influence of history and culture on my own life—to examine the ways in which I have been educated through textual encounters and how this education has contributed to my identity. As an educator I want to not only better serve but also empower students to take control of their own learning. However, there is a certain sort of insight required to facilitate this. First I must understand how I have been best served and empowered. As the system now grapples with questions of how to become more responsive to the needs of students, we as educators must model innovative ways of learning that aim to meet these needs.

Philosophy, Framework, & Research Question

As a qualitative researcher I am aware that, ontologically, my reality is but one of many; that my epistemology is rooted in my subjective experience; and that my axiology plays a role in the ways I interpret the world around me (Creswell, 2013). As a qualitative researcher, I keep these assumptions in mind when considering my research question.

Because of my interest in how individuals formulate notions of self through cultural connections, I embrace a social constructivist perspective. Social constructivism honors the subjective perspective, but also acknowledges the “complexity of views” present in any culture

(Creswell, 2013, p. 24). The subjective meanings I draw from experience are negotiated historically, as I fit them into my personal narrative, and socially, in the cultural spheres in which I am situated (Creswell, 2013).

When considering the ways *text* has played a role in educating me, I look to particular stories and experiences that have had a profound impact on the way I understand myself and the world around me. Tracing the lineage of these experiences, I can begin to see patterns in my development. The term “textual lineage”, coined by Alfred Tatum (2009) to describe the reading history of an individual, I employ here to describe the narrative thread that weaves the stories we read (watch, listen to, etc.) and those we lead (our life experiences, social interactions, history of ideas, etc.) together to create a personal curriculum that reflects and informs the course of an individual’s educational history. My research question is this: How has my textual lineage contributed to the development of my identity as an educator? This question speaks to issues of identity, but also implies issues of curriculum and practice. As such, sub-questions that explore these implications will elucidate my primary inquiry. First, what constitutes my textual lineage; what stories comprise my personal curriculum? Secondly, how has my understanding of this personal curriculum informed my identity? And lastly, how does my textual lineage inform my practice as an educator?

Literature review

Theoretical traditions for framing question

T.S. Eliot asks “Why for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others?” (1964, p. 148). In reflecting on his own “evolving intellectual interests”, William Pinar (1994) formulates what he terms a “method of *currere*”, in which he exhorts educational researchers to examine their educational histories, specifically the contribution their “formal academic studies” have made to the understanding of their lives (p 19). Pinar’s focus on formal education strikes me as—though perhaps practical for his own purposes—somewhat limiting. After all, Dewey’s claim that “experience is education” did not limit experience to the classroom. The spirit of Pinar’s method, however, which regards autobiographical experience as a source of insight, intrigues me. Tatum’s (2009) discussion of “textual lineage”, a term referring to the influential texts over the course of an individual’s life, is a similarly intriguing concept. Textual lineage recognizes the importance of textual engagement as meaningful experience. However, Tatum’s conception of textual lineage is limited to the written word and would, in my opinion, benefit from a broader definition of text. When the notion of text is broadened to include not only written, auditory, and visual forms of communication, but also autobiographical texts—the stories of an individual’s life—the study of textual lineage becomes, by extension, fascinatingly more intricate, inclusive of other cultures, and because of this, I would argue, more meaningful. By bringing together expanded notions of Pinar’s *currere* and Tatum’s textual lineage, I hope to reveal the narrative thread that links the significant texts and experiences of my life and constitute my educational autobiography.

I see text and experience converge most commonly in story. Individual and collective experience, both real and imagined is relayed most readily in this format. No story is ever static. Informed by experience, stories are told, not only so that they may be retold, but so that they may be lived, insofar as they inform future experience. As Paul Ricoeur (1984) notes, the mimetic

function of stories—their capacity to imitate and represent experience—is facilitated on three levels. First, stories reference knowledge and experiences with which we are familiar; second, stories are creative spaces in which those experiences are schematized in order to communicate understanding; and third, the meaning of stories is brought to bear in the ways in which this meaning is integrated into our actual, lived experience. The confluence of text and experience in story is the basis for this exploration of current and antecedent literature.

Curriculum: The pedagogical confluence of text and experience in stories lived and told

It is conceivable that individuals could trace over their lifetime histories of texts and experiences that had an educational influence on their understanding of self and as a consequence, their values and behaviour. While rarely described as a curriculum in the traditional sense, life can be characterized as a course of study wherein an individual is immersed in a selection of texts and exposed to a variety of experiences over a period of time. Ted Aoki (2005) differentiates between “curriculum as planned” and “curriculum as lived” (p. 163). The design and composition of a planned curriculum depends on the desired outcomes of its stakeholders. The design and composition of a lived curriculum, on the other hand, is emergent and dependent of on the texts and experiences—the stories—that make an impression and, upon reflection, figure prominently in the life (or lives) of the individual(s). Stories hold significance for a variety of personal and cultural reasons. While these reasons vary from person to person and culture to culture, the mind is predisposed to understand experience through the symbol-rich texts stories provide (Bruner, 1990). Stories help us mediate between our subjective realities, contribute to our internal sense-making apparatuses, and inform the ways in which we share our experiences and communicate our understanding with one another. Stories form the core of our lived curricula, so much so, we often fail to recognize the power they have in shaping our understanding. In order to deconstruct and examine the ways in which story dominates our notions of identity and reality, we must examine how story works to begin with.

Understanding begins with and is fueled by experience. Donald Polkinghorne (1988) describes experience as “an integrated construction, produced by the realm of meaning, which interpretively links recollections, perceptions, and expectations” (p. 16). Our cultural traditions provide a “store of plot lines” which can be used to configure these experiences into stories (p. 20). Stories are artistic expressions that reflect, bear witness to, and permeate experience. Art, as John Dewey (1990) suggests, is, like experience, social in nature. The meanings we draw from stories are always culturally situated. While experience plays a significant role in our understanding of self, the cultures in which we participate facilitate our interpretation of experience and, therefore, influence our sense of self. Stories reflect this dynamic interplay between culture, identity, and experience. Drawing on familiar settings and characters and driven by plots that play into or challenge conventional wisdom, stories communicate cultures of ideas. We draw on stories and other cultural artifacts to inform what Geertz (1973) calls “webs of significance” (p. 4). These webs help us articulate and understand our experience and the experiences of those around us. The ideas conveyed through story are not always concrete or strictly logical. Stories communicate meaning on a deeper level than is normally explored in everyday language. The meaning found in stories requires an interpretation of the symbols they conjure.

With symbolism, the relation between the signifier and the signed is, as Polkinghorne (1988) puts it, “arbitrary” (p. 5). In order for two or more individuals to communicate, they must have an understanding of the symbols used to do so. Language is composed of symbols commonly understood. Our understanding of language increases with experience, however, as Noam Chomsky (1965) suggests, there is an inherent structure, a “universal grammar”, with which we are all born that facilitates this understanding. There is an interesting parallel to Chomsky’s idea in Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious and the archetypal symbols he concludes are inherent in human mind. Jung writes extensively about the collective

unconscious, which he sees as the “psychosocial well” from which individuals and cultures draw “to produce the images, themes and stories that [express] their ways of seeing and being in the world” (Mayes, 2005, p.16). Culture, in his estimation grows from symbolic meaning found in art and literature.

Like Polkinghorne and Jung, Jerome Bruner (1996) recognizes the communicative purpose of symbolism. As social creatures, our need to communicate informs our efforts to understand and vice versa. Like Dewey, Bruner (1990) acknowledges the connection between narrative and experience in recognizing our “predisposition” to organize our lives into a narrative form in order to understand and communicate experience (p. 45). Storytelling highlights the complementary relationship between teaching and learning in that the disparate perspectives of the teller and recipients unite in spaces afforded by narrative communication. Bruner (1986) explains that narrative operates on “a dual landscape” of subjective and objective understanding, two ways of thinking that are “irreducible to one another” (p. 11). While words uttered or written down communicate concrete information to help frame understanding, the ability to grasp abstract concepts and deeper meanings requires subjective interpretation of the symbols such narratives conjure. The power of stories, Kieran Egan (1995) explains, lies in their capacity to combine “concrete content” with “abstract affective concepts” (p. 120). Stories appeal to both our logical and imaginative ways of thinking and have the potential to engage us like no other communicative device. Worlds unto themselves, stories entangle us in their meanings.

While Bruner uses the metaphor of landscapes to describe the way stories appeal to our different ways of thinking, David Herman (2004) elaborates with his suggestion that stories actually create and draw from whole *worlds* of understanding. The phenomena he terms “storyworlds” describes “mentally and emotionally projected environments in which interpreters are called upon to live out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative response” (p.16). Herman’s “storyworld” is curiously reminiscent of Freire’s (2009) notion of “contextual reality”,

in that both speak to the idea of situated understanding. Herman's notion of narrative understanding suggests that we "emplot" our experiences and "mold" our worlds into storyworlds (p. 9). If this is the case, the storyworlds we inhabit, individually and culturally, are analogous to the contextual realities from which we perceive, engage with, and respond to the world around us.

The ways in which we respond to the world around us depend on our interpretive stance (Rosenblatt, 1995). Louise Rosenblatt's (1982) transactional theory, which she describes as a "two-way, reciprocal relationship with the environment", characterizes the way in which individuals generate understanding through interpretation (p. 270). She (1995) maintains that we interpret experience on a receptive continuum that ranges from aesthetic (arguably more intuitive, emotional, and subjective) to efferent (arguably more calculative, rational, and objective) understanding. All understanding is drawn from the dynamic interplay of both ways of knowing. As Dewey (2009) notes, our interpretations of experience are also personally and culturally situated. In other words, our own ideas are always mediated by the ideas that surround us and circumstances in which we are immersed.

Story experiences and those in real life are undoubtedly different. However, the way we learn from these experiences may be more similar than we might imagine. Dewey (1938) explains that experience is structured through cause and effect, an equally fundamental aspect of narrative. The similarity between narrative and experiences is also noted by Rosenblatt (1995), who suggests that stories provide "a *living through*, [and] not simply *knowledge about*" imaginative experiences (pp. 37-38). Theodore Sarbin (2004) echoes this point of view in pointing to the ways in which we engage in stories through "attenuated or muted role-taking" (p. 6). The stories and characters we are drawn to, therefore, might tell us something about who we are. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) encourage us to understand life in terms of stories lived and told. Our lives, they write, are "filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments" (p. 17). Our predisposition for story, it would seem, does not mean we are merely receptive to stories

told, we also embody the understanding we gain from story, as characters in the stories we live out daily. This understanding is emphasized by Mark Freeman (2004), whose contention that we might benefit from understanding life *as if it were literature* suggests an intertextual relationship between the stories we tell and the stories we live.

Broadened notions of experience and text facilitate a fuller examination of how we view ourselves and the cultures in which we live. Text and experience come together in story as individuals and cultures make use of stories to document, explain, and explore experience. The embodied meanings that result from our transactions with these texts connect us to one another. The intertextuality of experiences, both real and imagined, and the resulting identities of these experiences suggests that stories are not just those artistic creations we share with one another, but structures in which we reside and play a role in creating.

Identity: The embodiment of acquired meaning

Stories foster our sense of self and give us insight into the lives, ideas, and identities of others. The meaning-making process of story carries us through plot developments in our own understanding. Identity is not static, for as our understanding changes, so do we. As we reflect on this change, we can trace the development of our understanding and consider insights we have yet to gain, thus charting our own curricular course and taking responsibility for our own stories.

In his discussion on autobiography, Pinar (1994) uses both archeological and architectural metaphors to describe how the self is drawn from “accumulations of experience [and] layers of sedimentation” and built through “relational bonding with others and with objects” (p. 202; p. 213). Similar to all stories, he argues, the self we convey through autobiographical storytelling is “fictive” (p. 209). Pinar explains that our personal stories occur within larger cultural stories (p. 209). As such, the self we know and portray to others, is “planned” and “built” through culturally derived conventions of “story-telling and myth-making” (p. 209). A deconstruction of the architectural marvel that is our *self* allows us to change and grow (p. 210).

Identity is not static, but an ever changing state subject to continual interpretation and redefinition. Dennis Sumara views identity as a process of continual creation (1998). In line with Rosenblatt's theory of transaction he notes that as a "text is interpreted by the reader, the reader, is at the same time interpreted" (p. 205). Texts, both stories and real life experiences, provide opportunity for reflection and identification. But as much as the individual finds meaning in the text, the cultural discourse that informs the text seeks meaning from the individual, making the identification process a two-way process. Rosenblatt would seem to agree, since her "transactional view of the human being in a two-way, reciprocal relationship with the environment" certainly does not envision interpretation happening in a vacuum (1982, p. 270). In agreement is Ricoeur, whose concept of narrative identity views life as "made up of stories created from fiction and history, creatively expressed over time through our engagement with others" (Farquhar. 2010, p. 10). This idea that our identity is tied up with the culture of ideas and meaning in which we are situated has significant implications. It means that who we are is at least partially informed by the ideas of those around us. Polkinghorne (1988) describes how the process of identity formation entails transactions in which the knowledge of others informs knowledge of the self and vice versa. Because of the ample opportunity they provide for such transactions, stories enable continual identity development.

Sartre writes that "a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it" (1964, p.61). Stories reflect, explain, and in turn guide our development as human beings. As stories provide a mirror for life, we look to them to determine the sorts of roles we play in life. Phillip W. Jackson states this clearly when he says that the stories we connect with "*actually make us what we are*" and are "constitutive of our personhood" (1995, p.12). The intertextuality of our lives, between our stories (real, read, and imagined) and the stories of others make identity many-layered but also ever-changing. Sumara

describes identity is an on-going project that involves the “fusing of past, present, and projected senses of self” (1998, p. 206). Thoughts mature, actions change, identity evolves, and at every stage, individuals engage with culture and learn more about who they are and who they have the potential to be. Communication between individual, yet culturally intertwined, identities informs the cultural discourse that gives rise to them in the first place, but which all participants have the power to influence.

Practice: How stories told become stories lived

The understanding we gather on a personal level invariably informs the roles we play professionally. Cate Watson (2006) concludes her research article on teacher identity with the following:

Telling stories involves reflection on, selection of and arrangement of events in an artful manner which contains meaning for the teller and seeks to persuade the listener of their significance. Telling stories is, then, in an important sense ‘doing’ identity work. Further, teachers’ stories are told within a community of practice which adds a collaborative dimension to the development of professional identity and has importance for the establishment and maintenance of school culture (p. 525)

Our participation in the story rich world in which we live makes us who we are. Ricoeur describes this fundamental aspect of identity as our “intersubjective” reality. He writes, “Our personal identity is thus defined by our commitments and identifications, what we endorse and what we oppose, from which we determine actions that we deem to be good, valuable, and right” (quoted in Farquhar, 2010, p.9). Like personal identity, professional identity is culturally situated. Professional roles are subject to social scrutiny and the process of *finding yourself* in the role at work is a matter of balancing personal values and cultural expectations.

In my professional role as a teacher-librarian, I struggle to balance my own ideas of what a teacher-librarian should do with the expectations of (or lack thereof) my students and colleagues, and those of my profession, which in the last decade has redefined itself to meet the needs of 21st Century learners. Two seminal texts for those in the profession, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (1998) and *Achieving Information Literacy: Standards for School Library Programs in Canada* (2003) both emphasize, as the job title implies, the importance of being both an instructional partner and information specialist. More recently, *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (2009) has stressed the importance of being educational leaders and technology integration specialists. I consider the roles proposed by these texts both vitally important and incredibly appealing, but know that I am not alone in feeling frustrated at being unable to enact this identity in my professional practice.

Much of my frustration stems from time constraints I face as a teacher-librarian working, in some cases with little or no clerical assistance, at three elementary schools. But it also has a lot to do with the value placed on teacher-librarians by those in my school community, who have, due to the persistent understaffing of school libraries, understandably come to view the role of teacher-librarian as far more limited than I or those in my profession would tend to consider it ourselves. This conflict of perspectives highlights a discontinuity in the discourse of what it means to be a teacher-librarian. This discontinuity is described by Sue Kimmel (2011) whose discourse analysis of how those in a school community understand what “a real school librarian” does, reveals the challenge of overcoming what James Gee (2001) terms a discursive identity. Gee’s notion echoes Ricoeur’s ideas about intersubjectivity in that both bring the ideas of the individual and those of the culture in which they are situated to bear in the formation of identity. As Kimmel writes, the identity of a teacher-librarian is “negotiated in interactions with others” and “exercised not only in the ways others see us but also in the ways we talk about and promote

ourselves” (p. 17). Here again, my efforts to connect curriculum, identity, and practice are affirmed by this notion that identity is tied not only to ideas but to practice.

The theoretical background upon which I have drawn points to the ways in which stories lived become stories told, but the reverse is also true. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, we ultimately embody the meanings we gather from the stories we connect to and tell about ourselves. How individuals live out their acquired meanings determines the roles they play and the meanings their roles hold for others. Bruner (1990) emphasizes the *shared* nature of meaning and Homi Bhabha’s (1994) notion of cultural hybridity as the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications”, contributes to the notion that our identities, both personal and professional, are always co-constructed (p. 4). What we do with this knowledge determines our cultural contribution. Yatta Kanu (2003) speaks of “imagining ourselves as a community participating, interpreting ourselves, and creating knowledge together” (p. 77). How we as individuals participate in our communities depends equally on the needs of that community and the understanding we bring of ourselves, reflected in our actions, to that community. It is here that our embodied stories merge with the corporeality of the larger cultural narrative.

I suspect that my frustrations with being a teacher-librarian might be partially mitigated by a deeper examination of the texts and experiences that have informed my identity and influence my practice. As it stands, my identity is a coded—or symbolic—representation of what I think, feel, and reflect about the culture around me. In other words, my identity is based in my contextual reality (Freire, 2009, p.151). My effort to understand myself and be understood by others requires that I *decode* the meanings I hold subjectively to “mov[e] from the abstract to the concrete” so as to recognize the implications and potentials inherent in my identity as an individual and as a teacher-librarian (p. 152). As Maxine Greene (2009) suggests, “awareness begins perspectively”. In examining my subjective perspective, I hope to “rediscover the ways in

which objects arise, the ways in which experience develops [and] the ways in which meanings have been sedimented in [my] own personal history” (p. 165).

Examining characters in stories I have identified with over the course of my life is one way in which I hope to achieve this. Examining the stories I tell about my own lived experiences is another way in which I hope to interrogate the phenomena that is my identity for careful examination. The “concrete existential ‘coded’ situation” these stories present will provide an opportunity for me to recognize myself, outside of myself (Freire, 2009, p. 151). Having considered who I am in this manner, I hope to be better able to embody and be consciously transformed, by that with which I identify. As Freire puts it: “It is thus possible to explain conceptually why individuals begin to behave differently with regard to objective reality, once that reality has ceased to look like a blind alley and has taken on its true aspect: a challenge which [they] must meet” (2009, p.152). My hope is that, although the stories I tell will be personal in nature, they will reveal for readers the “common core of experience” Rosenblatt (1995) spoke of.

Review and critique of related empirical research

Recent research has demonstrated that the development of a teacher’s identity is “a critical aspect of the professional preparation process” that “influence[s] all aspects of [his or her] professional work” (Richmond et. al, p. 2011). We know that as individuals we draw on narrative to translate personal histories into unified identities (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). This process involves taking stock of our values and perspectives (Caruthers, 2006), and ideally, critically examining the assumptions that shape our worldview (Karpiak , 2010). Self-narratives can facilitate critical thinking in that when we confront ourselves as objects in these narratives, we have the opportunity to reshape our understanding (Karpiak, 2010). While self-knowledge is incomplete without considering the various cultural contexts in which we are situated, personal narratives draw us into the complex cultural meaning-making processes that contribute to the formation of our identities (Pufall-Jones, 2010; Zilber, 2008). Cultural context, personal identity,

and the stories that describe and inform these are fluid over our lifetime (Zilber, 2008). A change in circumstances alters the course of our narrative and may cause us to question things we had previously taken for granted. Just as stories allow us to investigate our own assumptions, so too do they provide space in which to question the “assumed binaries” and concepts of “the discourse communities that surround us” (Lordly, 2007, p. 34)

Research has shown that storytelling develops “ways of knowing and dialoging about issues” (Lordly, 2007, p.30). This capacity of narrative exemplifies its intersubjective nature (Ricoeur, 1984). Sklar’s (2008) research on the pedagogical implications of sympathizing with fictional characters has shown that stories, other than our own, can provide an “absorptive” and “subjective construal[s] of experience” that compels us to re-examine our attitudes and understanding. In this way, our cognitive engagement in stories is often similar to that in real life (Sklar, 2008). Kaufman and Libby’s (2012) research draws analogous conclusions. Their research on “experience-taking” demonstrates that stories often encourage recipients to step outside of themselves, “simulate the subjective experience of a character”, and consider thoughts, feelings, and ideas that might be otherwise foreign to their own experiences (p. 3). Similarly, Cross’s (2010) research suggests that narrative serves a “bridging function” that connects the different structures we think with, inhabit, and encounter so that we are able to operate in the world and also make sense of it (p. 191).

While the research to date has demonstrated that personal narrative is well suited to the study of identity construction (Pufall-Jones, 2010), the complexity of this construction process has not been fully explored. The influence of culture, in terms of how an individual is situated beyond his or her control, is undeniable, but I am also interested in how individuals situate themselves and create their own cultural webs of significance (Geertz, 1973). The uniqueness of an individual’s *personal culture* is what fascinates me. It is my contention that personal culture, a matrix of significant experiences and texts, is worth examination because it will provide insight

into the values and beliefs that inform an individual's identity and the social (or professional) role he or she is suited to play.

Methodology

My research, with its focus on “stories lived and told”, lends itself to narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). An inductive process (Creswell, 2013) capable of bridging my personal experiences with my cultural influences is best handled by an autoethnographic approach. As Ellis et al. (2011) explains, “[a]utoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (para. 1). Because of the attention it pays to both the individual and the culture(s) in which he or she is situated, an autoethnographic approach is appropriate for my research question.

The stories that I share will reveal the educational relationship between my experiences and the cultural artifacts—texts—that hold significance for me (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 20). I hope to illustrate the extent to which this relationship has contributed to my identity and explore the ways in which I have been motivated to behave because of this experience with such texts. First, an autoethnographic narrative will serve as both the method through which I research the significant texts and experiences of my life, and the manner by which I express the findings of that research. Secondly, an autoethnographic approach assumes that I will explore my own stories. Stories, Freeman (2004) explains, are something “woven into the very fabric of experience” (p. 63). Similarly, Polkinghorne (1988) argues that identity is made up of narratives. Appropriate for the aims of my research, an autoethnographic approach illuminates the ways in which narrative has composed and continues to construct my identity. Finally, an autoethnographic approach facilitates my efforts to identify and “illustrate facets of cultural experience” that influenced the “trajectory” of my professional practice (Ellis et al., 2011, paras. 6, 9).

Studying my experiences gives me an insider perspective (Creswell, 2013), yet the challenge of adequately acknowledging “the multiple sources [...] that give rise to the self”

(Freeman, 2002, p, 209) as well as the “hazards of intimate familiarity” (Hayano, 1979, p. 102), which may blind me to my own “unexamined assumptions” (Muncey, 2010, p. 30) are there to consider. It is difficult to be objective about my subjective understanding, but each time I tell my stories I am afforded the opportunity to examine previously unexamined aspects of my identity. My understanding of self has evolved because of my research, but there are undoubtedly remain stones left unturned. As the central character in my own story, I am not an “already completed and unchanging person”, but one who is “evolving and developing” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 10). My study will not uncover a fixed and final product, but explore my identity in terms of who I have been and what I might possibly become as educator. It is in this exploration of my experience, not as an omniscient narrator, but as a participant in the action, that I hope to draw others into a consideration and appreciation of the complex and yet never fully comprehensive processes by which we all as individuals attempt to gain understanding of ourselves.

In order for my study to be meaningful to others, I must look beyond the “intra-textual” elements of my experience to the “inter-textual” elements that connect my experiences to the culture around me (Huhtala & Lehti-Eklund, 2010, p. 274). I will achieve this by linking my experiences to a variety of texts (picture books, novels, television shows, and music) and demonstrating the ways in which my textual lineage has informed and been informed by my autobiography. For educators, this kind of self-knowledge is particularly important. And individual’s relationship with culture reveals the personal and social dynamic Dewey (2009) speaks of that influences our beliefs, actions, and identities. In an era in which “personalized learning” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2012) is championed as the way forward, educators who are cognizant of the “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973, p. 4) that inform their own understanding are better equipped to guide students through the gathering of significant texts, construction of personal narratives, and reflective processes necessary for self-awareness and educational self-reliance.

Ethical considerations

While studying identity and culture, the lives and experiences of others are invariably tied up with my own. I acknowledge the difficulty of writing an autoethnography that does not draw on these experiences but focuses solely on my own. The purpose of this study was to explore my relationships with a variety of texts and determine the ways in which such relationships have informed my sense of self. A broader study that included an analysis of my other relationships, with family, friends, colleagues, and so on would have provided a deeper understanding of my identity. This study, however, is not meant to be exhaustive, if such a thing is even possible. Narrowing the scope of my exploration and analysis was a practical decision focused on the aims of my research question. Still, writing about my life without mentioning others is nearly impossible. As such, I took into consideration the ethical implications of making mention of those whose identities I would be unable to protect. I asked such individuals to read the sections in which they are mentioned and provided a consent form (see Appendix A) so they could approve of the inclusion of their names and the associated details. I included this form in my application to the Human Research Ethics Board who approved this study prior to the commencement of my research.

Procedures

Overall approach and rationale

My autoethnographic approach weaves together my “lived and told experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71) and a critical examination of my textual lineage (Tatum, 2009). In writing what Ellis et al. (2011) term a “layered account”, my research draws on data from my autobiography, textual lineage, and the insights I have gained from my experience (para. 20). As Muncey (2010) explains, autoethnography addresses and/or questions these many layers of

experience and identity. Ellis and Bochner (2000) speak of “the multiple layers of consciousness”, which connect individuals to the culture around them. The degree to which individuals can be recognized as distinct from culture, let alone the degree to which consciousness can be truly understood, is perhaps limited (Muncey, 2010). However, the possibility for greater understanding, and what Muncey (2010) terms the “evocative potential”, depends on the willingness of its participant to expose and examine the “vulnerable” and socially situated aspects of his or her identity. The degree to which I have done this effectively will ultimately determine the worth of this exercise and the value of my research question (pp. 30-31). Locating a “coherent individual self” is unlikely (Muncey, 2010, p. 30). Such knowledge denies the reality of human comprehension: it is never comprehensive. My study reflects an emergent understanding (Creswell, 2013). I weave my experiences, influences, and previous insights throughout this study to reveal the ways in which I have been educated and now draw on that education in my daily practice as a teacher-librarian. How effectively I have pieced together these elements will determine the “cultural relevance” and educational value of this exercise. (Creswell, 2013, p. 73).

Data sources and collection methods

I began by collecting stories, documents, and composing personal reflections in order to develop a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of my developing professional and personal identity. The following *field texts* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) reflect a diversity of personal, cultural and historical contexts (Creswell, 2013) pertinent to an examination of my experiences. My data sources, embedded throughout my thesis, are as follows:

Life history

The core thread of my autoethnographic narrative is my life story. I have examined multiple experiences from my life that I consider pertinent to my development both personally and professionally. In this way, the life story I present is, by necessity, selective. I tried to allow

this selection to occur authentically, but understand that I can only narrate my story from the present. Because of this, I used free writing methods to excavate memories of events that hold significance to my identity in its present configuration.

Educational autobiography

Pinar's (1979) method of *curare*, with its focus on institutional learning is important to my understanding of my identity as an educator. I examine the effect my school experiences had on the development of my identity, drawing on my earliest memories all the way to the present. However, I reflect on the learning I experienced in these settings alongside my learning in the world outside the classroom. My education involves learning in a variety of personal and social settings. As with my life history, the educational experiences I draw on here will reflect my current appraisal of where I stand in relation to where I have stood before, as well as where I stand in relation to others.

Personal stories of cultural milieus from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood

The cultural environments into which I was born and raised, along with those I embraced, rejected, and, from time to time, those in which I have been surprised to find myself immersed are of crucial significance. While I cannot extricate myself from these cultural webs I have attempted to locate myself within them. The stories I tell about the culture(s) in which I have grown reveal the nature of my relationship with them, a relationship that is characterized in my perceptions, reflections, and attitudes.

Influential texts

It is my contention that the stories and cultural artifacts that make up my textual lineage, those I have identified with and that had a significant impact on the way I came to understand myself and the world around me, reflect the nature of my relationship with culture. I explore and discuss the texts (books, music, television shows, movies, ideologies, mythologies etc.) that, from my current perspective, appear significant to my development and understanding so far. These

stories are shared alongside and woven throughout my own. These stories, like the experiences I share, are my own insofar as the meaning I make of them. My research will be framed by the exploration of these texts.

Personal journals

My personal reflections, the things I felt compelled to write down, are essentially proclamations of my understanding and identity. As historical texts of my own creation, they were certainly worth exploring. They are perhaps more intricately connected to my experiences than the texts I consumed. However, because my engagement with culture has been characteristically more consumerist than creative, I did not have as much to draw from here. Moreover, I do not believe that the ways in which we consume (or are consumed by) culture are any less revealing of identity than the ways in which we create culture.

Documents and reflections on my profession and daily practice as an educator

Also included in my data are artifacts from and insights into my daily practice. These include observations of my present teaching practices and excerpts of curriculum and Ministry documents. My selection of these items and the connections I draw to my experience contribute to my current sense of where I stand as a professional.

Data analysis procedures

My data collection and analysis “proceed simultaneously”. I wish to draw readers into the “emergent experience of doing and writing research” so they might, as Ellis et al. (2011) suggests, “conceive of identity as an “emergent process” and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analysis” (para. 20). I have constructed a chronology of understanding that reflects the shifts in meaning I experienced growing up (Creswell, 2013, p.74). I have identified themes and “turning points” (Denzin, 1989) evident in my “life course stages” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). Creating this narrative required a restorying (Creswell, 2013) process, which enabled me to illustrate the causal links in my cognitive and affective development.

Strategies for validating findings

Due to the nature of this study, validating my findings presented certain challenges, not the least of which was my ability to remember accurately (Ellis et al., 2011). The reliability of my findings will be reflected in my credibility as the narrator (Ellis et al., 2011) and the conceivable truth of my story. My work seeks verisimilitude (Creswell, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). I strived to keep questions of how my story would encourage readers to draw connections to their own educational, cultural and textual experiences and those of others in mind as I wrote (Ellis et al., 2011). The extent to which my autoethnography achieves verisimilitude depends on the accessibility of my story and the extent to which I have enabled readers to relate to, sympathize with, or learn from my experiences.

There is a valid concern that in studying my experiences, I run the risk of becoming overly enamoured with my own subjective understanding. In order to guard against this, I aimed to foster a high level of what Rosenblatt (1995) terms “critical consciousness”. Again, I acknowledge the difficulty of being able to critically assess my subjective understanding. However, in bringing various texts and experiences together in a continuous narrative, I have sought to uncover the intertextual nature of my cultural entanglements, evident in the themes that emerge, and *rethink* the ways in which I have been educated. More than merely telling stories, I wished to analyze the “storied landscape” upon which my experiences have played out (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 24).

Narrative Structure

A narrative approach informed each stage of my research and characterizes the presentation of my findings. I emplot my experiences in a three-dimensional inquiry space of space, time, and action in order to reveal the context and continuity of my life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and textual interactions (Creswell, 2013). Through an autoethnographic approach, both in process and in product (Ellis et al., 2011), I have written a

cohesive narrative that weaves my understanding of narrative theory with a summary and analysis of my research findings.

Expected outcomes

Narrative is a tool that may be used to better understand ourselves and the world around us. Through this autoethnographic study, I hoped to reveal how my experiences and textual lineage have impacted my sense of identity and my development as an educator. I anticipated that I would gain a greater understanding of how these things have shaped my own identity and practices as a teacher-librarian. I was correct in this assumption and intrigued by what I found. My hope is that my research methodology will demonstrate a manner in which others may, in examining the confluence of their own life experiences and connection to cultural artifacts, come to a better understanding of who they are and who they are becoming as educators.

Autoethnography

Prologue

For a brief period of time, when I was seven or so years old, He-Man and the Masters of the Universe mythology of which he was a part held a powerful hold over my imagination. I of course rooted for Prince Adam and his powerful alter-ego He-Man and loathed the wickedness of Skeletor and his minions, but there was one character in this on-going saga that baffled but totally intrigued me. His name was Zodac. At the time, I knew



Fig. 1. Zodac. Mattel, 1982

only that Zodac was neither a good guy nor a bad guy. Sometimes he helped He-Man and sometimes he fought alongside Skeletor. Zodac was, I was told, neutral. I've looked into this character recently to confirm my hazy childhood recollection of him and confirmed this to be true. Zodac is, as Wikipedia describes him, a "cosmic enforcer" who doesn't usually engage in the struggles between He-Man and Skeletor but does, from time to time, aid one or the other as he deems necessary. My apologies to He-Man aficionados if I've somehow misinterpreted Zodac's role, but at the time, I found Zodac's peculiar neutrality provided an interesting contrast to He-Man's otherwise very black and white world.

In recent years, I have become rather interested in the concept of liminality. Built on the Latin root *limen*, meaning threshold, liminality denotes a state of ambiguity. A liminal figure exists just past the point of comprehension, is partway through or in a perpetual state of becoming, and because of this, is shrouded in mystery. Zodac, whose actions are unpredictable and whose character cannot be easily defined, is a liminal figure. Neither "good" nor "evil", his character exists outside the moral understanding of the world of He-Man and Skeletor. Moral ambiguity is an unexpected trait of a children's cartoon character, however, perhaps more peculiar are the ways in which we often categorize ourselves and those around us in the real

world with similar binary-inspired definitions. The truth about identity, however, is that it is far more nuanced and almost never fixed. I think that what fascinated me about Zodac more than anything was that, in the black and white world of He-Man, his character made the most sense.

A few years after trying to wrap my head around Zodac's transgressive nature and laying down my He-Man action figure, I started thinking about what, if being a "Master of the Universe" like He-Man wasn't an option, I might be able to do to contribute to the world around me. It was around the age of ten that I decided I might like to become a teacher. It took me until twenty-three, however, to commit to this decision and to articulate to myself the kind of teacher I wanted to be and the sort of message I wanted to convey. I think my realization of this was quite gradual, but the words came to me so suddenly that I wrote it down so I wouldn't forget: "You are a doorway. You are *another* passageway. Multiple directions centre me. Centre, me" (Personal journal, 2002). A bit cryptic, I know. But this was the distillation of what I had come to realize: that each of us represents a life *history* and a state and a way of being that we can all learn from. Our life stories reveal experiential paths and learning from the stories of others is like opening doors to well-worn passageways of being, behaving, and believing different from our own. Each one of us is at the perceptual centre of our own world, but it is the dramatically diverse array of perspectives around us that has the potential to centre us and give us an appreciation of the conscious whole of humanity. When I started thinking about what kind of teacher I wanted to be, I began by reflecting on the lessons I had learned through childhood and as a young adult. Many of the lessons learned, a lived curriculum I venture to explore here, have to do with becoming aware not only of my own unique textual lineage but of the vast number of cultural passageways to understanding that exist and are utilized in the world around me. By understanding that such alternatives do not pose a threat, but offer an opportunity for greater understanding, I have come to more greatly appreciate the diversity of individual learners. Being different does separate us, but it also provides an educational opportunity. What we *must* learn is not any one thing easily

handed down to us from on high, but that which comes out of our engagement in our everyday existence and the stories we tell to explain our life experiences to one another.

Over the course of my life I, like many of you, have struggled to come to a greater understanding of who I am. My story explores this struggle through an autobiographical exploration of ‘Self’ in various states of becoming. I cross-reference my personal story with fictional stories and characters that have influenced my understanding of self in significant ways. My storied account is replete with liminal characters—those who operate in spaces in between—who, like myself, find themselves in the middle of a process of becoming. Here and now, at the age of thirty-three, I find myself looking back, tracing trails I’ve left behind me to determine the meaning I ascribe, in this moment to my existence. This is my story.

Once upon a time... there were no other gods before me

I was born into a Christian home, raised to revere God as the creator and controller of the universe. My protestant upbringing instilled in me certain beliefs about the love and power of an omnipotent, omniscient, singular God. Central to these beliefs is the notion that that humans are born into a world of sin and temptation. Two thousand years ago, God appeared on Earth in the flesh and lived a human life as a man named Jesus. Jesus offered himself up as a sacrifice to pay of the sins of humanity with the promise that whoever admitted their sins and accepted him as their saviour would enjoy eternal life. The stories of the Christian tradition in which I was raised piece together this conception of the world. We can imagine that these stories were originally shared orally by early believers and subsequently inscribed by those who followed later. Later still and continually thereafter, these stories were interpreted and reinterpreted, translated and retranslated until finally they came to me in the form of Sunday school lessons and around-the-dinner-table devotional discussions. I listened to and read a lot of Bible stories as a kid. I could relay any one of them to you today.

There's the Old Testament story of the prophet Elijah, who challenges his arch nemesis and wayward Israelite king Ahab to a contest in order to determine whose god is greater: the rightful god of the Israelites, God, or Baal, the god worshiped by Jezebel, King Ahab's heathen wife. Elijah and 450 prophets of Baal ascend Mount Carmel where



Fig. 2. The Slaughter of the Prophets of Baal..J. Schnorr von Carolsfeld, 1860.

Elijah issues the following challenge: “[Y]ou call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” (1 Kings 18:24, New International Version). Each side set up altars laden with sacrificial bulls to their respective gods. The prophets of Baal dance, wail, and cut themselves, calling upon Baal for hours to no avail. Elijah taunts them, saying: “Shout louder! [...] Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27, New International Version). Christians love this story. God’s prophet isn’t shy about his faith. Though he is far outnumbered, he knows God is behind him; he’s got Truth on his side. Before Elijah asks God to ignite the altar, he first requests that his altar be doused in water, not once, but three times so that it is soaked through. Then, with one prayer, fire rains down from the sky and engulfs the altar built for the one True God. Not only does the sacrificial bull burn, so does the wood, the rocks, and soil upon which the sacrifice is laid. The people of Israel immediately acknowledge God’s superiority and Elijah commands that the prophets of Baal be slaughtered, which they are. Take that, Baal!

Stories like this were a big part of my education, in my home, in school, and in church every Sunday. They were a part of my daily life. After I decided to stop calling myself a Christian at age 19, I attempted to cut myself off from the educational influence of Christianity. Bible stories were never the only sort I drew from to build understanding, yet they loomed with mythological proportions. Through them I had been taught to seek Truth. That's truth with a capital 'T', because there was no allowance for truth outside of God. Granted, this isn't necessarily the viewpoint of all Christians, maybe not even those responsible for my education, but this was certainly the impression I got. If truth had any relativity to it, this was something I was going to have to figure out for myself. This practice of looking to stories to learn about what was true through narrative played an important role in the development of my identity. Biblical scripture wrote its way into my brain and shaped who I became as a young man. When I tried to extricate myself from their inscription, I found myself searching for a new truth-bearing narrative. By the time this happened, however, I had long come to understand that there is far less Truth and a great deal more *truths* in the world than I had once believed.

The stories that informed my Christian identity as a child were not new. Millions of others before me had received and based their understanding of themselves and the world around the messages they perceived in these stories. However, the context in which I received these stories was my own. The time and place in which I received them was different from the time and place in which my parents had received them before me. Our political, cultural, and social environments were, even if only subtly, different. Genetically and in so many other ways I was built with many of the same building blocks as my parents, siblings, relatives, and members of the cultural communities in which I was raised, but experiences I've had and cultural ideas I've adopted and rejected has made my "architecture of self" (Pinar, 1994) unique.

I remember sitting around the dinner table in our two-storey brick house on Stanley Ave. in Hamilton Ontario, being reminded to close my eyes as we gave thanks for the meal laid out

before us. I would have been three or four years old. I waited until my father's prayer had begun to reopen them. Looking then and there at my parents, observing their devotion, heads bowed and hands clasped together in concentrated reverence, I saw that the command they gave me was one to which they themselves answered. I remember this giving me pause. Our prayer was not simply an activity my parents had devised for themselves, but an expression of a much larger system of which they were a part and wished me to be a part of too. The ways in which I was encouraged to participate in these and other rituals, with suggestive phrases like "We do this because..." and "We believe this because..." had the intended effect of drawing me into practices of believing and behaving, because I wanted and needed to be a part of this "we" they described. After all, if I wasn't part of "we", who was I? For all I knew, at the time, this was the way everyone did things. I don't recall ever considering or being made aware of an alternative.

When I got to kindergarten I was shocked to discover that other kids in my class didn't believe or practice the same ritualized behaviour. They didn't speak of God as one would a revered father. They didn't pray before they ate or ever pray at all. "They don't believe!" I said to my mom after coming to this realization early on in that first year of school. Recognizing that the stories and beliefs I took for granted were not part of the realities of others had as great an impact on me as my initial recognition of the very existence of these stories and beliefs around the dinner table a few years earlier. I didn't begin to imagine at the time what stories and beliefs others held dear in place of mine, only that they didn't share those I had assumed were common to all.

Much of my early elementary school years were spent coming to terms with the fact that, though in many ways I was part of something huge, namely a cultural way of knowing, believing, and behaving that spanned the globe, in the more immediate day to day experience of the culture of the small town public school I attended, I was an outsider. I gradually understood that many of the kids I went to school with came from somewhat similar backgrounds. I accompanied one friend to a service at the local Mennonite church and spent a few Sundays across the street from

my family's Presbyterian Church with my Catholic friend and his family following Saturday night sleepovers. Yet, aside from these few connections, I didn't meet many kids in those early years that came from religious households or, if they did, they didn't talk openly about it. In retrospect, I didn't talk about it much myself. Outside of my family and church-associated friend groups, I don't know if I talked about it at all. I wasn't interested in making my difference known. Again, I wanted to associate with a concept of "we" which, in the public school system, didn't openly acknowledge personal religious belief. At the time, especially compared to today's more strictly secular public environment, religion was still a part, though a somewhat detritus one, of my early public school experience. Every morning we'd follow up the national anthem with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Everyone knew this by heart, not out of personal devotion mind you, but because we all chanted it every day. We didn't talk about it, we just did it. It wouldn't be much longer before this routine was removed from the daily public school regimen. I suppose the lack of meaning it held for an increasing number of students and teachers foretold its removal from the public narrative.

Though the influence of religion in public schools was on the wane in the mid-eighties, we welcomed on occasion local ministers into our classroom, individuals who read us Bible stories and discussed the moral themes of these from a Christian perspective. I remember one such instance vividly, since the minister in question, who encouraged us to call him Pastor Alan, was none other than my own Presbyterian parish's latest acquisition. This was grade three. I was becoming more comfortable being different, and as tight-lipped as I usually was about my religious home-life, having my own minister come to my public school classroom was a validating experience for me. Following his Bible reading, I readily raised my hand to answer his questions. I remember one of my classmates asking me how I knew about all this stuff and being proud to tell him that I knew Pastor Alan and the answers to his questions because we went to the

same church. This experience was affirming. Thought it did reinforce my sense of being an outsider, it also boosted my confidence and made me feel better about being different.

My knowledge and experience was not in sync with that of many of my classmates. While my religious upbringing was a significant factor in that disparity, things like the fact that my family did not own a television often meant that I was unable to participate in conversations about shows my friends watched. I came home from school one day upset that my friends were able to watch TV at home and talk and laugh together the next day about what they'd watched. My Mom, heartbroken, almost broke down completely and bought a TV, but decided against it. I'm glad. My out of school education was quite different, on a few fronts, from that of my peers. Many of them lived in town, while I lived in the country. While they watched television after school, I went outside. While they played hockey on the weekend, I went to church with my family. All of this gave me a unique perspective. I didn't after all have the opportunity to run with the pack. I was never ostracized or bullied. I had plenty of friends and enjoyed going to school. Yet, the disconnect between my cultural references and those of my peers gave me an outsider perspective with which I identified early on. I don't imagine that feeling like an outsider is all that unique, but believing that it was certainly shaped the way I came to view myself in relation to others.

During the summer before I entered grade four, my family moved west, leaving our small town in Northern Ontario for a somewhat bigger town in Southern British Columbia. This move coincided with an awakening I suppose is common to most eight year olds making the move from a primary to intermediate grade and to the cognitive and emotional development characteristic of this stage of an individual's life. For me, the move was exciting. I was facing and embracing change at all levels. This transition was no more or less traumatic than anything going on inside of myself. I was a well-adjusted kid and ready for the change.

The plan for my siblings and me was that we would attend the public school a mere two minute walk from our new suburban home. That summer was spent getting to know the neighbourhood and our future classmates. It was an exciting time. However, just weeks away from Labour Day, my parents attended an open house at the Christian School on the other side of town. There had been a big shake-up in the school community there and what had at first struck my parents as a less than ideal social and educational environment was now looking much more positive. The decision was made to send us there; a decision made with the encouragement and generous financial assistance of my very Christian grandfather.

At the time I was disappointed. I had become invested in my neighbourhood and ideas I had generated about where it was I would be going to school. The Christian school struck me as hopelessly impoverished with its single hallway, library portable, ridiculously tiny, low-ceilinged gymnasium, and total student population of sixty-five. It felt like a move down to the minor leagues, but I was adaptive to my parent's wishes. I quickly made friends, came to appreciate the fact that my formal education now reflected the values of my upbringing, and soon felt comfortable with the confinements of this environment. The dueling notions of "we" to which I subscribed, the sense of "we" I associated with my family and church community and that I associated with my friends had, at least at school, merged. I no longer felt like the outsider. As a result, my identity, in terms of my connection to others, was less divided and therefore strengthened. While my early years in school had been marked with greater shyness and feelings of being labeled as different, I blossomed in my new environment, became increasingly social, easy going, and comfortable with myself.

Going to Christian school was a good thing for me. It brought the narratives by which I understood the world together and made growing up less complicated, at least for a few years. Yet, my kindergarten realization that not everyone shared the same stories and beliefs as my family, church community and me, came back to me as I entered high school. There, outside of

the protective bubble that was my private, Christian, elementary school, I was faced with ways of understanding the world and behaving that were both foreign and frightening to me. Those feelings I had about being an outsider returned and this time more intensely. I felt small and unable to participate as a member in the cultural group in which I was now immersed, which brought back feelings of inadequacy I had not experienced since entering preschool back in Hamilton. This wavering confidence was a recurring factor in my development from childhood to adulthood. I don't suppose this struggle is uncommon, but my reasons for it are my own and thus crucial to the development of my narrative.

Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang

As a young boy, the eldest in my family, entering school for the first time was, like it would be for many, a daunting prospect that bore an equal mix of excitement, confusion, and apprehension. The excitement came from finally entering the grown-up world of going to school like big kids did. My school experience began when I was three. I attended preschool for two years: one year at Mother Goose preschool and another in junior kindergarten at Earl Kitchener Elementary, both in Hamilton. There was the newness of leaving home without my parents, of new toys, and new responsibilities. All of these factors made going to preschool exciting, but a little scary too. I was beginning to establish my identity in a group situation. Shy and quiet, I gravitated towards groups of quieter children. More often than not, these were groups of girls. Boys tended to be more exuberant in their play and this was not something that appealed to me at the time.

My best friend, a girl, lived two doors down from me. Each morning we would board a tiny little school bus that picked us up right outside our doors. The Mother Goose preschool was only a few blocks away. I know this now thanks to the Internet. At the time it might as well have been a half hour drive, though I have virtually no memories of being on that bus. This might be explained by the fact that I would have gotten off the bus just minutes after boarding. Getting on

a bus to go to school with my best friend, to play with kids my age, to create things like paintings and place mats, and to perform songs we'd practiced for our parents was all quite exciting for me. I do not recall any of the teachers at Mother Goose. All I can really see in the mind's eye of my memory are big legs walking around me and big hands reaching across my line of sight. Like most of my memories from this time, it's all a bit hazy. But I do recall feeling safe there. The name alone, Mother Goose, was a comfort to me. A maternal presence I associated with softly cooed nursery rhymes that presided over this gaggle of kids whose parents needed to be at work made going there seem like a good thing to do.

Still, leaving the comfort of my parent's home was confusing at times. My most vivid recollection of this has to do with strange encounters in darkened closets. Before you get too excited, allow me to explain. You see, preschools provide great opportunities for healthcare providers to set up shop, connect effectively with parents and kids, and do their jobs. Such individuals would be given the use of a small office, spare room, or in the case of the Mother Goose preschool building, a large closet. There they would assemble whatever apparatus they used to measure our hearing, eyesight, or possibly our IQ. I am sure whatever they were doing was explained at length to us. I imagine us preschoolers sitting around in a circle to meet the "nice lady" who had come to "check our ears and eyes" or whatever it was, but having no points of reference it was always a bit confusing. One at a time we (or was it just me?) would be called out to visit the nice lady in the closet. This nice lady did a little more explaining I'm sure, but I don't remember any of that. All I remember was having things stuck in my ears, being told to listen for certain sounds, usually a beep of some kind, having the lights turned off and being told to look through a pair of funny glasses and identify certain shapes and colours, and getting the sense that I was being tested, measured, and judged in terms of my fitness. Of course I was never informed of such judgements, so the whole affair would remain shrouded in mystery. Years later I would encounter similar tests in elementary school and, taking both experiences into

consideration, I could see that such exams were routine. That I was able to hear the beeps and see the shapes meant that everything was okay. But at the time these experiences were confusing. They also introduced me to the world of standards. Because I had never had a problem with my eyesight or hearing I had never thought about what it would be like not to have these things. Thinking about that possibility got me thinking about what other tests I might encounter and whether or not I would measure up. Such thoughts contributed to my sense of apprehension when it came to going to school. I very much wanted to do right and be right in the eyes of the big people around me and the thought that I might fail in this regard caused me some concern. Though balanced by the excitement of new experiences and a general sense that I really didn't know what was going on anyways, my fear of not measuring up was part of my early school experiences, and to be honest, later life experiences as well.

Following a year at the Mother Goose preschool, I began junior kindergarten a few blocks away at Earl Kitchener Elementary. Here I had no exposure that I can remember to older children. We junior kindergarten kids had our own recess and run of the playground and went home at a different time than the rest of the students so, like at Mother Goose where we were the only ones there, it felt like the school was ours. Our two teachers were both very lovely ladies who were kind but had very clear expectations concerning our behaviour. This was comforting to be sure, but the concern about not living up to these expectations landed me in a bit of a pickle on at least one occasion.

At the halfway point of our half-day, we always had juice and cookie. This was always followed by a nap. One day during snack time I found myself needing to go to the bathroom. The trouble was I hadn't yet finished my snack. The rule, as I understood it, was that we were to finish our snack before leaving the table. I was determined not to break this rule. I had to pee really badly though and was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. As a way to extricate myself and save face, I began to encourage my fellow students to help themselves to my juice and cookies, to

please, by all means take what they wished. I didn't explain to any of them that I had to go pee. I managed to get rid of one cookie and was beginning to lose bladder control one squirt at a time when I began to panic. I begged those around me to finish my snack before committing the all too imaginable. My fellow students were unsympathetic. In a last ditch effort to save my increasingly damp pants, I made a break with etiquette. I abandoned the table and left my unfinished juice and cookie behind. I ran to the washroom. But it was too late. I had already soaked through my pants and let the little I had managed to hold back go. I didn't even bother to unzip my fly.

When one of my teachers saw me standing by the washroom door, my pants soaked, waiting to catch her eye, she quickly dashed to the emergency underwear stash for a pair of dry briefs. As she followed me through the washroom door, I realized she intended to help me change. This meant she was going to see me naked. I was between her and the washroom wall and I found myself wrestling with the decision about which end of me I'd rather keep concealed. It was either my bum or my penis. It was a tough decision. I didn't know which one was worse. Finally I concluded that a bum was more embarrassing and more private than a penis and decided to keep my bum to the wall as she helped me into a dry pair of underwear.

I looked down as those wonderfully dry undies slid into place. They were purple. I had never seen purple underwear before. All of mine were white or blue. I wondered whose purple undies these were, and if they missed them. I was so caught up with these purple undies, I completely forgot about my unfinished juice and cookies. I forgot about my wet pants. I forgot about whether to hide my bum or my penis. Those purple undies and the possible story behind them fascinated me. When I got home that day and reported the day's events, I enthusiastically laughed about my wet pants and about hiding my bum from my teacher. When I finished telling my story, I stripped down to my purple undies and danced around the living room.

This story is kind of like my Garden of Eden moment. I commit what I perceive to be a cardinal sin, suffer humiliation, and suddenly feel quite exposed. Like Adam and Eve I realize for the first time how naked I am. Instead of being banished from preschool however, I am forgiven for my sins and given some clothes to wear. Other than the trauma of peeing my pants and being naked in front of my teacher, the purple underwear has always stuck out for me in my memories of this incident. Perhaps it was something my teacher said to me at the time, reassuring me that lots of kids pee their pants and in fact this was precisely why they had a ready supply of fresh underwear on hand. Perhaps it was because those purple underwear, which seemed so foreign and yet so comfortable, got me thinking about how my experiences weren't all that different from others. The relief I felt about not getting in trouble certainly put a positive spin on the whole experience. It felt good to be understood.

My preschool experiences were informative. They gave me an understanding of what going to school—as in kindergarten—was going to be all about. Based on my preschool experiences, school was a relatively safe place kids went during the day to learn and play while their parents worked. In anticipation of my first day of kindergarten I began imagining what it was going to be like. If experience had taught me anything, I knew that I would be taken good care of. Kindergarten: the word conjured up images of other “gardens” I had experienced. No doubt *kindergarden* activities would take place in a similar setting. I imagined a motherly figure holding the hands of multiple children, leading them through an idyllic enclosure of greenery no doubt adjacent to the building that had been pointed out to me as my new school. The reality of kindergarten was of course slightly different. For starters, there was no garden. The motherly figure I imagined was there though and I warmed up to her quite quickly. In this regard, my prior experience aligned with my current situation. The difference however, was that now I was really going to a school where lots of other big people went. Our kindergarten class was just down the hall from the office where the principal and secretaries worked and the classrooms that housed

the rest of the school's grades K-8 population. I knew that big people, like the principal, were always on the lookout for kids behaving badly. I also knew that if anyone was going to behave badly, it would be big people who made up the older student population. They'd certainly jump at the chance to behave badly towards me the moment the principal or my teacher's back was turned. Going to school in the presence of these giants was a scary prospect.

Starting kindergarten was only one of the big developments of 1984. We had just moved to Englehart. Going to school in this new town also meant becoming part of a new community. This was probably not something I thought about so specifically at the time, but it was certainly part of the sense of newness I attached to this experience. Though Hamilton is a large city, my sense of community was nurtured by the fact that members of my extended family lived only a short walk or drive from our house, that running errands with my mom or dad meant walking about that same neighbourhood, and that I went to neighbourhood schools. Englehart on the other hand was, and still is, a very small town, much smaller than Hamilton, but, as is the case in many small towns, the distance between school and home was far greater. My community, though made up of a similar number of people, was spread out over a much bigger geographic area than in Hamilton. We lived on the outskirts of town, 8 km up Highway 11, and down Chamberlain Road, which marked the third concessional tract of land north of Englehart. We didn't have a neighbourhood, only two neighbours who lived on either side of us several hundred meters or so across farm fields and down dirt roads. The radius of my home turf in Hamilton was much smaller than that I would be required to traverse in Englehart. Instead of a few blocks, I had a several kilometers to travel to get to and from school.

Because I attended kindergarten in the afternoon, I and two of my new classmates had the good fortune of having a school board funded cab ride to school. Each morning we'd be picked up, one after the other, by a friendly big person and shuttled down Highway 11, past the Grant Waferboard factory and its distinctive smell, and into town to school. I quickly adapted to this

private car service and readily befriended my driver and fellow passengers. The afternoon trip back home however was not quite as pleasant. On the first day of school, each kindergarten child needing to take a bus home was assigned to a grade 2 or 3 “buddy” on the same route. Our buddy’s job was to show us which bus to get on. My big buddy was a thin, blonde and pasty, fun loving grade two boy who made me laugh but also smelled curiously like sour milk. Despite the off-putting smell, he was nice and reassured me I’d be getting home safely. As he and I boarded the bus, however, I caught the eye of our driver, a man in his forties with a beard and tinted glasses who did not, like my friendly morning cab driver or big sour milk-smelling buddy, inspire this same confidence. As I stepped on to the bus, the look he gave me made it clear he had no idea who I was and, worse, where it was he was supposed to take me. My big buddy said something about him needing to drive me home, that his route was the same as mine, only I’d be getting off after he did, and the driver said something back that amounted to, “Well, we’ll figure it out” and left me with the distinct feeling that I might not be getting home as safely as I had hoped. Our first stop was just down the block at the high school. My buddy and I had thankfully chosen to sit at the front of the bus. Several teenagers, the least predictable and therefore scariest type of big person, boarded the bus and loudly made their way to the back of the bus, casting disdainful eyes at us as they passed. These giants, with their styled hair, funny clothes, and course language might as well have been ten feet tall. Even today, I look back on memories of those high school kids and still find it hard to believe that eventually I grew to be as big as and perhaps bigger than many of them. Sharing the bus with these giants did not make that first trip home any more comforting. After several minutes of driving down the highway and up and down roads that were not mine, my big buddy stood up and bid me farewell. His job was done. As we continued along the bus route and I sat there, free from the stench of sour milk but also without the friendly assurances and humour of my big buddy, I felt incredibly small, alone, and scared. Eventually, I suppose through a process of elimination—he must have had some kind of list—the bus driver figured out who I was, where it was I needed to go, and succeeded in getting me home. The

moment I stepped off the bus into the arms of my mom I burst into tears and relayed to her the whole frightening adventure. Though things got much better from there, my first day in the land of giants had not gone as well as I had hoped.

It would be a few years before I could really reflect on my fears of being inferior, of being a disappointment to others, or of simply being overlooked. But my growth and understanding in this regard was certainly aided through my engagement in narratives I saw as reflective of my own. Stories were a common means of gaining understanding in my life. Where the fear of “giants” was concerned, no narrative was quite as compelling and instructive as *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*.

I was probably in grade one or two when my Dad first exposed me to Mordecai Richler’s famed dabbling in children’s literature. At the time, *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* was probably the longest story I had been read and it likely took a few nights of reading to complete.



Fig. 3. Jacob Two-Two looking on as his older siblings play. F. Wegner, 1975.

This would have allowed me some time to dwell on and dream about its characters, themes, and the connections I was making between the experiences of young Jacob and those of my own life. In the story, Jacob is a four year old child, the youngest in his family. By the time I was exposed to this story I would have been at least six and the eldest child in my family. However, the story and title character resonated with me. A year or two after my first exposure to the book, *Jacob Two-Two* was one of the first chapter books I read on my own.

Reading it over by myself was especially gratifying. I had loved the story the first time around, but my second, independent reading, brought me much closer to the text and its themes. Richler’s

descriptions of Jacob and the world of giants around him, paired with Fritz Wenger's marvellous illustrations, captured and came to define for me the feelings I associated with growing up during those first few years of school. The spare, yet detailed, black and white images were instantly appealing to me. To this day I am drawn to this artistic style and find that it is often a key component of many of significant texts of my life. Richler's story, about a young boy struggling to conquer feelings of inadequacy and to assert himself in the face of fear, had a profound effect on me. Like Jacob Two-Two, I felt an acute sense of not measuring up at times. I sympathized with Jacob's fears of being brushed aside, or worse, chastised for failing to meet the demands of the grown up world. These feelings were irrational and even at a young age I knew this to be the case. I lived in a loving and supportive home, had good friends, teachers, and people around me that genuinely cared about and were supportive of me. Still, like Jacob Two-Two, little things like being unable to "cut a slice of bread that wasn't a foot thick on one end and thin as a sheet of paper on the other" bothered me (Richler, 1975, p.5). I suppose the story spoke to the perfectionist in me. I've always aimed to please and tried earnestly to do things right (both properly and in a moral sense) and am troubled when I see myself failing in this regard. Jacob's story wasn't just about feeling anxious and inadequate however. It was about finding the power to conquer those fears.

Jacob Two-Two is two plus two years old, the youngest in a family of five children, preceded by *two* older brothers and *two* older sisters. Because he is sure no one ever listens to him, he develops the habit of saying everything twice. This habit lands him in trouble when a "grown up" he encounters on his first trip all by himself to the grocery store believes Jacob is mocking him with

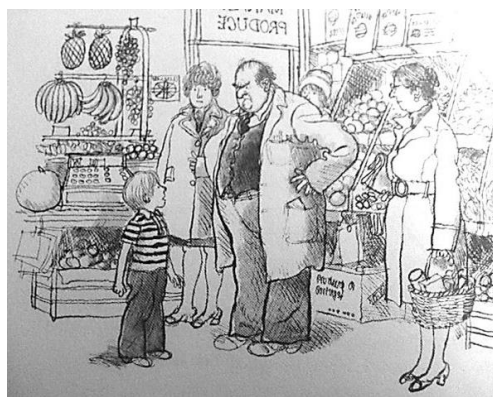


Fig. 4. Jacob Two-Two suffers the disapproval of the grocer. F. Wenger, 1975.

his twice-spoken request for “firm red tomatoes” (Richler, 1975, p. 10). Spurned by the grocer’s irritability, Jacob flees the store and loses himself in a fantastical realm inhabited by nefarious characters, unforgiving adults, and horrible giants. Jacob awakes to find himself in a holding cell. Assigned a completely inept barrister, Louis Loser, Jacob discovers he has been charged with insulting a big person. He is found guilty in children’s court, but before he is hauled off, he is given hope by the sudden appearance of two slightly older children, the Infamous Two: Intrepid Shapiro and the Fearless O’Toole (aliases that thinly disguise their true identity as Jacob’s older brother and sister) who promise to “appeal the verdict” (p. 23). Though condemned to hard labour on Slimer’s Island, a fog enshrouded, snake and wolverine-infested prison for bratty children, and held captive under the menacing eye of the prison’s warden, the dreaded Hooded Fang, Jacob is



Fig. 5. Jacob Two-Two meets the Hooded Fang. F. Wegner. 1975.

emboldened by the appearance and promise of the Infamous Two. Here in Jacob’s fantasy, he ceases to be the frightened boy whose feelings of inadequacy paralyze him in the presence of big people. When brought before the Hooded Fang, formerly “the most hated and vile villain in all of wrestling” (Richler, 1975, p. 34-36), a giant who claims he is determined to make all children, whom he loathes, fear him, Jacob Two-Two is surprisingly unafraid. There’s something about the Hooded Fang that seems childish and even sweet.

Eventually Jacob plots an escape with the help of Child Power, the heroic organization led by the Infamous Two. In the end, he confirms his suspicions about the Hooded Fang. The climactic scene, in which Jacob throws his arms around the Hooded Fang in an embrace that exposes the giant’s frailty for all to see, initiates a delightful resolution to Jacobs’s real-life fears. His triumph lies in realizing the Fang’s humanity, which in time allows him to conquer his fears.

Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang spoke to my own fears about entering the world of giants. I learned that overcoming this fear amounted to little more than recognizing that big people, whether big in stature or in reputation, were not all that different from me and that everyone feels inadequate, misunderstood, or unfairly judged at times. The story is a wonderful vindication against the fear of failure that through wit, humour, and the convoluted logic of children, reveals the power of believing in your own abilities and having faith in those who love and understand you to help you through life's toughest challenges. I think another reason this story resonated and continues to resonate with me has to do with the fact that these are lessons I am still learning.

New experiences come with a mixture of excitement, confusion, and apprehension. As a child attending a new school for the first time, my perceptions of what the world was like were affected by my limited experience. Jacob's story provided a lens through which to understand and round out that experience. It's a story I never tire of. This is a common feature of many of the texts I've found myself drawn to: they engage and satisfy my curiosity yet leave me with a lingering sense that there is more there that I have yet to comprehend. *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* is one such text that I continue to find educational value in each time I read

it. There is something symbolic in Jacob Two-Two's struggle that is relevant to my own experience and each time I examine this relevance I discover something about myself I had not considered before. Another story with which I find this to be the case is that of character named Andrew Henry. Like Jacob Two-Two, Andrew Henry feels overlooked, unappreciated, and out of place. His response however is markedly different. As I grew up and gained more confidence in my abilities, I began looking to stories whose characters reflected my growing self-assurance.



Fig. 6. Child power. F. Wegner. 1975.

Andrew Henry's Meadow

The biggest thing about moving from Hamilton to Englehart was the dramatic change of scenery, a shift, that is, in setting. Life in the city meant a small backyard. Life on the outskirts of a very small town meant a virtually endless one. Being only five years old of course limited the extent to which I could explore that endless space, but the knowledge of its existence was enough to capture my imagination and ignite in me a creative urge to *make something* of my surroundings. My family home was situated on a 10 acre parcel of land a few hundred meters down the road from a sawmill. At the back of our property, past the wood shed, the tool shed, and the sturdy gambrel-roofed barn, lay a forest and endless possibilities.

Our move up to Englehart was celebrated with the acquisition of a puppy, a blonde lab-retriever cross we named Sally. Sally grew up, as I did, running free around the countryside we came to call home. At first, Sally's enthusiastic puppy-like temperament frightened my brother and me who were afraid to go outside to explore because outside was where Sally was. As soon as we opened the door, she'd jump up on us in her excitement and, because we were so small, knock us down. My sister, being only a few months old upon our arrival in Englehart, was not yet up and about, so it was up to my brother and me to, once brave enough to push past the beast outside the gates, explore our new surroundings and stake our claim in the fields, among the trees, and around the out-buildings that made up our back yard. As our confidence grew our explorations became bolder and Sally became our loyal companion. At first we ventured only to the edge of the cleared half acre of grass behind our house, peeking into the sheds, watching my Dad rummage around, organize his tools, and chop wood, exploring the barn with its stalls and hay-loft, all under the watchful eye of my parents. Eventually, our explorations would take us into the forest, down fern and mushroom-lined paths to future tree-fort territory, across the road and into fields where we would anchor our kites, and down to the end of the road, where, in the winter, we'd toboggan down the steep hill just past the sawmill. The outdoors provided a

playground of endless possibilities. This potential was revealed in no small way by our parents who worked and played alongside us, creating gardens and outdoor skating rinks, taking us on long family bike rides down farm roads and through pastures that, when bathed in the light of the evening sun, looked to me like heaven. Our adventures would break only at meal times, when my sister, now a toddler, would call out from the porch on behalf of my mother: “Boys!”, which was our signal to make our way back home.

We had left the city so that my dad could take advantage of a job opportunity with Scouts Canada. Charged with, among other things, establishing a northern Scouting outpost and overseeing operations at Camp Daymar, an adventure centre and canoe base, he was in my eyes a model outdoorsman. I joined the Scouting organization as a Beaver, went on to become a Cub and followed a outward bound trajectory that included year round hiking, camping, and skill development related to the principles of self-reliance, community, and honour laid out by Baden Powell, founder of the Scouts. My time in Scouting is marked with years of fond memories and the lessons I took from Scouting about cooperation, self-improvement, and preparedness were important components of my educational journey.

It was during these years, between moments I was absorbed in the pastoral setting of my childhood, adventuring with my parents, and imagining with my brother and sister, that my creative instincts were awakened. I wanted to build things, to draw on the wilderness around me to create something civilized. Like many kids I built forts, and this occupied much of my time. It began with playing with my dad’s tools and his lessons on to swing a hammer properly and to relax my grip on the saw and let it do the cutting. These skills, along with my mom’s constant encouragement to see the marvelous potential in the everyday world around me, provided a foundation and fostered a curiosity for my siblings and my exploration and discovery of dozens of ideal locations for all variety of forts. From the tree-house we built in the back woods, carting wagon loads of scrap lumber down the road from the sawmill, to the ravine fort we cleared open

and dug out of the side of a hill with help from our Opa and equipped with a chair for our Oma, to the grass-fort my brother inadvertently “discovered” when he accidentally veered off the gravel road and into the ditch, we were constantly creating new play areas and exercising our imaginations in new ways. Part of this imaginative play involved elements of role-playing, like the time my sister and I spent a whole afternoon perched, in pirate regalia, on a chunk of partially dismantled framing, sneering and calling land-ho, or the dozens of miniature G.I. Joe bases my brother and I built and battled over. For the most part, however, our play entailed being who we were, absorbed in the world in which we lived.

When, after four years, my Dad accepted another job across the country and told us we’d be moving to British Columbia, the thought of uprooting and starting anew was not, oddly, that disconcerting for me, but rather, part of a continuing adventure. While I would miss the unsettled expanse of the country, I welcomed the move to the bigger town of Vernon. My parents came back from their preliminary visit with news they’d purchased a house right next to a park that featured not only two soccer fields and two baseball diamonds, but also a forested area that surrounded a meandering creek. This bit of nature, in addition to our proximity to an incredible provincial park nestled around Kalamalka Lake, made our transition to life in the suburbs of Coldstream, a community immediately adjacent to Vernon, all the more easy. My siblings and I quickly got to know the neighbours. Their family composition, in terms of age and gender, was identical to our own and they introduced us to the neighbourhood. Here the urge to build and explore met no opposition. The park surrounding Coldstream Creek was like a big back yard for us. We continued to build forts here and in other areas of the neighbourhood and in doing so began to learn lessons of how to get along with others. Questions of who is boss of the fort or in charge of the game, along with who is being left out or playing unfairly brought a new dimension to our play. Of course these were all issues we’d confronted playing among ourselves, but when two families of siblings come together those challenges become ever more complicated. As our

skills and interests developed, our play took us in different directions at times. My brother's interest in sports and my sister's interest in playing house and with dolls contrasted with my own increasing interest in reading books, drawing, and writing stories.

Playing outside continued to be my main means of recreation, yet, increasingly, my adventures took place between the covers of a good book. The more I engaged in the imaginative play of reading and creating my own stories, the more I came to understand who I saw myself to be, based on my experiences, and who I wished to become, based on what I read about. As a pre-adolescent, reading introduced me to experiences similar yet not identical to my own so that I was able to envision myself living the lives of those depicted in the novels I read. While more and more my reading selections were new acquisitions from second-hand book stores or the library, I periodically returned to the back pages of my



Fig. 7. Andrew Henry. D. Burn. 1965

family's book case, which housed all the picture books that had been read and reread to me as a kid. One such book, a book I found myself becoming increasingly enamoured with was mid-60's penned and beautifully illustrated picture book that spoke to my experience of playing outside and building forts and to the kind of person I wanted to become. The stories that had educated me up until this point, the Biblical tales and the story of Jacob Two-Two, had helped me make sense of the world around me when, as a young child, I craved certainty and security.. Yet as I approached the age of ten, I found myself filled less with apprehension and more with a sense of adventure. The stories I now felt myself drawn to featured confident, capable characters. These were characteristics I admired in Andrew Henry and hoped to emulate.

The story and detailed illustration of Doris Burn's, *Andrew Henry's Meadow*, captivated me as a child. The thoughts and feelings I took from the experience of that book still resonate for

me today. As a child, I found the capability and quiet confidence of the boy featured in Burn's book extraordinary. As I have grown up and nurtured my own interests and abilities, my appreciation for the character and story of Andrew Henry has grown.

Andrew Henry lived in a family with a mother, a father, two younger brothers and two older sisters. "He was", as Burn tells us, "in the middle. He was always with himself, yet he didn't mind. He had plenty of things to do" (1965, p. 2). Andrew Henry "liked to build things" (p. 5). The problem was no one in his family appreciated his creative spirit or skills as a builder. To

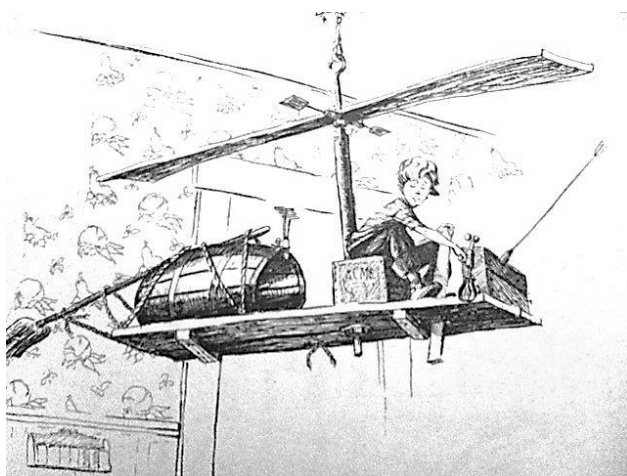


Fig. 8. Helicopter in the kitchen. D. Burn. 1965

them, his contraptions were a nuisance. While the helicopter he built in the kitchen, using many of the objects and utensils at his disposal and "had many fine features", it interfered with the work of his mother, just as the eagle cage he built in the living room interfered

with his father's enjoyment of the newspaper. While he demonstrated a great deal of talent, these talents were unappreciated in the non-nurturing environment of his family home. Despite his ingenuity, undeniable in the ways he expressed his interests and skills, the fact that this did not match the values of the family home meant that either he had to suppress his natural tendencies or find somewhere else to express them. He chose the latter.

Andrew Henry left his family home packed with items he considered useful. Having recognized that his desire to build was not welcome in his family home, he decided, "I'll build a house for myself". The storyteller assures us, "He knew where he was going" (Burn, 1965, p. 12). Through the pasture, over the hill, across the swamp and through the deep woods, Andrew Henry journeyed toward his destination. He arrived at an open meadow and said to himself, "Here is

where I will build my house” (p. 19). In the meadow, Andrew Henry was free to pursue his own interests. His family home did not provide this opportunity. It was not long before other children, each uniquely creative and similarly alienated, also moved to the meadow. Here they solicited Andrew Henry’s skills as a builder, who in turn constructed for each of them a home

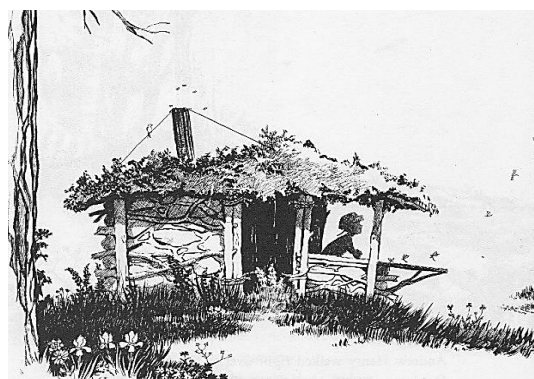


Fig. 9. Andrew’s house in the meadow. D. Burn, 1965

that accommodated their needs and interests. For Alice Burdock, lover of birds, Andrew built a tree house. For George Turner, who arrived with his collection of boats and fishing poles, Andrew built a house on the stream that ran through the meadow “so he could be close to the water” (p. 22). One after another children, in flight from their family homes, arrived at the meadow, each looking for a new space in which to explore their interests and creativity.

Burn’s artistic rendering of Andrew Henry’s meadow, imagines a place where one’s interests, skills and desire to create something useful can be realized. As much as each child brings their own interests to the meadow, Andrew Henry’s contribution is what brings them together. His ability to help frame, build, and bring meaning to the passion of each child binds them as a community. Readers of the Burn’s book can imagine the shared experiences and knowledge of the children, since they too share in the knowledge and experience of the children through the illustrations on the page.

Andrew Henry’s meadow is akin to the environment in which I grew up, a countryside in which I was free to pursue my own interests and opportunities to build things with others. Unlike Andrew Henry, the environment in which I was raised was incredibly supportive. As a ten year old boy, I couldn’t understand why Andrew Henry’s family didn’t appreciate the things he built. My mom and dad always expressed admiration and praised the work I did. I would show them the

forts I had built with pride, knowing they would be proud of me. It wasn't the lack of support Andrew Henry experienced or the way that he was misunderstood that drew me to the book, at least not at first. Initially, my fascination centred on the creativity and the artistic genius of his contraptions and constructions, which Burn so skillfully illustrates in the spare, yet detailed drawings that spill across each page in black ink. I marvelled at the contraptions, machines, and houses he built for those around him. I liked his style and I admired his imagination. Looking at the house he builds for himself, I thought I might be able to build something like that too. My forts would often incorporate a variety of elements, of sticks, stones, and mud, of things that grew and of things I'd found. Burn's book is like a builder's manual, detailed in its illustrations and description, and everything that Andrew Henry builds has a quality of realness to it so that, no matter how imaginative, I felt I could build something similar. For several years growing up, I tried to emulate Andrew Henry in my creative endeavors. But Andrew Henry's creativity was not all that endeared me to him or to Burn's story. I was also impressed with Andrew Henry's unassuming style of leadership, which draws children, particularly under-appreciated creative

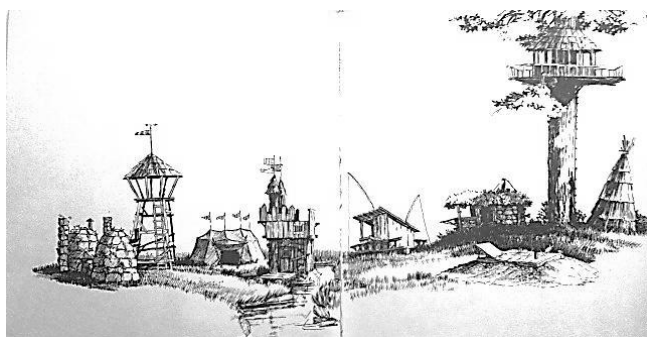


Fig. 10. Andrew Henry's meadow village. D Burn. 1965

types, out to the meadow to be, to build, and to create with him what gradually becomes a community apart from the larger society. There is something very natural about the way in which this community in the meadow develops, about how Andrew

Henry's hand in helping create this community honours and enables the strengths of the children who are its members, and something very satisfying in the way that it is this community and its demonstration of independence that brings the larger society into a realization of the worth it represents.

Joseph Campbell (1949) talks about the hero's journey, a universal theme found in literatures of the world. The end of this journey involves the return of the hero who, having acquired the "runes of wisdom," is reintegrated into and improves the society from which he or she initially came (p. 193). Having established themselves in the meadow, Andrew Henry and his friends overcome the challenges they faced at home. Because their families do not acknowledge the merit of their interests or the validity of their contributions, the children create a community in which to freely explore and share their interests. Their heroic return is initiated by their families who, after four days of searching finally locate the small village in the meadow. Their awe and amazement at the children's accomplishments is followed by much celebration as they are reunited with the children. We are told that the children return, presumably to more accommodating homes, where they carry on with their normal lives. Andrew Henry's family, for one, is certainly more appreciative of his talents. As Burn (1965) tells us, "The Thatchers gave Andrew Henry the corner of the basement behind the furnace just to build things in. [...] And his family was always curious to see what Andrew Henry would build next" (p. 42-43). As a kid, I loved how Andrew Henry was so gracious in his exit and re-entry. Leaving his family home and taking up residence in the meadow was not an act of protest but a means of survival. Andrew Henry enacted change by remaining committed to exercising his creativity. He had no grand vision or ultimate goal, just a determination to his own unique process of becoming. Campbell writes: "The hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he *is*" (p. 243). What I learned from Andrew Henry, a lesson I cherish to this day, was that the creative urge I hold inside needs to be exercised, but more importantly, that such exercise is sufficient in and of itself and does not require validation from anyone else. What the story of Andrew Henry taught me was that leadership isn't always based on the adequate performance of a preconceived role, but is often demonstrated by those who insist only on being themselves. As I said, unlike Andrew Henry, I have never experienced a lack of support. All my life I have been surrounded by and enjoyed the faith and encouragement of family and friends. But the prospect of creating

something new, of creating new understanding has been a driving force in my own educational development. It's difficult to explain why I have felt it necessary to do things differently, to view life and my place in society differently than that which is offered in the conceptions of reality and prescribed roles I've been introduced to over time. But Andrew Henry's impulse to create is one I identify with because I believe that there are bound to be other, and possibly better, ways of doing things. It's towards this promise of *something else* that I've fool-heartedly ventured.

To Boldly Go Where No One Has Gone Before

The nature of my mission, or fine, let's just call it the course of my life, changed dramatically the day I graduated from Vernon Christian School and began gearing up to re-enter the secular system. The four years I spent shuttling across town to participate in a community to which I felt a kinship had isolated me from my immediate social surroundings. Other than the dozen or so soccer league games I played (half-heartedly) with the neighbourhood kids each year, my contact with kids my age who lived next door to and up the street from me was limited. I wasn't invested in these relationships and saw no reason to be. No reason, that is, until I left that little school across town after grade eight and continued my formal education in my catchment area at the high school down the street from where we lived. The neighbourhood kids I had lost touch with had already been going there for a year. My delayed entry only made my re-integration more awkward. Two friends from my elementary school, who also lived nearby, attended this high school as well and we glommed onto one another for survival, ever so grateful to have at least a piece of our former identities recognized in this foreign environment.

Though the shock eventually wore off, I was for the first time confronted with girls who swore as loudly and as often as I knew boys were capable of, with classmates who flaunted their drug and alcohol use, bragged about their capacity to "party", and came to class stoned, and individuals who, upon hearing that I had attended the Christian School, either very bluntly stated how lame that was or joked that they worshiped Satan instead. I was somewhat prepared for all of

this. After all, the Christian narrative is rife with of themes of persecution. It's not supposed to be an easy ride. I was on the road less travelled after all. Evident throughout the Bible, from the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt to their suffering in the desert and at the hands of various idol worshiping civilizations to the crucifixion of Jesus, and the martyrdom of his apostles, persecution of God's believers is a common theme. All of these stories had helped shape the way I felt towards being an outsider. I wouldn't call it righteous indignation exactly, but I wasn't in any rush to sell myself out and ingratiate myself with my new peer group by adopting their ways. I had felt tremendously comfortable at the Christian School, yet in many ways I had been living inside a bubble. When that bubble burst around me, it took some time to adjust to the reality that I was now more of an outsider than ever. Somehow I had to make peace with that.

I spent the first two years of high school trying to fly under the radar and made small attempts to merge my sense of self with the expectations of this new environment. While at the Christian School I knew who I was and the role I played; here I was an unknown quantity, to myself and to others. I didn't know where to begin. In retrospect I should have joined a club or involved myself in some way. I did try out for the basketball team and didn't make it. Too proud to join the B Team, I resigned myself to being a non-athlete once and for all and sought out something new to pass the time.

It had been a while since I read a good book. My middle elementary years had been filled with trips to the library and evenings and late nights under covered lamplight reading books by Beverly Cleary, Gordon Korman, Judy Bloom, E.L. Koningsburg, and others, but my obsession with reading waned for a while. In grade six my interest shifted to collecting hockey cards. I became consumed with completing whole sets, which meant regular trips to the corner store and the local card shop where I would deplete my meager paper route earnings on packs of Score and Upperdeck. Like an addict trying to hide his bad habit, I'd cycle ten minutes out of my way a few times every week to the store that sold the packs I wanted, hoping my parents wouldn't notice and

express their disapproval of me wasting my money on something so ridiculous. I rationalized it to myself and anyone who asked that these cards would be worth lots of money one day, (a dream that has yet to materialize I might add), but by grade seven the Oilers' dynasty years were over, Messier had been traded, and I finally decided that collecting cards wasn't paying off as I had hoped. Once my investment in hockey shifted from collecting cards to the game itself, I came to the realization that I actually found watching hockey on television to be quite boring. I took up reading again, briefly taking an interest in Terry Brooks' fantasy *Shannara* series, but it wasn't long before something else caught my eye and proceeded to sweep me up completely. It was the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Star Trek: TNG had been on the air for a few years already at this point. My dad had taken an early interest in it and exposed my brother and me to the world of *Star Trek* when he rented the sixth and final movie featuring the original cast. This new series, he told us, took place



Fig. 11. The USS Enterprise. Paramount Pictures, n.d.

a century or so later and featured a whole new crew. We were introduced to characters like Worf, a Starfleet Klingon, which seemed shocking after *Star Trek VI*, which had depicted humans and Klingons

at war. Also intriguing was Data, an android whose human-like features yet not-so-human personality intrigued me. In the first few years after the series premiered, I watched *Star Trek: TNG* only on occasion. While I liked the show, there was nothing there that completely captivated me at first. However, as I became a teenager and dealt with the strangeness of adolescence, *Star Trek* began to have greater significance.

My fascination with *Star Trek* can certainly be attributed in part to the amount of exposure I had to the show. After the series had been on the air for four or five seasons, it began

appearing as a mid-afternoon rerun. The timing was perfect, both practically and psychologically speaking. Once my siblings and I got off the bus and made our way home it was about quarter to four. This left me just enough time to make myself a peanut butter and jam sandwich and turn on the TV to watch the final credits for *The Young and the Restless* wrap up. This little routine became an after school tradition that would see me through the end of elementary school as a pleasant after school diversion and through the first two years of high school as an essential part of my extra-curricular education. My early adolescence, while attending the Christian School, was relatively free of the angst and awkward growing pains many experience (I'd have plenty of this later). I came to rely on *Star Trek* as a reprieve from the boredom of everyday schooling and eventually as a means to imagine for myself a better world based on values I had been instilled with and those with which I was beginning to identify. Thus far, my experiences and textual influences had established in me an appreciation for community and a sense of justice and morality informed by my Christian upbringing, the determination to be brave in the face of adversity like Jacob Two-Two, and the desire to be an independent and creatively-minded individual like Andrew Henry. I saw all of these values reflected in *Star Trek*. As much as it spoke to my past, *Star Trek* was a show about the future, a future I longed to be a part of. The admiration I came to hold for this show had a lot to do with the values I saw enacted by the Enterprise crew and the ways in which they continually strive for greater understanding, honour difference, and foster equitable relations with those they encounter. *Star Trek* helped cement many of the lessons of my textual lineage, but it also encouraged me to reflect on and look beyond this understanding.

I remember waiting in line at the water fountain one day in grade seven, perhaps a few weeks after I began watching the show on a regular basis, thinking about going home to eat a peanut butter and jam sandwich and settling down in front of the TV for my daily dosage of *Star Trek*. It occurred to me that this was becoming a bit of a habit, but one I liked. I've always been

fond of traditions so, then and there, I committed myself to continuing this ritual. It was perhaps a few months later that, while watching Chief Engineer Geordie LaForge run around the engine room trying to prevent yet another catastrophic engine failure, that it dawned on me how much I had become invested in the characters and how much I now loved this show. As a kid Data had been the most interesting character to me. His desire to understand what it is like to be human and his efforts to become more human provided an interesting analysis of what makes humanity unique as a species and prompted me to examine my own emotions and patterns of thinking. As I got older and began watching the show more regularly I started to identify with many of the



Fig. 12. The crew. Paramount Pictures, 1992.

other characters as well. Picard's sophisticated tastes and unmatched leadership skills were inspiring and certainly something I wished to emulate. As much as I admired his strength, I loved the way that the show didn't shy away from showing him at his weakest either. In one of my favourite episodes, Picard gets kidnapped by Cardassians and is subjected to torture as his captor tries to extract tactical information from him. Picard is reduced to tears but refuses to give into his captor's demands. His pain is made palpable in a way that only an actor of Patrick Stewart's calibre can portray. There was something about seeing this authority figure maintain his strength while exposing his frailty that I found inspiring. While Picard was inspiring, I felt that Commander Riker's fun-loving but quick tempered manner was probably more like who I was. As someone who tries to get along with everyone but is quickly agitated, I identified with the way Riker balanced those two aspects of his character. He wasn't afraid to speak his mind or to challenge the chain of command to do so. His regular requests for "permission to speak freely" always signaled some kind of righteous tirade. The ridiculous degree to which Worf took himself

seriously made me laugh. It's not that I didn't find his dedication to honour admirable—I did, to a point—but what got me was how blinded he was by his own pride. Watching Worf struggle with this was instructive. I try to avoid taking myself too seriously and usually relish the opportunity to laugh at myself. LaForge's earnest and amiable nature made him likable, but he always seemed like a bit of pushover. I identified with that. I often feared that in my efforts to win others over I would be perceived as weak. Troi's empathic abilities brought an emotional awareness to the show. Her ability not to read minds but the emotions of others seemed novel at first, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that empathy wasn't a superpower, but an ability most people can nurture if they choose to do so. Crusher's presence had a maternal feel to it, perhaps because her interactions with her son figured prominently. Her quiet confidence and sense of humour, along with her skill as a physician and an officer, made her someone I was always happy to find out more about. Though some characters, like Picard, figured most prominently in the series, all of the title characters were explored in significant depth. By the end of seven seasons, I felt truly enriched by my exposure to each of them and the ways in which they made me think about who I wanted to become.

What fascinated me most, I think, was the setting and themes of the show. Summed up in an opening sequence I will never tire of, was a mission statement narrated by Captain Picard who, day in and day out, set the stage for me with the following lines:

“Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one has gone before.” (Roddenberry, 1987)

Though hurtling through space at warp speed sounded exciting, the idea of continually exploring “strange new worlds” was what really interested me. The Enterprise crew criss-crossed the Milky Way galaxy meeting planetary species that observed peculiar customs and rituals, but

with whom, more often than not, they were able to connect and learn from. The United Federation of Planets had, since the time of Kirk and Spock, become allies with their long-time Klingon adversaries. This was only one way in which the *Next Generation* distinguished itself from its predecessor. The increased and slightly less sexualized portrayal of woman (of all colours), who now occupied many positions of power, was one such change. Counsellor Troi and Dr. Crusher were both “feminine” but were as strong as they were sensitive and clearly respected by their male counterparts. *Star Trek*’s exploration wasn’t limited to space but also reflected the changes time brings and the need to venture forward in terms of the relationships we have with one another. This was apparent in discussions the Enterprise crew had among themselves and other species, the philosophical and moral struggles they engaged in, and the values they championed. Themes of honour, courage, and friendship were all there, but of particular interest to me was the theme of non-interference.

The Enterprise crew was bound by the Prime Directive. This guiding principal dictated that Starfleet members were not to interfere in the internal development of alien civilizations. This meant that regardless of how incomprehensible or morally reprehensible the crew deemed the actions of another civilization to be, they were to allow that civilization to follow its own developmental course as long as the actions of this civilization did not directly threaten Starfleet members. As a young man growing up, entering high school, and trying to come to terms with who I was outside of the insular Christian community in which I’d been raised and in which I’d flourished, I longed to break free from the watchful eyes I saw all around me, and not only those of my Christian friends and family, but those of my new non-Christian peers as well. I felt the need to distinguish myself in some way, but I didn’t know how to go about doing this. I did know that neither clinging to the expectations of my sheltered past nor conforming to notions of what was cool in my new surroundings held the answer for me. I needed time to think and, until I had decided who and what I wanted to be, I didn’t want to be interrupted. But for a few close friends,

this desire to be left alone, along with my shyness and lack of confidence, effectively isolated me from my peer group. Projecting myself into a glorious future in which I could strive for knowledge and personal growth alongside a like-minded crew held great appeal for me. I didn't want the approval of anyone if it meant sacrificing myself. I wanted to be respected for who I was, not for who I was expected to be. I didn't want to follow. I was too proud for that. I wanted equality at the very least, to be popular sure, but more than anything, I wanted to lead. Admitting this feels strange. Leadership is not something I've often considered appealing. I associate being a leader with controlling resources and telling others what to do, essentially money and power. It's not that I don't understand the appeal of money and power; both are great in that they allow you to do things you might not otherwise be able to do. But it's precisely this I resent. I resent that fact that a lack of money and power is often all that prevents individuals back from surviving in this world, let alone achieving their full potential and that economic scarcity is often all that allows a privileged few to dominate and direct others. Looking back on it, I see that *Star Trek* instilled in me a conception of authority and leadership that was relatively free from these aspects I find so distasteful.

I was amazed to discover that in the proposed future of *Star Trek*, money is no longer used on Earth and as such, none of the crew members were being paid to venture out into the unknown to "seek out new life and new civilizations" (Roddenberry, 1987). Replicators have eradicated starvation, nuclear fusion has solved the world's energy problems, and economic scarcity is a thing of the past. This, along with worldwide democratization, has fostered health and happiness and rendered many of the social, political, and economic hierarchies meaningless. As a result, the motives of individuals have become more intrinsic. Because people, on Earth at least, don't need to work to *survive*, work has become more a matter of pursuing one's own interests, betterment, and contributing to the betterment of society. Though the vision is admittedly utopian, I was very much drawn to this idea that we as a species might one day

overcome our shortcomings to ensure that all are provided for and have the opportunity to pursue callings higher than our own survival.

Star Trek was and remains hugely inspiring for me. Through it I came to a greater understanding of my personality and the personality types of others, to articulate for myself values I held and ideals to which I wished to aspire, and began to dream of a possible future in which I and those around me might not simply coexist and cooperate in the name of survival but have the space, time, and freedom to explore, independently and collectively, the universe within and the possibilities without. *Star Trek* reinforced my foundational understanding, the values my Christian upbringing had provided me. But there was much building left to do. It wasn't long before all good things came to an end and the last episode of *Star Trek* aired. Over the course of three years I had succeeded in watching and wondering through every episode. I had explored the depths of my own inner-space and felt once again equipped to face frontiers outside of myself.

Punk Rock Changed My Life

For my first two years of high school few people really knew me. I didn't do anything to change this either. It wasn't until I entered a program called Earthquest in grade 11 that my social development began making up for lost time. It just so happened that my coming out party had a soundtrack. Earthquest was an outdoors program open to grade 11 students across the district. There was an application process in which candidates were admitted based partly on grades, partly on an entrance essay, and partly on the level of enthusiasm we displayed at the annual try out run held every spring. I managed to meet all of these requirements and was accepted into the program, which for me, kicked off on the first day of school in grade 11. Each day I met a group of thirty other students, some of whom I knew from my own high school, most of whom attended other schools in the district. Our days were spent mostly outside, running, camping, kayaking, hiking, telemark skiing, crafting, building, tracking animals and learning about the traditional practices of First Nations people. It was a unique educational experience that contrasted

incredibly with life in the classroom we were all used to. As with many Quest groups before us, the thirty of us bonded closely over the course of our five months together. There was one individual in particular, Jon, who helped draw me out socially. In elementary school I had been recognized as a bit of a class clown. This was an identity I had been comfortable with. I like making people laugh and like goofing around and don't mind being known for that, but for the first two years of high school, I hadn't been recognized for much of anything, let alone the ability to entertain people. In the first week of Earthquest I said something to a friend of mine, I can't recall what, though I suppose it was funny because Jon, who was walking a few steps ahead of us, turned around, looked me in the eye, and laughed. In that moment I realized that being in this new school setting for a half a year was going to be more than an outdoor adventure, it was a chance for me to get outside of the shell I'd been hiding in for the past few years and back to being recognized for who I knew I could be.

Knowing that Jon had laughed at one of my jokes made it easier for me to let loose a little, make him laugh some more, and to let him and eventually others, get to know me better. We became good friends and virtually inseparable for the duration of our time in Quest. Jon lived right across from the school in which Earthquest was based and we'd often go over to his house for lunch. There we'd hang out in his room and watch skateboard videos (Jon was an avid skateboarder) and listen to music. Learning outside and being active on a daily basis, often vigorously so, was good for me, but just as beneficial was the friendship I formed with Jon and the kinds of things he introduced me to. Jon was a big fan of the Beastie Boys, a group I had only had limited exposure to. Their recent albums, *Ill Communication* (1994) and before that, *Check Your Head* (1992), were among Jon's favourites. He played those on a regular basis and I quickly came to appreciate the music's proficient blend of hip hop and punk. Rap was something I had written off after I'd gotten over a brief obsession with MC Hammer in the fifth grade. The Beastie Boys reignited my interest in hip hop, but it was the occasional hardcore punk songs that dotted



Fig. 13. Beastie Boys. G. E. Friedman, 1991.

these two albums in particular that got me totally hooked. Songs like “Time For Livin’”, “Tough Guy”, and “Heart Attack Man”, captured my interest immediately. “Time for Livin’” in particular, in the urgency of both its sound and lyrics, encapsulated for me a feeling I was beginning to experience.

Ain't nobody got to spell it for me
 Ain't nobody got to yell I can see
 Ain't nobody got the pain I can hear
 But if I have to I'll yell in your ear
 Time for living
 Time for giving (Beastie Boys, 1992)

I didn't know at the time that this song was a reworked version of a Sly and the Family Stone classic. But that didn't matter then and it doesn't really matter now. When I first heard it, it was like a welcome, wakening slap in the face. I was ready to live. I was ready to give. I was ready to burst.

This was not my first exposure to punk. As a musical style, punk was certainly more familiar to me than hip hop, thanks to my early teen interest in grunge and alternative music. Yet, unbeknownst to me, my first exposure to authentic punk rock had occurred two years before. In grade nine, my friend Curtis had brought home a cassette by the band Bad Religion. Both of us were Christian School alumni. It was our first year of high school and the band's *Recipe for Hate* (1993) had just been released. Curtis had seen a student at our school walking around with a Bad

Religion shirt that boasted the band's logo: a Christian cross set within a red circle with a red diagonal line crossing through it, that is, the "universal no" symbol (like those employed in no-parking and no-smoking signs). Like me, Curtis came from a devout Christian home. His upbringing was stricter than my own, yet he was the curious one. I probably wouldn't have picked up the tape myself. He however, wanted to see for himself what this band Bad Religion was all about. I went over to his house for a sleepover one weekend in grade nine just after he bought that cassette and the two of us listened to that thing from start to finish at least a dozen times. We



Fig. 14. Cross Buster.
Bad Religion, 1981.

scanned the liner notes and tried to decipher the lyrics. Bad Religion's lyricists (there are two of them) are erudite and highly educated and don't shy away from using big words, so figuring out what they were singing about was a bit of a challenge. What we found was not the litany of anti-Christian messages we'd expected, but a creative and intelligent portrayal of life in a society in which political, economic, and religious beliefs are shaped, manipulated, and bent in accordance to systems of power. More than anything, the band seemed critical of people's blind faith and unquestioning acceptance of these systems of power. Of course, I wouldn't have been able to articulate this to you then. Still, I left Curtis's that weekend humming the melody to "American Jesus", a song critical of American exceptionalism, without really knowing what Bad Religion was all about, but feeling pretty confident they did not pose a threat to my values.

I don't need to be a global citizen
Because I'm blessed by nationality
I'm member of a growing populace
We enforce our popularity
There are things that
Seem to pull us under

And there are things
 That drag us down
 But there's a power
 And a vital presence
 That's lurking all around

We've got the American Jesus
 See him on the interstate
 We've got the American Jesus
 He helped build the
 President's estate (Graffin, G. & Gurewitz, B, 1993)

I continued to follow the band Bad Religion over the next few years. I didn't know they were "punk" until Green Day re-popularized the genre and a Columbia House (1995) catalog I used to order Bad Religion's next album, *Stranger than Fiction* (1994) described them as "stalwart punks". It turned out Bad Religion had been going strong for fifteen years. Now, more than fifteen years since my first exposure to *Recipe for Hate*, huddled around the tape deck in Curtis's bedroom, the band Bad Religion continues to release albums and remains one of my favourites.

This earlier exposure to punk did not, however, make the kind of impression on me that it would two years later. Huddled around the CD player in Jon's bedroom, listening to the Beastie Boys crank out tracks like "Egg Raid on Mojo", I began to feel the excitement of awakening to the world around me and the urgent need to let my voice be heard and myself be known. Jon was quite enamoured with punk and the Beastie Boys had firm roots in this genre. Before their ascension to fame in the mid-eighties for encouraging frat boys everywhere to "Fight For [their] Right (to Party)", the Beastie Boys were a punk band mentored by the likes of hardcore legends

the Bad Brains. Through the Beastie Boys and other punk albums by the likes of SNFU, Pennywise, and Rancid that he had in his collection, Jon introduced me to the world of punk rock, which in turn, reintroduced me to the world.

Upon re-entering my regular high school after my time in Quest, I was changed in the eyes of many of my classmates who now began to notice and take greater interest in me. The fact that they hadn't done so before wasn't their fault. I hadn't gone out of my way to be noticed. Many of them knew me by name only. Because I only ever hung out with the same two or three people all the time, didn't party on the weekend, frequent the smoke pit, or involve myself in any kind of extracurricular activity, I was, in their eyes at least, a geek. But Quest had revitalized me, boosted my confidence, brought me out of hiding, and allowed me to shine like I hadn't done for some time. I had dozens of very close friends now, not just two or three. My network was significantly expanded and making new friends was now easier than ever. I had no reason to be shy anymore. Being open and confident about who I was had positive social consequences and there was something about punk that inspired this confidence and helped me articulate both values I had grown up with and values I had begun to adopt as my own.

Punk can't be painted with a single brush stroke. There's far more to this culture than I can convey here and much more to it than even I understand. I can only explain to you the aspects of punk that appeal to me and try to deconstruct how I identified with this cultural expression as a young man, how it has continued to captivate me as an adult, and how looking back I have begun to grasp the impact it had on my sense of self. While my identity gets inevitably caught up in notions of religion, class, gender, and consumerism, punk helped me imagine spaces outside of these paradigms. Greg Graffin, vocalist and songwriter for Bad Religion attempts to define "punk" in his essay, "Punk Manifesto". When I first read this essay at the age of 18, much of what Graffin had to say rang true for me. His definition includes the following statements:

- “PUNK IS: the personal expression of uniqueness that comes from the experiences of growing up in touch with our human ability to reason and ask questions. [...]
- PUNK IS: a movement that serves to refute social attitudes that have been perpetuated through willful ignorance of human nature. [...]
- PUNK IS: a process of questioning and commitment to understanding that results in self-progress, and by extrapolation, could lead to social progress. [...]
- PUNK IS: a belief that this world is what we make of it, truth comes from our understanding of the way things are, not from the blind adherence to prescriptions about the way things should be. [...]
- PUNK IS: the constant struggle against fear of social repercussions” (2000, para. 54-58).

I found and continue to find myself very receptive to Graffin’s well-articulated descriptions about what punk meant to him. Perhaps it is ironic that, in spite of Graffin’s admonishment of doctrinal belief, his manifesto was like the sermon I had been waiting for. My acceptance of Graffin’s vision was not, however, committed blindly. His words rang true not because I had been previously advised of their undeniable veracity, as had been the case in my Christian education, but because they resonated with lessons of my textual lineage, lessons I had already taken to heart about with the way I wanted to live my life. If *Star Trek* had begun to open my eyes to whole new worlds of possibility, punk propped my eyes open for good. My willingness to look past outward appearances to recognize the humanity of others like Jacob Two-Two and my desire not to only be creative but to create community like Andrew Henry both influenced the way I came to understand punk. Though the values of my Christian upbringing often stood in stark contrast to the values espoused by many punks, I did not feel threatened by this contrast, but instead found myself beginning to critically assess my previously “unexamined assumptions” (Muncey, 2010, p. 30). Doing so allowed me to pinpoint the values of my

upbringing that were most dear to me to gradually discard those that were not. Punk provided a counter-narrative that helped centre me and allowed me to define myself in a way that no other narrative or experience had before.

I embraced punk for a few reasons. First, punk is aggressive, both sonically and in terms of the messages it conveys. As a child I had trouble dealing with and felt guilty about my own feelings of anger, but I found in punk meaningful and constructive outlets for that aggression. Secondly, punk's message that who you are is not something to be ashamed of or hidden from others but something that deserves celebration had a profound effect on me as an adolescent coming to terms with my identity. Third, punk's do-it-yourself (DIY) tradition was inspiring in that it gave me confidence in my own strengths and abilities to make of myself what I would, without relying on the cultural resources and social approval of the mainstream. And finally, punk's determination not to take itself too seriously and the resistance to place any of its members on a pedestal engendered a sense of equality and good will among musicians and fans that I have yet to see elsewhere. In all the ways I found punk culture instructive and inspiring as a teenager, I see connections to the ways in which I came to terms with who I am as an individual and to envision a better, more equitable world.

Punk rock changed my life and has continued to fascinate me throughout the years since I was first introduced to it.

Though I've never actually called myself a punk, there's something about the energy and expression of punk that I find utterly captivating. People's initial reaction to punk is



Fig 15. Misfits. Photographer unknown, 1979.

usually related in some way to what is most immediately apparent: its aggressive tone. They either love it, laugh at it, or loath it. Punk musicians often adopt an antagonistic stance. It's part of an aesthetic, along with that loud cacophonous racket, that aims to scare and intimidate listeners and ultimately challenge convention. One need only look to the defiant and outwardly horrifying appearance of bands like the Misfits to see that many punks *want* you to perceive them as the 'enemy'. Of course once the initial shock has worn off you might begin to look past the tough guise and appreciate the music and message of punk for its political urgency and often unexpected positivity.

For me, the aggression of punk spoke to me on a deeply emotional level, and got to the heart of how I felt a great deal of the time. As a kid growing up, I struggled to control my temper. When agitated, I would often act aggressively, emotionally and sometimes physically, usually towards my siblings and occasionally towards very close friends. This was something I was and continue to be ashamed of. As a boy around the age of 8, I remember my mom reading me a story about a boy who had a bad temper and isn't able to control it. As a child he torments his siblings and says mean things to his parents when he gets angry, but as a grown up, his hurtful words and deeds are decidedly more abusive. He lashes out at those around him, kicks his dog and even hits his wife and kids from time to time. I remember listening to this story and feeling quite upset by it. I imagined myself growing up to be this kind of man and resolved to not allow this to happen. I became somewhat fearful of my aggression and tried to hide it from others. I was more successful at this when in public and less successful in the comfort of my own home with a brother and sister who knew how to push my buttons. Bit by bit, I did get much better at controlling my temper, but often did so simply by suppressing my emotions. Listening to a song like "Time for Livin'" inspired a release of pent up aggression which, like so many of my best experiences with punk have since, stirred up and literally yanked from my guts an enthusiastic (and here I mean that feeling that spans the emotional spectrum and fills you with utter joy) "Yeeeeeeaaaahhh!"

Punk allowed me to embrace the enemy within and accept and begin to really deal with a part of myself that I had long ignored.

Punk, a style of music with an aggression factor somewhere near the top of a ten point scale, drew me in like nothing else had before. The fact that punk's anger was not typically expressed without just cause was immediately appealing. Unlike the grunge and much of the alternative music I had been listening to, the messages of punk were pointed and issued in exhilarating rapid fire succession. The songs weren't long, drawn out, messy affairs. There wasn't any room for the kind of depression you find on a Nirvana album for instance. Moreover punk's rage was as righteous as it was relentless. Punk grew out of a sense of political alienation and cultural disconnection sometime in the mid-seventies. It grew out of a sense of desperation, out of the need to be heard in order to survive. It grew out of a sense of boredom with a cultural mainstream that had ceased to reflect the reality or represent the dreams and desires of handfuls of disenchanted and often disenfranchised youth in pockets across Europe and North America. Some will tell you that the urgency and importance of punk died around the time of my birth but having felt that urgency and importance first hand, primarily through iterations of punk created since then, I can tell you that punk lives and thrives across the globe in garages, clubs and record stores, but, most importantly, in the hearts and minds of many. Punk's staying power has, in my estimation, a lot to do with its capacity to help voice the concerns of anyone who finds kinship in its expressional form, the desire, that is, to stand up, state your case, and be done with it.

Realizing that punk's aggression wasn't randomly directed or muddled by self-loathing, but focused on issues of critical importance, namely prejudice, injustice, and oppression in its many forms, made me realize that being angry wasn't always a bad thing. It also illuminated some common sources of frustration. As a boy I often felt misunderstood, perceived as inadequate, incapable of performing, and generally inferior to others who seemed to have much less difficulty fitting in. By acknowledging my feelings of anger and directing that anger towards

that which angered me not only seemed like the most sensible thing to do, but also allowed me to exercise a modicum of control in the way I expressed my anger. I also discovered that punk espoused views that, like *Star Trek*, provided a vision of a healthier, more equitable society. No other style of music, no other kind of activity, no other thing I had previously identified with had hit the nail so squarely on the head nor felt quite as right as punk. My heart, mind, body and soul all agreed: this was it. Now, almost twenty years later, punk still strikes a chord and fascinates me as a cultural expression.

Punk provided me with role models whose expressions of aggression were purposeful and directed at institutions of oppression. I found the tortured moan and poetic exposition of Rancid's Tim Armstrong immediately enchanting. The song "Salvation" depicts the economic divide and cynicism between the rich and the poor and draws on Armstrong's experiences living at and working for the Salvation Army.

There's a neighborhood called Blackhawk
where all the rich people hide
I was down on my luck working for the Salvation Army
The shelter is where I reside
Everyday we drive into Blackhawk
and we pick up the offerings
Microwave, refrigerator for the suffering
Come on baby won't you show me what you got
I want your salvation
I can't believe these people live like kings
Hidden estates and diamond rings
I'm a rat out on a mission
I'm in your front yard under suspicion (Armstrong, 1994)

Punk, at its best, is an assault on the senses. It is an aggressive style of music. In my experience the more aggressive it is the more likely I am to enjoy it. In punk, the guitars are loud, the drums are fast, the bass shakes, and the singers don't sing so much as shout. Loud, distorted guitars and pounding bass lines are standard. When you break it down, the number of beats per minute in a typical punk song far exceeds that of your average radio-friendly rock or pop song. But volume and speed alone don't tell the whole story. Attitude goes a long way to conveying punk's aggression. The lyrical content of punk music ranges considerably, but few musical styles have as big a reputation for being overtly political or offensive as punk. Punk lyricists have made names for themselves by speaking out in opposition to governments, corporations, and society in general, by defying the status quo, or by simply being obnoxious. Punk singers are also more likely than singers in other genres to make whining, yelling, and screaming core components of their signature sound. Punk plays to engage, but it's not easy listening and not something you'd expect those enamoured with the populist sounds served up on music television or the radio to appreciate.

I was never much of an athlete. But being physical was important. I don't like to sit around. For me, punk provided an outlet to be physical in a way that didn't require me to run up and down a field. Punk shows are not complete without a "pit". It is in the pit that punk's ritualized dance takes place. Here participants willfully slam into one another in matched response to the assault of sound coming from the stage. Although punk rockers take the stage like any typical rock band, the separation between the stage and the pit is far less definite. Often the stage is not even a raised platform but simply a designated section of the floor. Some onlookers, not content with looking on, crawl on stage to dance around and even sing (usually very badly) into the nearest microphone before diving back into the arms of the crowd. Similarly, musicians will take leave of their posts to wade into to crowd while continuing to play or sing, though to varying degrees of success. At a punk show, these actions, which in many other music

performance contexts would come across as unacceptably aggressive, are an accepted part of the experience. While certainly aggressive, I have rarely encountered individuals whose intentions are malicious. There is a pervasive spirit of camaraderie among those who understand the rituals and implicit rules that govern behaviour in the pit. Bodily contact such as punching and kicking



Fig. 16. Dancing Punks. H. Grebe, (n.d.)

or anything done with the intention of hurting someone is unacceptable and quickly stopped. When an individual falls down in the pit they are not trampled but immediately helped to their feet by those around them. Stage divers

are caught by dozens of outstretched hands that often not only cushion their fall but keep them afloat to surf the crowd.

As a young man attending punk shows, I engaged in all of these aggressive rituals. I felt energized by them and valued them as a way to blow off steam. But I was also struck by the sense of camaraderie and belonging I felt at those shows. I felt like I was a part of something there in a way that I had never experienced in any of my years in church, on sports teams, or at school pep rallies. I had one remarkable experience at a punk show I will never forget. It involved two maliciously aggressive males whose entire purpose for being there seemed to be to hurt unsuspecting individuals and start fights with those who retaliated. This had gone on for hours and continued to escalate during both opening sets. Normally these conflicts are sorted out by the audience members themselves and the collective moral suasion of the group, but this was an exceptional case in which the two responsible for the violence didn't seem to be taking the hint. It

was remarkable how it only took two hyper-masculine, mean-spirited individuals to wrest power away from the rest of us who numbered well over one hundred. By the time the headlining band Good Riddance had taken the stage, many people had opted to stay out of the pit. Halfway through their set, both the guitarist and the singer took notice of what was going on and abruptly stopped playing. They called these two individuals out for their violent behaviour, which they indicated was not welcome. They then assured the two aggressors that we as a crowd (of which they included themselves) were not going to put up with it and gave them the option to either stop or to leave. Though momentarily taken aback, the two guys were undeterred and hurled back a string of expletives. Having made clear their choice, the guitarist proceeded to inform them that “we” would then show them the door. He and the rest of the band stepped down from the stage and advanced towards our oppressors. Those of us in the audience couldn’t have been happier to answer this rallying cry. We immediately moved en masse towards the antagonists, effectively forced them towards the door, and then ran them out of the building altogether. Once they were well beyond the venue and warned not to return, the crowd returned to the pit, the band returned to the stage, and the show proceeded without incident. It was a thrilling experience in which a group composed of friends and strangers came together to reassert and maintain the conditions of peaceful coexistence we so valued.

The feeling of camaraderie in the pit was always something I looked forward to. Part of why I appreciated it had to do with the fact that being present, respectful, and protective of one another were the only requirements of participation. The people at punk shows didn’t all look the same. It wasn’t the sea of chains and mohawks you might envision, though I’m sure there was enough of that to confirm the stereotype, but there was also enough difference to confirm that the adoption of any kind of uniform was unnecessary. To employ some more stereotypes to illustrate my point, there were as many jocks, preps, skaters, geeks, hippies, and skids in attendance as there were dyed, pierced, and tattooed punks. In short, appearance wasn’t the point.

Punk culture is filled with examples of people acting, dressing, and unapologetically being who they are. Punk empowered me to express myself and my identity freely. In elementary school I had been an outgoing, jocular young boy. Upon entering high school however, I repressed my fun loving self for fear of standing out and becoming a target of ridicule. I was shy and lacked confidence. Instead of being myself, I became quiet and reserved and constantly worried about how others perceived me. It took a few years and my introduction to punk to break me out of my shell before I felt comfortable sharing myself again. Punk gave the go ahead to dress how I wanted. I drew on aspects of typical punk attire but never felt bound to them. I mixed these up with my own sense of style and experimented with different kinds of dress, which did attract some ridicule, but also drew respect. Because I was once again comfortable expressing myself, I took that ridicule in stride and made friends out of those whose disapproval I had previously feared. Punk was hugely liberating in this regard.

Punk's DIY ethic came about out as a requirement for survival in the corporate rock world. For years and with very few exceptions, mainstream record companies saw little commercial value in punk. However, there were benefits to not being held under contract, not least of which was the ability to control one's own artistic vision. Punk resonated with enough people to allow many musicians to make a meagre living. Though many found themselves having to work second jobs to support themselves, the success of punk musicians who managed to survive without the help of music "businessmen" during the eighties became not only an inspiration but also an expectation of punk fans in the nineties when suddenly punk was "rediscovered" by the music business and offered a seat at the high table. Bands like Green Day, the Offspring, and Bad Religion that accepted major label offers were often accused of selling out and lost fans because of it. As ridiculous and unfair as this might be, it took only a few such cautionary tales for many musicians to resist the urge and "stay true" to their roots in the underground. It was no surprise that long before many of the big record contracts lapsed, many of

the bands who had signed them found themselves dealing with labels that had lost interest in them and moved on to the “next big thing”. Ultimately punk has continued to survive and stayed relevant into the current millennium because of its underground allegiance and commitment to independent record labels. In a world so imbued with the notion that legitimacy, success, and power are all proffered from on high, punk has been remarkably successful at turning this paradigm on its head. In my life as a consumer, an aspect of my identity that is almost impossible to deny given the sort of society in which I live, I have done my best to do things I might otherwise “outsource” myself. The DIY ethic influences my consumption of clothing and media. To this day, I buy most of my clothing at thrift and discount stores. Doing so has the benefit of allowing me to craft my own sense of style and distanced me from the possibility of achieving any sort of societal ideal. By not buying into this ideal on the most superficial level, in the clothing I wore, I have found myself equally distanced from the need to look and act like I am “supposed” to in other ways as well. The way I consume media has also been heavily influenced by punk, which taught me to think critically about images portrayed and products pushed via commercial culture. Punk provided an alternative: a culture created by its participants that actively subverted the mainstream models of consumption. Living in opposition to the normal ways of consuming culture around me isn’t easy and I won’t deny feeling inadequate and the pressure to conform at times, but I do think that making the choice to dress in a way that suited me as a teenager and to question the pervasive messages of the popular media to buy into a supposed ideal has helped insulate me from the worst of these feelings. It has also allowed me to develop my own style and ideals. I have punk to thank for giving me the confidence to look inward for inspiration instead of relying on an outside authority for direction.

The anti-hero and anti-authoritarian attitudes espoused in punk subvert notions of hierarchy. This was especially true when I was a kid. During the mid-nineties, punk was gaining more and more mainstream recognition, but many of the bands I listened to resisted cashing in on

this sudden attention. The resistance of punk musicians to embrace mainstream culture meant they didn't enjoy the benefits of being on big record companies: big tour buses and big stadium tours. The fact that I was able to see and personally meet most of my favourite bands within an hour's drive from my house, even though many of these bands had travelled thousands of miles to make this possible, says a lot about the price paid for humility by the bands and the benefits of it for the fans. Bands had to work harder in order to earn a living. This meant touring often and extensively. They couldn't afford to play in only the biggest cities and doing so wouldn't have made much sense anyways. Since they drove from gig to gig and had to stop to eat and sleep at least once a day, they did so in conjunction with scheduled tour stops at smaller venues. They couldn't afford to act like spoiled rock stars because they simply weren't. Bands organized tours themselves. Due to the constraints of their budgets and means of transportation, they found themselves in small towns and cities as often as they did big ones and with few exceptions they played at small venues with little or no staff or security and were left to their own devices. As mentioned before, the absence of any real barrier between the stage and the crowd at these venues fostered a sense of equality between all participants at a show. Because of this, bands and fans became more connected and a high level of mutual trust and respect flourished as a result. I have stood next to and engaged in conversation with some of my favourite musicians in the grimeiest of washrooms. I think this says something about anti-hero and non-hierarchical values of punk culture, or at least the aspects of punk culture to which I found myself drawn.

Punk has influenced me and my sense of being in the world in numerous ways. Through punk I found a constructive outlet for aggression, the freedom to identify and represent myself in a way that drew on my own creativity rather than binding me to the demands of the dominant culture, the capacity to be a critical consumer, and a sense of equity rarely experienced by young people in the presence of those they admire. Punk's influence on me is something I continue to think deeply about. I've taken an active interest in researching the history of this cultural

expression and continue to draw inspiration from my own brief involvement in the punk scene. More importantly, the values of punk helped me solidify and motivated me to celebrate who I am and to accept others for who they are.

Jack the Giant Killer

While punk effectively brought me back in touch with myself, looking back on my upbringing and the things that had influenced me up until the point where punk culture became my primary focus, I began to uncover the origins of my ideas and values. I began to draw connections between the messages of equality and independence I found ringing true for me in punk and in the lessons I had learned from my Christian upbringing. Though by no means a sole influence, Christianity had played a huge role in shaping my view of the world. Stories like *Jacob Two-Two*, which had aided me in my psychological development, and *Andrew Henry*, which had inspired me on a creative level, were also very influential. *Star Trek* had helped me refine my sense of self and of justice in a way that didn't directly conflict with my Christian values. Punk had certainly been more confrontational in this regard, but interestingly, I rarely felt as though my beliefs were challenged by punk. The reason for this, I think, was that what I truly valued about Christianity's teachings were the messages of love and acceptance. There are not many punk love songs, but the struggle for acceptance is a prominent theme. The rest of Christianity, from faith in a one True God to belief in Biblical conceptions of Heaven and Hell, were things I took for granted and didn't actually think that much about. I had grown up believing and didn't feel threatened by messages that contradicted these beliefs. So I sang right along to Pennywise's "Waste of Time" quite contentedly because dwelling on these types of "big" questions wasn't something I devoted a lot of time to.

I've got a question for all you sinners

Have you ever wondered is this all there is to life?

A quick adventure not much to mention

A slow procession leading us to die
Or is there a heaven a distant valley
A golden meadow waiting for us in the sky
No one right answer spirit seems broken
Still I just can't help but wonder why
Seems like a tragic waste of time (Lindberg, 1995).

Around the time that I was experiencing my personal punk-inspired renaissance, I began attending a weekly youth group at a local church with some of my Christian friends. The group was fun. We'd play games and goof around for about an hour or so each week before getting down to discussing deeper issues. I didn't take issue with much of what we talked about. Christianity, for me, had always seemed to be a positive force in the world. While I certainly wasn't blind to the historical failings and injustices of the Church, I did consider these to be, for the most part, things of the past. Yet as I continued to attend youth group over the course of a year or so, I began to understand that much of the attitudes that, in my view, lay at the root of the Church's historical failings were present in the messages I was receiving in our weekly seminars. What triggered this realization were the attitudes many of my fellow group members had towards homosexuality. The common understanding was that sexuality was a choice and that choosing a homosexual lifestyle was a sin. This was by no means an idea I was hearing for the first time. Indeed, a few years earlier, I probably wouldn't have batted an eye. But my exposure to *Star Trek* and to punk, cultural influences that had sensitized me to the realities of others, made me question this message of intolerance. The more I thought about the Church's stance towards homosexuality, the more it bothered me. First of all, to label sexuality a choice meant that I and everyone else had at some point in time made a choice about who to be attracted to. I had always been attracted to girls and I didn't ever recall consciously deciding to feel that way. But supposing sexuality was a choice for some, I thought, what did it matter if they did choose

otherwise? What made that choice, if it indeed was one, harmful to the individual or to society? I couldn't make sense of that and began to suspect that the belief that God despised homosexuality was actually a front for bigotry.

If Christianity had taught me anything it was to *love* my neighbour. If punk had taught me anything it was that everyone deserves respect and social hierarchies that deny this are harmful, illegitimate, and worth challenging. Furthermore, experience had taught me that being overlooked, ignored, or judged unfairly felt horrible. The more I thought about the messages I was hearing at youth group about the sins of *others*, the more I began to think about my own sins. My own sins, as I came to understand them, had to do with previously unexamined notions of privilege. The notion that being chosen by God over other less fortunate and more sinful human beings saved me from his wrath and that being born into home in which I never wanted for the basic necessities of life, in a country in which I never felt threatened by my government, political upheaval, or war qualified me to judge the circumstances, beliefs, and choices, let alone genetics, of others did not sit well with me. After challenging the ideas of the youth group leader one evening and having little success in altering the discursive script by which he conveyed God's disapproval of homosexuality, I realized that the closed-minded atmosphere of this weekly get-together was no longer something I wanted to be a part of. This tiny fracture, this separation between Church and the state of mind to which I was gradually awakening began, I believe, my search in earnest for meaning outside of the primary text of my upbringing. If my sense of justice had not in fact been inspired by Christianity, as I had assumed, where else might it have come from?

In 1981, my uncle and aunt bought my new born brother and me a copy of the *Arthur Rackham Fairy Book*. Following a morbidly delightful reading of *Blue Beard* a few years later, my father swore off ever reading to us from the book again. In this story, the title character nearly murders his new bride when he finds she has disobeyed his strict order to never to open one

particular room, which, incidentally, houses the corpses of all his previously disobedient brides. Luckily Blue Beard is stopped by her two brothers who arrive not a moment too soon and kill him on the spot. My Dad's resolve was gradually weakened as our repeated requests for a re-reading of the story about the "bloody princesses" eventually took their toll. The best part of the whole affair was the laugh we got from my uncle and aunt's inscription: "*Christmas 1981. To Travis and Tommy, Sweet Dreams.*". The horror of tales like *Blue Beard* and other stories in this volume (*Hop-O-My Thumb* was another of my favourites), was accentuated by Rackham's sublimely grotesque illustrations. There was one illustration in particular, however, that peaked my curiosity and interest above all others. It was that of *Jack the Giant Killer*.

I was laid up sick one day, around the age of 17, when I dusted off my favourite book of fairy tales and recalled all the fun I'd had listening to these stories as a young child. Over the course of the day, I worked my way through them again, rereading my favourites and discovering



Fig. 17. Jack the Giant Killer. A. Rackham, 1978.

new ones. I found myself quite drawn to Rackham's image and the accompanying tale of a brave young lad in King Arthur's kingdom who dares to stand up to giants that ravage the countryside. Interestingly, the story itself isn't all that great. Jack basically kills one giant after another and we get little or no insight into who he is or who the people he saves and the giants he slays are as characters. I did however enjoy the casual nature and

cleverness with which Jack defeats his foes. That intelligence and trickery are the weapons with which he battles and, without fail, ensure his success, was enormously appealing to me. I identified with Jack's methods. I had long relied on my wits, not only because my physical stature and prowess was lacking, but because I had them. I knew words and creativity had the power to win out against the brutish strength of bullies and those who made their way through life

trampling on the heads of others. More importantly, Jack the Giant Killer became a symbol for me, an aspect of strength in my identity as a young man as I sought to rail against the tyranny of small-mindedness I saw around me.

Upon entering college I spent a semester failing and dropping out of science courses for which I had registered. I had listened to the advice of guidance counselors who, probably because I failed to express any interest or enthusiasm for any other course of study, recommended the sciences to me, explaining that this is where the jobs of the future would be and that having a basis in science would open doors for me. Had I wholeheartedly pursued this path I have no doubt these predicted benefits would have materialised, but my heart was simply not in it. Calculus, physics, and biology and didn't cause my eyes to widen and chemistry put me to sleep. After a false start and one lost semester I changed course and registered in first year courses in History, Sociology, and Psychology. These courses ignited in me a passion for learning I had not experienced before. Sociology in particular captured my interest. When assigned the task of writing on a concept of social organization that interested us, I looked to a concept commonly bandied about in punk culture but which I did not fully understand. I wrote a paper on anarchism.

While I don't claim to fully understand the philosophical underpinnings of anarchism, and acknowledge that there is plenty of disagreement among those who call themselves anarchists about how to achieve an ideal society and what such a society would look like, the common themes of freedom, equality, democracy and what I found expressed in much of the literature I examined as the capacity for individual and social responsibility in all individuals, appealed to my sense of justice. It was an anarchist vision, a vision of a society in which self-reliance and self-regulation, mutual respect, and cooperative support networks that would do away with the need for government as we know it, that excited me on a political level. Perhaps this was naiveté on my part. I never went as far as to call myself an anarchist or to engage in any kind anarchist activity—though I spoke openly among friends and family and in a few letters to the editor of a

Vernon newspaper about my opposition to things like the foreign policy practices of the US administration of then President Bill Clinton—but I believe that when thinkers like Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, whom I so admire for their well-articulated critiques of history, capitalism, and nationalism, call themselves anarchists, there's got to be more to this idea than the chaos and wanton violence we, and certainly the mainstream media, commonly associates with the word "anarchy".

An image I was drawn to and subsequently printed onto an iron transfer and wore proudly over my chest on a homemade t-shirt was that of the anarchist bumblebee. There's a disproven myth in aerodynamic science that says that the bumblebee, due to its size and relative wing span, should not be capable of flight. While reality alone shows this not to be the case, the ability of flight among bumblebees has also been demonstrated through scientific investigation.

Still, the once thought improbable flight of the bumblebee represents the impossible dream of anarchists: that we could

actually sustain civilization without government. Defending an ideology like anarchism is difficult, especially since it largely fails to propose a method of actualization, other than willful civil disobedience, or values beyond what, really when you get down to it, most political ideologies have in common: a functioning society in which the needs of its members are met. However, part of what appealed to me about anarchism *was* its refusal to outline a strategy for achieving its utopian goals. This lack of a strategy is symbolic of the big way in which anarchism differs from other political ideologies. Anarchism acknowledges what few others do: that in spite of all our similarities and common needs, the way we as individuals and societies choose to meet those needs and pursue that which we desire over and above those needs differs dramatically. Expecting or forcing individuals within politically or arbitrarily defined borders to adhere to a



Fig. 18. Anarchist Bumblebee.
FAUD, 1919.

system of organization and an approach to meeting their needs that runs contrary to their values or worse, fails to provide for them as promised is not only unsustainable, it is unjust. I concluded my paper on anarchism with a quote from *Jack the Giant Killer*: ““Now,” thought Jack, “either my death or freedom is at hand.”” (Perrault, 1978, p. 106). For me, Jack’s ultimatum echoed one I was in the process of facing myself; a decision that was as political as anything I had been discussing in my sociology class, but intensely more personal as well. Years before, I had faced giants in the form of personal fears that threatened to crush my budding independence as a young child first entering the world of grownups. At that time, Jacob Two-Two had been a symbol that



Fig. 19. Jack in the hands of Blunderbore. A. Rackham, 1978.

helped me understand both these fears and the bravery to overcome them. Now, almost a decade and a half later, at nineteen, I looked to a similarly heroic, yet similarly ordinary character, Jack the Giant Killer, for inspiration and the confidence to face ideological giants that threatened to wreak havoc on my burgeoning sense of self and notions of justice.

Throughout my years of going to church I regularly recited the Apostles’ Creed along with the rest of the congregation. The translation I was most familiar with was that used by the Christian Reformed Church I attended. It is as

follows:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he

descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen. (CRC Publications, 1987)

This creed, which is the article of faith upon which the culture I was immersed in based its conception of the world, summarizes the core tenets of a religion I had come to accept as Truth. Yet after years of reciting this creed on a regular basis, after years of Sunday school, and after professing my faith publically before the congregation as a young teenager, my faith in this conception of the world began to fall apart around the age of 18. In reflecting on why this happened I have long credited the church's attitude towards homosexuality as the divisive issue that prompted me to re-examine all that I believed in an effort to reconcile how a religion purportedly based on love could be so closed minded and cling to such bigotry. My re-examination began with writing down my own creed, one that certainly resembles the Apostles' Creed. It was as follows:

"I believe that God created the Universe

I believe that God is a loving God

I believe that Jesus was the Son of God and came to Earth to share God's love

I believe that Jesus was crucified, and died, to pay for our sins and rose from the dead."

(Personal Journal, 1998)

This is where I stopped. Writing those words down, I recognized how incredibly Sunday school-like they sounded. Years ago a teacher of mine had admonished those of us in his class for providing answers we knew he wanted to hear. He had called them "Sunday school answers". This was at the Christian school, and I wondered at the time what other answers he might actually tolerate. In writing my own creed I had intended to define for myself a more tolerant version of

the Christian faith, one that was true to the core messages of love and acceptance that I valued. Yet, as the words came out of me, I felt as though I wasn't being genuine and began to question the very fundamentals of my Christian faith. If the message of love was what mattered to me, what purpose did the rest of this creed serve? In other words, did it matter if Jesus rose from the dead or if he actually was the son of God? Did it matter if God created the universe? Did it matter if God existed at all? If what mattered to me most was the importance of Jesus's second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself", what purpose did his greatest commandment, to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul all your strength and with all your mind" serve (Luke 10:27, New International Version)? These questions drove me to the then fledgling Internet to see what others had to say on the connection between God and love.

I have always admired the passage found in the book of Corinthians, famous for its clarity on the topic of love, not to mention its widespread use at wedding services (including my own). It goes as follows:

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Cor. 13: 1-7, New International Version)

In Bible class in elementary school, we had once been told to go through the passage and replace every “love” and pronoun “it” with “God”. Read this way, we were told, demonstrated not only the nature of God, but also illustrated what was meant in 1 John 4:8, which states “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (New International Version). At the time I thought that was a pretty clever exercise and it affirmed the equation in my own mind that God was indeed all about love. But searching the Internet in my state of doubt I stumbled onto a page all about the plethora of contradictions found in the Bible. I was astonished to see page after page of supposed contradictions and quickly grabbed the closest Bible I could find and make sure whoever it was that had composed this list had quoted the good book correctly. They had. I noticed there was a whole section on the contradictory conceptions of love and wondered what possible confusion there could be. Listed there were links to a few passages, which variously described the commandment to love God , several more that warned readers to fear God, and then one, critically important passage, 1 John 4:18, which states: “There is no fear in love” (New International Version). These six words widened the cracks in my faith and the broke apart the rationale I had clung to in order to maintain it, which was that, despite what the followers of God said and did, Christianity was a religion founded on love. All those lessons about the jealousy of God, the wrath of God, and the very notions of Hell and eternal damnation, floated to the forefront of my mind and suddenly struck me as louder, far more incessant messages than the one of love that I naively held onto. What I realized that day was that, in my experience, from childhood onwards, Christianity and the text upon which it is based, preached a message of fear as much, if not more, than it preached love.

In the years since, I have come to recognize Christianity as a far more nuanced system of belief than I had the capacity to understand as an 18 year old. Yet at the time, the contradictions confirmed for me that the Bible was not the word of God, but a book written, arranged, and interpreted over the centuries since Christianity’s inception by men. Moreover, many of these

men served under or had vested interests in regimes maintained by tactics of fear and coercion. It was not long after that day that I ceased to call myself a Christian. I no longer wished to identify with a cultural tradition that seemed to lack the self-awareness and critical ability to recognize that the words it attributed to God were in fact its own. As much as I now admire Christianity as a human movement that positively affects the lives of many, many of whom I love and call friends and family, too often its capacity for fear and prejudice overrules the need for rational thought and the very principle of love to which it purports to subscribe. My experience with Christianity taught me a valuable lesson, which was when the stories we use to explain the world around us become doctrines that permit us to reject all alternative visions of reality, we become insular in our thinking and incapable of allowing the ideas of others to enrich our own.

When I think back on this time in my life, on my growing critical awareness of the world around me and the way in which I turned that critical eye on myself through some painful but ultimately liberating self-reflection, I think of the ruthlessness of Jack the Giant Killer. While I identified with Jack's casual, clever nature, his combative spirit was what resonated with me most deeply. I was looking to destroy, to break down, and to rebuild. So far I had successfully shattered my faith in government and religion. Two giants lay under a cloud of dust, dust that was settling over now severely fractured ground. The ground beneath me felt shaky and I didn't know where to stand. I realized that this was my own doing, yet I was at a loss as to how to go about picking up the pieces. I didn't know where to start, let alone what to strive for.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra

I took a break from my studies in the spring of 1999. After a summer of saving up to go on an extended ski trip with a friend of mine, only to see those plans fall through when we both got laid off from work, I decided that another season up at the local ski hill would have to suffice. I landed a job with the maintenance department at a hotel on the mountain. It wasn't very challenging work, mostly shoveling snow, servicing hot tubs, and changing light bulbs, but I

wasn't looking for a challenge and liked the fact that I got a discounted season pass out of the deal. The year before, the hotel had been bought up by a major chain but then dropped after just one season. The ownership was in the process of changing hands again as I was hired. It turned out the managers I worked under were not thrilled about this changeover or keen about their incoming employer. There was a lot going on behind closed doors and a great deal of concern that the new owner would be laying-off staff. The snow was falling and the walks needed shovelling a few times a day, so my fellow maintenance staff and I took full advantage of the fact that the management, who did not feel so secure in their jobs, weren't paying that much attention to what we were doing. We went about our jobs, or at least kept up the appearance of doing so, but without a watchful eye over us, we ran wild with the incredible amount of free time and space to roam our jobs afforded us. If I had worked harder and took the initiative to perform beyond the minimal expectations of my superiors, I may have found the job more rewarding. Though hardly working was fun at first, the feeling I was wasting mine and everyone else's time began to drag me down.

In fact, since leaving college, I had found myself growing increasingly dissatisfied and irritable in general. My discontentment grew over that first year out of school and culminated in an ugly incident at a staff function near the end of the ski season. We were celebrating the birthday of our general manager at one of the local golf courses when, for reasons I am still unsure about, a friend and I spontaneously trashed the men's washroom. We did substantial damage and were caught doing it. I couldn't explain to any of my very surprised yet surprisingly forgiving superiors why I had acted in this way, only that it had something to do with being frustrated and unhappy in my position at the hotel and with life in general. My friend and I paid for the damages and most everyone we worked with laughed it off as an unfortunate error in judgement fueled in no small part by too much alcohol. I knew there was more to it than this. As the ski season wore on, and the relations between the managers and new owner became more and

more strained, I became less and less concerned with my appearance as an employee.

Increasingly, a sense of recklessness took over me. Inspired by the ruckus energy of punk and the cavalier attitude of Jack the Giant Killer, I sneered at anything and anyone who sought to advise, question, or control me. Towards the end of the ski season, I quit my position on the mountain to head West with a friend who shared my dream of starting fresh, in a bigger city, somewhere near the ocean.

It was never our intent, or at least not mine, to settle in Victoria. After a few entirely unfruitful days of job hunting in Vancouver, where we spent more time lost and driving around in circles than we did handing out resumes, we decided to visit some friends in Victoria for the weekend. Perhaps it was the feeling of familiarity that greeted us as our friend picked us up from the ferry, or the fact that Victoria, a comparatively small town to Vancouver, felt more like home. Whatever it was, landing on the island and driving into town completely erased our desire to make it in the big city. Victoria was big enough. Two weeks later I returned to Vernon for the weekend to pick up my stuff and made the move to Victoria permanent.

I moved to Victoria on a whim and, in spite of a total lack of forethought, I managed to land on my feet, secure a job as a barista, and find a place to live. Here, my reckless attitude prevailed, but instead of being miserable, I became increasingly more celebratory in my defiance. Now, more than a decade later, I look back, shake my head at all the stupid things I did, and marvel at how I wasn't ever arrested for buffoonery or seriously injured. At the time I felt like I was on the cusp of something new and wonderful, which was something I really began to think about when a friend I had worked with at the ski hill came for a visit. While we had been working together I had, at a particularly low point, told him I wished I could run away from society, from work, from the need to play along nicely, and move to a deserted island to be by myself so I could think. During his visit to Victoria, we ventured out to Thetis Lake with a few other friends and were having a great time lounging on the rocks, when looking out to the little island that sits in

the middle of the lake I, now in a much better headspace, reiterated my desire to live on an island someday. “But, Travis,” he pointed out, “you live on an island now”. We laughed about this, but I remember being quite floored by the fact that I had overlooked this obvious fact. I suddenly recognized that this failure to fully appreciate my current circumstances was, at least in some small way, symptomatic of something bigger I had been overlooking. This something was the opportunity present in every moment to redefine how I see the world and choose to operate in it. Vancouver Island wasn’t exactly a desert island. I was surrounded by more people than ever, but I had begun to enjoy the anonymity that comes with living in a city, particularly one you aren’t raised in, and found myself with more time to myself and more time to think. The more I thought about it, the more I realized how consumed with angst I had been.

I began to focus more and more on the way I had been letting my worries, frustration, and anger dominate my outlook. I decided that the only thing to do was to let go of all of this so that I could think clearly. I looked for inspiration and found it in a few books recommended to me by a few new friends. James Allen’s *As a Man Thinketh* (1991) with its message of positive visualization woke me to the power of my own thoughts. When left unchecked, negative thinking could wreak havoc on my emotional well-being. As I began to orient my thoughts towards gratitude and self-acceptance I quickly found that my feelings followed suit. Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations*, particularly the passage: “Cast out the judgement; you are saved. Who then hinders your casting it out”, spoke loudly to me (1998, p. 116). I had spent the better part of a year lashing out against the wind, feeling sorry for myself and holding myself from happiness. Richard Bach’s *Illusions* (1977), which suggests that reality is just that, made a significant impression on me and left me resolved to finally let go and float free with the breeze, to allow life to take me where it would.

Much of what I discovered about myself during this time is documented through a series of journals and across reams of loose paper, mostly hand written notes I scribbled down whenever

something I thought worthy of recording occurred to me or simply when mood struck me.

Writing was catharsis for me to be sure, but more than anything I was documenting my transition into adulthood. I look back over my journals from this time and am astounded at the amount of time and energy I invested into self-reflection. There is a box of writing now stored in my garage that contains an incredible output of personal ramblings that mark the passage of time between 1997-2003, beginning, interestingly, from around the time I professed my faith as a Christian at 17, subsequently lost that faith about a year and half later, and for the roughly five years immediately following my fall from grace. The three years immediately preceding my re-entry into university, beginning with my arrival in Victoria is when the vast majority of this writing took place. At the time I figured my interest in writing pointed to a possible career. Looking back however, I can see I was trying to piece myself back together and find ways to fill the gaps, gaps I had willfully cracked open but now needed to fill in order to secure a firm foundation upon which to reframe my understanding. Disassociating with Christianity had left my identity in ruins. It was time to rebuild.

One afternoon, on a particularly slow day at the coffee shop, I was killing time behind the counter, free-writing on the backs of coffee cards and taking immense pleasure in playing with words and sounds and then *making* sense out of things I was writing. Most of my journals are comprised of exercises like these. I would try to let go of my conscious mind and let my subconscious dictate what I wrote. It was like a self-administered Jungian free-association activity. I was searching for meaning by piecing together understanding I held within. I had recently been introduced to the work of Carl Jung through the writer and Jungian analyst Robert A. Johnson. Johnson's book *He* (1989) had been recommended to me by a friend who had an experience with religion somewhat comparable to my own. The book provides a Jungian interpretation of the Grail Legend and engages readers in a discussion on masculine psychology that centers on the character Parsifal and questions concerning the Grail King and the purpose of

the grail. It was an interesting read that piqued my interest in psychology and the uses we make and the meanings we derive from stories. Stories had long been my favoured means of learning. Up until this point, I had not been that interested in non-fiction, but Johnson's book and writings by Jung and later Joseph Campbell, all non-fiction writers who rely heavily on narrative, got me much interested in this style of writing.



Fig. 20. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. K. Tong, 2011

A few months later, I was introduced to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by a friend whose philosophy class was studying Nietzsche. Something he said about the book, I can't recall what, drew me to it. Perhaps it was Nietzsche's infamous statement: "God is dead" (1928, p. 6). This was certainly a notion I was wrestling with and seeking guidance in relation to. On the other hand, it may have been the knowledge that Nietzsche's philosophy, in the case of *Zarathustra*, was presented in the form of a story. I had dabbled in philosophy in my second year of college but not found it to my liking. At the time, the

emphasis on reason and questions pertaining to the existence of God featured in that introductory course didn't capture my imagination as I had hoped. This is interesting, since I would have enrolled in this course immediately following my decision that God, as I had known him, did not exist. But even in my most concerted efforts to rationalize my disbelief, I found the dry rationality of philosophy, at least as it was presented to me there, unimaginative. The thought of a philosophical novel, however, one in which the philosopher embedded his thinking within a narrative, appealed to me. Almost immediately after I picked up *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I found myself hooked, not only with the story, but with the ideas being expressed. After months of unleashing my thoughts and feelings on to paper, of gathering together the remnants of my former

world view, Zarathustra was instrumental in helping me piece together a foundation upon which to reconstruct my identity.

There is much about Nietzsche's philosophy that I don't agree with. I recognize the historical significance of his thinking and the ways in which it reflected and informed the burgeoning modernist sensibility of the 20th century. Nietzsche sets the stage with the claim that "God is dead" (p. 6). What I understand him to mean here is that God has ceased to be the central influence and source of meaning in Western civilization. He observes the effect this is having on society and sees an increasing sense of nihilism in reaction to this lack of a shared belief, identity, and sense of purpose. His prophetic warnings about the dangers inherent in how we as a society will fill the void left by God, through nationalism for instance, are remarkably accurate considering some of the defining events and trends of the 20th century, particularly the World Wars, the Cold War, communism, capitalism (not to mention rampant consumerism), and nationalism in general. However, you needn't look farther than the Nazi's appropriation of Nietzsche's philosophy to see the dangers inherent in Nietzsche's own solution to nihilism found in the Overman.

Nietzsche presents his philosophy through the character Zarathustra. When we meet him Zarathustra is making his way down a mountain upon which he lived in solitude for ten years. He is on his way back to his hometown to share what he has learned. Once there, Zarathustra proclaims to an unreceptive audience that "man is something that is to be surpassed" (p. 3). This was not something I necessarily disagreed with. My Christian upbringing had apprised me of humanity's failings, but you didn't need to be a Christian to see that humans were far from perfect. However, while Christianity holds out hope for forgiveness from God, Zarathustra insists that humanity's shortcomings are something that can be overcome by an individual's "will to power" (p. 123). It's Nietzsche's contention that humans have the creative capacity to change and

to evolve. The idea that I was capable of becoming a better person, able to create a new identity and define my own morality without the benefit of religion, was incredibly empowering.

I was in the midst of getting over my loss of faith, faith I had placed in a particular morality and world view that privileged itself over all others. I could see that this kind of thinking wasn't just a problem of Christianity. Looking around me I could see that even the 'freest' thinkers were as guilty of closing their minds to ideas that ran contrary to their own. Having spent half of my life surrounded by people who held similar beliefs and the other half surrounded by those who shared far fewer of those beliefs, I knew that like-minded or not, most people were fearful of difference, resistant to new ideas, and stubborn about change. It is a common tendency among humans from different traditions, cultures, and those holding differing political viewpoints to regard one another with suspicion and even hatred. It seemed ridiculous to me that we could be so blind to the fact that when taking the scope of the universe, or if you prefer, the infinite nature of God into consideration, all beliefs are worth questioning. I had stopped calling myself a Christian because I no longer wanted to be associated with a religion that condemned others based on their differing beliefs or behavior. The concept of Hell bothered me. For me, a god that would banish someone to eternal damnation is not one I would bow down to, regardless of the consequences. Zarathustra's notion of morality, which holds that notions of good and evil are individually and culturally qualified made far more sense to me than the seemingly arbitrary line in the sand that Christians drew to divide those who please God from those who offend him. I couldn't imagine that God, if he actually existed, cared that much about the sorts of stories people told to explain the universe around them or trivial things like the sorts of things consenting adults chose to do with one another in private. I had not, and have still not, abandoned the idea that there might be a god, but a god that would convince me of its existence would not divide and condemn people with a morality as exclusive as that. Nietzsche does not reject morality outright, but recognizes that morality, like so many other "truths", is relative. He argues that we, not God, are

the creators of morality. While it is natural and often necessary to establish a sense of right and wrong for yourself, to go so far as to codify and coerce others to obey your morality goes against nature by precluding the possibility of change. Change, Zarathustra stresses, is a fundamental aspect of nature.

I was ready to embrace change but soon realized I was stuck in the kind of thinking that bound me to my former conception of reality. When Zarathustra proclaims that “All living things are obeying things [...] whatever cannot obey itself is commanded” (pp. 123-124), I began to recognize that overcoming the loss of direction Christianity had provided me meant learning to take direction from myself. This is of course far easier said than done. Since pulling up my socks and deciding to re-determine meaning in my life I had sought to minimize my struggle. I did this by trying to focus solely on the positive and to avoid worry, which made me happier for a time, but also distanced me from reality. This distancing is evident in my journals where I write about how the world around me is little more than a dream, that who I am is more spirit than body, that my spirit is eternal and part of a larger whole, which could be thought of as God (Personal journal, 2000). Separating oneself from reality I now recognized was a fairly common defense mechanism. Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam all recognize activity here on Earth as either a distraction from what is real, a playfield for supernatural forces beyond our control, or a mere stepping stone to the afterlife. Struggle, in these conceptions of reality, is something we can minimize and even hope to avoid if we submit to a will greater than our own. Though I had rejected Christianity, I had carried on accepting that reality was an *illusion* not grounded in that which we can perceive through our senses. While I still accept possibility that there is more to reality than we are able to perceive, my dualist conception hindered my ability to move past my previous Christian conception and see reality in a dramatically new way. Because of this, I continued to look outside of myself for guidance and, in doing so, relinquished my own creative potential.

I was gradually learning that I had opportunity to create meaning for myself free from the external constraints of my former religion, but making meaning wasn't about establishing a new impenetrable world view. Life could be confusing, devastating, and generally unpleasant, but these appraisals were often rooted in my inability to be flexible in my understanding. One quote I wrote down around the time and have returned to periodically over the years is from Robert A. Johnson (2009) who writes: "If you ask the Grail to give you happiness, that demand precludes happiness. But if you serve the Grail and the Grail King properly, you will find that what happens and happiness are the same thing" (p. 80). As I understand the Grail legend (and this understanding has evolved and will continue to do so, I'm sure), the grail symbolizes the mystery of life. Learning to live contentedly is about embracing and engaging the challenges that come with being alive and *awake*. Life isn't here to serve us, but we it. We mustn't withdraw or run away from this challenge. Zarathustra implores: "Let your love to life be love to your highest hope; and let your highest hope be the highest thought of life" (Nietzsche, 1928, p. 48). When he follows this with "Man is something that is to be surpassed" (p. 48), I take his reference to "man" to mean the self-centered, egoistic notions that bind us to our own narrow conceptions of reality and blind us from all other possibilities. Zarathustra refers to this desire to see meaning as fixed as "the spirit of gravity" (p. 215). As Nietzsche writes, "'This—is now *my* way, —where is yours?'" Thus I answered those who asked me "the way." For *the* way—that doth not exist!" (p. 217). More than anything else, what Zarathustra taught me was that only through asking questions, facing life's challenges, and overcoming my own misconceptions, would I be able to assert my independence and begin to create for myself a new vision of reality.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, perhaps more than any other story I've referenced here was and continues to be one with which I struggle to pinpoint my fascination. I think this is because it does not feature a hero so much as it does an individual in the process of becoming. As an adult I recognize that this process is never complete and if I was to identify accurately with any one

thing, it would be this. Static characters like Andrew Henry and Jack the Giant Killer, who present visions of self-satisfied confidence are appealing to the childlike mind, but more and more I have found myself looking to characters whose identities mirror the complexity, uncertainty, and fleeting definitions I consider when I look to the roles I play in my own stories. My story ends at a point ten years prior to this writing. This is partially because in the last ten years I have been engaged in the unfolding of my own life's story and not recently connected, I don't think, as intensely to other texts, but this may also be because it's taken me ten years to realize the significance of all the stories I've described to you here. My autobiographical recollections, set alongside stories of my Christian upbringing, Jacob Two-Two, Andrew Henry, *Star Trek*, punk rock, Jack the Giant Killer, and Zarathustra, have permitted me insights into my sense of self as it developed up until my entry into adulthood. These cultural influences affected my individuation. As an educator, these insights give me a better understanding of the ways in which I wish to influence those I teach. But before I get to this, I have one more story.

Following my year of awakening in Victoria, 2000-2001, I went up North for the summer to plant trees. Here, lessons on the necessity of persistence in the face of challenges and the need to work hard and accept discomfort came raining down upon me. I bore each of these lessons as best I could, which in many cases wasn't very well. Still, I learned much about myself in the process. Was I able to overcome myself with self-discipline and learn to obey a higher calling within myself? No, at least not if that higher calling had anything to do with planting a lot of trees and staying sane. I struggled then and struggle now with obeying myself. Yet something happened that summer that jolted me from the joy of carefree living I had experienced over the last year in Victoria. Tree-planting can be an isolating experience. Many plant alone, often completely so, in the middle of cut blocks tens if not hundreds of kilometers from the nearest town. Looking up from my work and into the forests of Northern British Columbia that lined clearings I was tasked to fill with new trees, I marveled at how easy it would be to wander off

into that darkness and never be heard from again. I fancied living alone, like Zarathustra, atop a mountain somewhere. The solitude of the work brought me back *inside*. Just as my entrance into high school had done before, I began to withdraw socially, bit by bit at first, but then suddenly so following a traumatic event that occurred in the spring of 2001 on the last day of my first tree-planting contract.

I had gone to bed following a night of celebration. We had just completed a month and a half contract and had gathered, as we did most nights, around a massive fire fueled by dozens of the waxed cardboard boxes. These boxes, which had housed the trees we had just finished planting, went up in flames as fast as any fuel and we'd pile them in towers ten feet high before taking a match to them and watching in awe as they'd burn to the ground in a matter of seconds. After I'd had my fill of revelry, I wandered off to bed around midnight. My quarters were an eight person waxed canvas tent my parents had taken on camping trips when I was little. We hadn't used it for years and when I left to go plant that spring, my Dad told me he'd be happy to be rid of it and told me not to bring it home. As was my routine each night, I entered the spacious tent, which I had all to myself and lit a small candle I had perched on top of a makeshift night table—a Tupperware lid—by my bedside. Usually I would prepare for bed and often read, journal, or listen to music for a while, before blowing out the candle and falling to sleep. That night however, I fell asleep almost as soon as I got into my sleeping bag and failed to blow out that candle.

A fellow camper was heading to bed about an hour or so after I had turned in when he walked past my tent and saw a bright light on inside. At first he thought it was a flashlight. But there was something in the movement of my silhouette that struck him as peculiar. It looked as though I was clawing at the sides of the tent. He stepped closer and heard me mumbling to myself and sensed that all was not right. He asked me if I was okay and I said no. I don't remember any of this, but apparently, he then asked if I needed help, if I needed to get out. He told me later that

he wasn't sure what was going on but could tell that I was beginning to panic. For some reason he reached for his pocket and pulled out a box cutter. These were common in camp. We all had one. They were used to open the tree boxes. But this cutter wasn't his. Someone had picked it up earlier in the evening and handed it to him. He had absentmindedly put it in his pocket and forgotten about it, until that moment. By now a crowd was beginning to gather around my tent. He asked me if I wanted him to cut open the tent to which I immediately replied yes. I have no recollection of any of this.

What I do remember is waking from a dream in which I had been trapped, suffocating at the side of a stage, hopelessly tangled in a mass of heavy curtains. Suddenly a blast of cool night air hit my face and arms reached towards me, pulling me from my tent. One hand reached down and pulled from my leg a burning piece of nylon. I was awake, standing outside, and surrounded by other planters. As I turned around towards the tent from which I'd just been pulled, it burst into flames and burned to the ground in a matter of seconds. Though my face was blackened with soot, I was uninjured except for a small third-degree burn on my upper thigh, where the fire had burned through two sleeping bags and woken me just enough to draw the attention of the fellow who ultimately saved me. I look down at the scar that burn left from time to time and think of it as my "fisher king" (Johnson, 2009) wound. My tent fire experience changed the way I saw the world. On one hand I gained some important insights about how lucky I was to have people looking out for me, yet on the other, I felt overwhelmed and paralyzed by the vast beauty and unpredictable nature of life.

At first, my response could only be described as a feeling of exhilaration. As a friend of mine recently pointed out, upon tumbling out of the tent, finally extricated from the "curtains" I had been dreaming about, I was "on stage". There was certainly cause for celebration. I felt lucky to be alive and extremely grateful to those who had been there to save me. But as I woke the next day, packed up what remained of my otherwise charred belongings, I felt myself beginning to

withdraw. Since that night I have gone through periods of intense introversion and introspection and periods of extroversion, periods in which alternately, I have felt despair and found inspiration. At all times however, I have endeavored to retain the important lesson I learned from my tent fire experience. Had it not been for the chance encounters and quick thinking of others, I would have died that night. I realized then, with the full emotional force only lived experience can bring, that I was not alone and could not think of myself that way if I truly wished to grow, let alone survive, in this world.

I look back on my life experiences and the texts that spoke to me in significant ways to try to determine how it is I got to where I am today. I am now a husband and a father and my story has continued from the point at which I leave off here in a dramatically different, yet intriguingly similar fashion. I am an educator who at one point decided that more than anything I wanted to show people that life is full of incredible opportunities and possible journeys. There are many doorways and passageways to choose from. Each offers something unique and none is more “right” or “wrong” than the other so long as the lessons we draw from our experiences bring us closer to who we have the potential to be and strengthens the contributions we make to the lives of those around us. What my stories have taught me is that each of us needs an independence of mind in order to be creative participants in our communities. The aim of education as I see it is to nurture this independence by encouraging students to think critically about what fascinates and motivates *them*, facilitating their skill development so they can reach their creative potential, and demonstrating that it is their independent interests, individual strengths, and unique abilities that make them valued members of their community. Ultimately, we need each other, but the *other* we need must truly be an-*other*. It is our differences, not our capacity to conform, that allow us to grow, to change, and to become better, for one another and through one another.

Discussion

The purpose of the autoethnographic exploration of the previous chapter was to reveal the intertextual relationship between my life experiences and the significant texts of my life and to determine how this confluence of stories shapes my identity. Having now shared the stories that constitute my textual lineage and explored the ways in which each contributed to the construction of my contextual reality (Freire, 2009) and the formation of my values, I turn my attention now to the ways in which this understanding informs my practice as an educator. The meaning I derive is pertinent not only to my practice to date, but, more importantly, to the role I hope fill going forward. To articulate clearly what these stories mean to me is the first step. As an educator, the best way for me to communicate this meaning to others is to consciously embody my understanding and allow it to inform my practice. The following thematic exploration of my textual-lineage will reveal the educational worth of my cultural investments. Reflections on my educational practice will aim to connect what I have learned about myself with who it is I hope to become.

Themes

There are a few themes that arise in my autoethnography worth exploring. First, I notice a common *aesthetic* running through my textual lineage explored in the previous chapter. Though not always present, its recurrence seems significant enough to warrant exploration. I would also like to further explore the concept of *liminality*, which I briefly introduced at the beginning of my autoethnography. Finally, themes of *empowerment* and *creativity* are undoubtedly pertinent to the meaning I now make of the stories presented in the previous section.

Aesthetic Characteristics

There is an aesthetic with which I am enamoured found in many of the images that accompanied the words and sounds I immersed myself in growing up. By aesthetic I refer to the similar artistic style of artists whose drawings helped convey the tone and character of the stories to which I was drawn. This artistic style became informed my personal taste and my subsequent

selection of stories that now populate my textual lineage. These images rendered as much meaning and were as important to me as anything conveyed in words. I found the sparse, black on white ink drawings of Fritz Wegner, illustrator of *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, Doris Burn, author and illustrator of *Andrew Henry's Meadow*, and Arthur Rackham, the illustrator of my favourite book of fairy tales and the artist behind the image of Jack the Giant Killer featured above, fascinating and at time even frightening. There is a convincing yet imaginative aspect of realism to each that is convincing. The drawings are not particularly cartoonish; the characters are proportionally accurate and bear resemblance to real human beings. Yet, no attempt is made to make them look more real than the fictional creations they are. The lack of colour or even detailed shading is significant. It gives the images a somewhat unfinished look. Some readers might be tempted to colour in these drawings. For me, I didn't so much wish to colour between the lines as I did to actually insert myself in the sketchily-defined worlds these lines depicted with such elegant simplicity. There was room to grow in there, spaces that I could fill in with my own imaginative understanding. These images draw a fine line between reality and the imagination, just as the stories they help tell, and for that matter, the stories I tell about myself. As I went on seek out more narrative sources to fuel my understanding, I sought out similar imagery, found myself immediately drawn towards and open to the artistic suggestion of images like those of favourite childhood stories. Now as teacher-librarian, tasked with engaging kids in the search for not only appealing narrative and informational texts, but also the ways in which these texts are represented through art and imagery, I find myself becoming more aware of how personal taste functions as a necessarily ruthless filter in an increasingly textual world. My personal tastes led me to a variety of texts that each contributed to a more rounded understanding than any one of them could have helped me achieve. Cultivated by a very specific artistic style, my personal taste helped me pinpoint narratives that, at a glance, felt intuitively "right" for me.

The stories of Jacob Two-Two, Andrew Henry, and Jack the Giant Killer are undoubtedly fictional. Readers can appreciate the unlikelihood of the experiences faced by these characters. We know children are not sent to prison for saying things twice, that children don't usually succeed so brilliantly in running away, or that children rarely have the need, let alone the capacity, to fight blood-thirsty two-headed giants to the death. But each of these characters, despite their incredible strengths and adventures, are presented to the reader as rather ordinary. None have magical or supernatural powers. All rely solely on their own wits and bravery. I know that for me, this made imagining myself in their shoes possible.



Fig. 20. Punk flyer. S. Kerri, 1981

I found a similar aesthetic in the illustrations depicted on punk flyers that were common *before* my time. In particular, the artwork of Shawn Kerri captured for me the aspects of punk I found most appealing, namely its intensity, sense of humour, and irreverent attitude. Through these and other historical artifacts of punk culture I became interested in the *story* of punk, something that, perhaps even more than the music, has fueled my interest in the phenomenon of punk. I came of age in an era where computer programs, cheap colour printing, and an increased investment in marketing and promotion had become the norm. The images of punk's past, however, were brought to the present in high resolution. Bad Religion's (1995) retrospective *All Ages* album featured dozens of flyers from the early eighties. Not long after that, collectors-cum-curators of punk culture began posting similar images online and books like Bryan Ray Turcotte's and Christopher T. Miller's (2000) *Fucked Up and Photocopied* detailed the punk aesthetic in depth. These sources revealed the DIY roots of punk culture and an era when amateur illustration and cheap black and white reproductions were the best most bands or promoters could muster. These images told stories.

They conveyed the fury and irreverence of punk and helped cultivate an understanding of what punk meant to me.

I realize that my own interpretations of these images, largely artifacts created long before I was exposed to them, don't necessarily reflect the reality of punk culture as it was, is, or ever will be for anyone else. I know that the meaning I make of punk culture was influenced by fans and musicians who've regaled me with glorified tales of punk's past and that I have had a hand in glorifying the history of this culture in my own mind.

However much the meaning I make of this culture relates to the understanding of others, this meaning is uniquely my own.

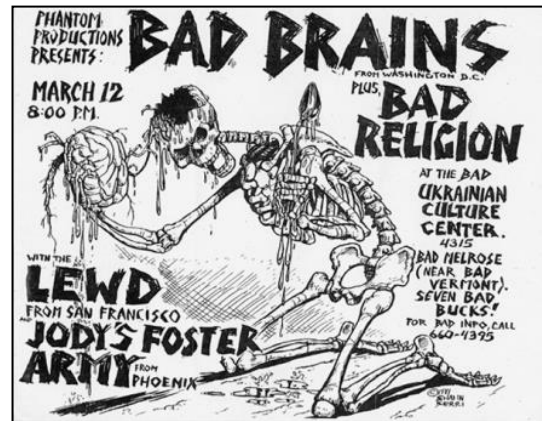


Fig. 21. Punk flyer. S. Kerri, 1981

As individuals we connect with a variety of stories in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. The meanings I derive from the decades-old stories of punk, Jacob Two-Two, and Andrew Henry, to a centuries-old tales like *Jack the Giant Killer* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the purportedly thousand or more year-old stories found in the Bible, are based in what Rosenblatt (1995) would recognize as the dynamic transactional experiences I have had with each. My aesthetic and efferent interpretations draw on and foster meanings generated by the storyworld construct (Herman, 2004) I draw upon to understand the world around me. For me, the common aesthetic found in these stories is in part, simply evidence of my own tastes. Still, my taste in literature and in music and have taken me down cultural pathways to knowing that all point to a particular desire on my part to be given the chance to learn and to understand in imaginative ways, to make my own meaning rather than have it handed down to me, and to rejoice in the uncertainty of any ultimate meaning to our shared reality. These *sketches* of reality I

am so drawn to characterize the way in which I see the world and my place in it. I shy away from the definite and the concrete in favor of ambiguity, laughter, and irreverence because I do not believe anything is concrete, least of all our understanding of self.

Liminality

The concept of liminality is one I find intriguing and see well represented throughout my textual-lineage. As noted earlier, the word liminality draws on the concept of *thresholds* and denotes a state of ambiguity or confusion. Joseph Campbell's (1949) discussion of the heroic journey features two stages in which the hero crosses thresholds. The first threshold marks the hero's passage into "regions of the unknown" (p. 79). The second threshold marks the hero's return to ordinary life, wherein the challenge of this second passage lies in retaining the wisdom gained from his or her adventure. Adventures into the unknown occur on a "road of trials" upon which a variety of encounters and occurrences determine understanding gained by the individual hero (p. 97). But bringing this understanding to bear in one's ordinary life is difficult. So different is the landscape of adventure from that of day to day life that the return to reality is often faced with as much apprehension as the initial call to adventure (p. 193).

The space between the first threshold and second is a liminal space in which the hero navigates an unfamiliar realm. I think of Jacob Two-Two's flight from the corner store and into imaginative realm of Slimer's Island, Andrew Henry's implausible meadow village, the Enterprise's unfathomably bold mission to "go where no one has gone before", the barbarian-like cry of punk, Jack's unlikely capacity as a carefree slayer of giants, and Zarathustra's mountain hermitage in the company of an eagle and a snake. In all cases, the hero crosses a threshold that divides common experience (family life, Earthly concerns, mainstream culture, normal occupations, and society) and experiences that lie beyond our common understanding. Our ability to understand these liminal experiences requires imaginative participation. It is in these liminal spaces, upon these landscapes of adventure, that the previous identity of each hero is challenged

and begins to transform. It is in this state of change that the character's identity becomes unfixed and takes on a liminal quality. We watch and marvel at the character development of Jacob Two-Two as he transitions from a scared little boy to one emboldened by "child power" (Richler, p. 84); we observe the incredible creative capacity of Andrew Henry gradually reveal itself in the meadow as his building begins to take on previously unrevealed meaning; we join the Enterprise crew as it restlessly explores the galaxy and continually learns more about itself; we are confronted by punk's social, political, and cultural assault and see in its expression pains of ostracization and dreams of unity; and we witness Zarathustra, a hermit, strive to inspire humanity while also trying to overcome his own human failings. In each of these heroic adventures, though to varying extents, the identity of the protagonist exists outside the range of "normal" experience. These states of being are the stuff of nightmares, fantasies, and science fiction. These ways of behaving lie, purposefully, outside of the realm of normative, socially acceptable, and socially comprehensible existence. I find myself relishing these imaginative, haphazard, and confrontational expressions of identity, am intrigued by my reaction to them, and determined to decipher how these stories and experiences relate to my own. Because the characters and experiences to which I find myself drawn challenge my understanding, I must take an imaginative leap in order to draw albeit uncertain conclusions as to the nature of identity, both theirs and my own.

There is a quote somewhere I cannot locate and must therefore paraphrase that aptly describes this search for self: Of all the mysteries we endeavor to solve, it is the mystery of ourselves that we solve last. Life for me is an educational process in which despite all that I learn about myself, through personal, social, and imagined experience, I am left forever wondering. Leaving the certainty of Christian dogma behind me at first left me grasping for Truth. I have since cultivated an agnostic mindset that has allowed me to come to terms with *not knowing*. Acknowledging the role Biblical stories play in shaping my understanding, while also looking to

a more variably sourced “scripture” for inspiration, fuels my curiosity. As J.R.R. Tolkien (2007) wrote: “Not all those who wander are lost” (p. 170). I am content in my uncertainty and in my continued search. My appreciation of story is no longer rooted in my desire to find Truth but in my belief that all stories bear some truth. The stories that entice me to jump, to dive into unexplored imaginary spaces, are the ones that speak to my own evolving personal sense of truth.

I resist the urge to pin my own identity down, for my own benefit or for the benefit of anyone else. I stopped calling myself a Christian because I no longer wanted to associate, nor be associated with ideas and practices I did not wholly endorse. But this refusal to be named was already and became even more so, a bit of a habit. As much as I was drawn to Star Trek, I never called myself nor wished to be perceived as a “Trekkie”. As immersed in and enamoured with punk rock as I became and continue to be, I have never called myself a “punk”. As interesting and agreeable I found the philosophy of anarchism to be, I never called myself an “anarchist” and don’t think I ever will. I don’t want to be labeled. I don’t want to be stereotyped. I want to exist outside these easy definitions, I think, because I have come to realize that none adequately describe who I am. This is where my fascination with liminality comes from. More than anything definitive or iconic, I identify with and believe in *the process* of becoming.

Empowerment

While some of my stories exhibit it more than others, the theme of empowerment is a prominent one. At various stages growing up, I found the stories of Jacob-Two-Two and Andrew Henry empowering. Both central characters are empowered through the actions they take and the experiences they encounter. Jacob-Two-Two, along with the help of a few inspiring characters, overcomes his fear of big people and of not living up to the expectations of the adult world. He does this through realizing his own unique strengths, cultivating an attitude of bravery, and recognizing that, in many respects, big people are not all that different than kids. Andrew Henry’s empowerment begins with his decision to leave home to build a life for himself in the meadow. In

doing so, he encourages and empowers others to do the same. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* presents a vision of an empowered and united human race that conducts interplanetary missions to engage alien species in collaborative learning experiences that are free from the forceful imposition of beliefs and values. Punk culture demonstrated for me a present day process of empowerment that rejects dominant narratives and asserts itself politically, socially, and culturally. Where that self-empowerment will lead captivates my imagination. I knew that Jack the Giant Killer was an empowered character. His transition from farm work to toppling giants is startlingly abrupt and his manner suggests an impressive level of confidence, cleverness, and capability to which I felt compelled to aspire. Lastly, Zarathustra's message of the Overman, aimed at pulling humanity out of its small-mindedness, highlighted the dangers and limitations of power. He strives, as he encourages others to strive, towards an independence of mind and a level of creativity we would associate with the most impressive and successful individuals among us. In many ways, the idea that such capacity for greatness could be nurtured through deliberate self-actualization became, as evidenced through Hitler's appropriation of Nietzsche's message, and sentiments of racial superiority, nationalism, and so on that would plague the 20th century, a modernist dream that spelled nightmares for many. However, when we examine Nietzsche's meaning free from the shackles of our own prejudices we might see that his vision of empowerment meant not the vilification of others at the expense of one's own glorified ego, but precisely the opposite. The ego is exactly that which needs to be overcome. The empowered individual is one who can see clearly that individuals either create their own reality or allow others to create it for them. The true benefit of this realization is not so that we might foist our visions of reality upon others, but so that, through greater self-awareness, we might work towards a life of self-determined fulfillment.

Through my exposure to these narratives of empowerment, I have been inspired to gain a greater understanding of myself and the world around me. My ideas of what it means to be

empowered are shaped by these stories. For me, power is something that resides within us all. We all have unique strengths, abilities, interests, and perspectives. To fixate too strongly on the ways in which we are different or to try to cover up or eradicate this difference, can have a socially-isolating effect. To deny difference and attempt to conform to what we perceive to be socially acceptable ways of being, or worse, to try to define such things for others, we lose sight with our unique perspective and the *power* we possess that might benefit and enrich the lives of others. To empower means to increase the strength of an individual or a community. We empower one another by giving each other permission to express and explore our individuality and helping one another find ways to use our personal strengths in socially beneficial ways. Empowered individuals are aware of their creative potential and able to consciously construct and embody an identity that brings meaning to their lives and to the lives of those around them. When we nurture the skills and ideas of the individual, allow everyone the space and freedom to develop their personal strengths and articulate their unique perspectives, we have the potential to empower a whole community.

Creativity

Themes of creativity run through my textual-lineage. I am drawn to creative types, from individuals in the world around me to characters in stories. Creativity in others inspires me to uncover my own creative potential. Creativity plays a role in each of the stories I have discussed, but it is most prominent in the stories of Andrew Henry, *Star Trek*, punk, and Zarathustra. In each of these stories, the ways in which conflict is resolved hinges on the creative capacity of the protagonists. In each case, creativity is more than an individual pursuit. The creativity and creative acts of the protagonists always have considerable social implications.

Andrew Henry is clearly a creative type. His creativity is stifled however in his family home. Perhaps his greatest creative achievement lies in his decision to leave home and move to the meadow. The meadow provides fresh ground for new ideas and new ways of living he and

several other children soon enact. Andrew Henry's creativity not only allows him to resolve the conflict he faced at home but enables both he and the town's other exiled children a means by which to build a community of their own.

The crew of the Enterprise is repeatedly faced with new situations and alien races, near disasters and dangerous encounters. The crew, each of whom possess unique temperaments and abilities, is compelled to work together in order to survive and to thrive. The newness of each situation they face demands ingenuity. Their unfailing success is a testament not only to clever writing that ensures no conflict is too big to solve in the last five minutes of the program, but to their collective creative capacity and willingness to work together.

More than a style of music and dress, punk is a creative movement borne out of the desire to tear down the old and build something new. While some may argue that the creativity of punk has dwindled since its inception into the cultural consciousness, punk music and culture continue to thrive across the globe. What is recognized as punk depends on who is passing judgement. In many ways, the limits of punk simply reflect the imaginative limits of those who make it their business to criticize some expressions for being un-punk and others for being not punk enough. Regardless of such petty arguments, punk culture has accomplished a great deal over the past forty or so years. From crafting a signature sound and style and repeatedly challenging the public's, and its own communities' understanding, of what passes as punk, to establishing clubs, touring networks, magazines, and independent record labels, many of which continue to flourish, punk's creativity has influenced a whole generation of musicians and music fans of all genres who now take for granted the fact that music can and should thrive without the benefit of large record labels, lucrative contracts, and luxurious rock star lifestyles. Punk grew out of a creative impulse to change the way music was created and consumed that remains as strong as ever.

Zarathustra's message of the Overman is rooted in a desire to see humanity freed from its dependence on supernatural, political, social, and cultural authorities that weaken and restrict individual creativity. Zarathustra explains that belief in a creative god, which could refer to anything or anyone to whom humans defer, inhibits creativity. While this could certainly be read as a admonition against belief in a higher power, I understand it as a warning to those who would forgo all independence of mind to submit to a will outside of their own, placing faith blindly in invisible gods and intermediary institutions, whose will they ultimately represent. Zarathustra's call to take up the creative powers, with which we are endowed, is aimed at bettering the individual. Nietzsche's notions of the natural inequality of peoples and his admonishment of democracy aside, there lies in his philosophy hope for humanity as a whole, or at least those who can manage to pull themselves out of their malaise and stubborn mediocrity. While his attitude towards the masses wavers between contempt and love, his search for fellow seekers, those who, like himself, are dedicated to personal evolution, lands him in the role of a teacher. His teachings, which make up the book, lambast the herd mentality of humanity and the desire to escape the sort of struggle that comes along with being an individual. Zarathustra commends those who struggle to create and take responsibility for their own reality.

I am a creative individual who believes that creativity is not a gift granted to some and denied others, but a right and a responsibility of all individuals interested contributing to the communities in which they live. Our talents and interests are different, but there is a place for all who wish to bring the best of what they have to the table in order to create a better world.

Conclusion: Bringing Back the Boon

Having reflected on several lessons I have learned from my text-rich life, I am beginning to grasp how little I have managed to untangle myself from the cultural threads that have wrapped themselves around me. The story told here is limited out of necessity. I cannot practically convey the myriad of entangled memories and cultural influences that shaped my understanding in a way

that would be completely satisfying. Still, having gained insights on my perspective I had not fully appreciated before, I have benefited from this exercise. As I trace my textual lineage and unravel my story-rich past, the meaning I make of these particular narrative threads give me fresh insights into the person and the professional I am in the process of becoming. While I might otherwise be tempted to allow the meaning of it all to float along unarticulated in the ether, as a student and educator, I must ask myself what this all means and reflect on how these stories have influenced my practice. I must cross back over to reality as best I can and put my new understanding to good use.

First, I have learned that my story is a distinct construct, a “storyworld” (Herman, 2004) which, however relatable for others, is most useful and appropriate for me. I chose to probe my understanding in a way I found most comprehensible and in the process confirmed for myself Pinar’s (1994) assertion that “the self is fictive” (p. 209). Having told this version of my story, I have started to see alternate tellings. For example, I am curious to see how my narrative would unfold if I consulted those who know me. However revealing that would have been, I chose to limit my examination to my relationship with texts rather than people because the meaning I make of these relationships alone is enough of a curiosity to warrant its own examination. I draw first and foremost on my personal understanding of who I am. I do this out of necessity because my personal understanding is rooted in an intimate knowledge only I have: knowledge about the life I have lead, about the way I think and feel, how I view myself, and who I desire to become. My interpretations reveal *my* sense of self, which may well contradict or surprise those who know me. But this is my story, and for now, I must address the implications of my unavoidably and *necessarily* fictive self.

Secondly, I am more aware of my own tastes. The practicality of this lies in understanding the privileges I have as a teacher-librarian and not abusing that privilege. In my role as a teacher-librarian I am tasked with purchasing suitable material for my school libraries.

Though I am always drawn to texts that I find aesthetically pleasing, it is my job to consider the tastes and ultimately the needs of the students and teachers who depend on me as curator to satisfy their palates as well. This might seem obvious, but without fully appreciating the very personal nature of my own tastes, I might mistake the things I find distasteful as having lesser value than that which I myself prefer. There are thousands of books in any one of my libraries that I find to be ugly, boring, irritating, or offensive. As the one tasked with making the decisions about what is and is not appropriate for an elementary school library, I need to ensure that my students have sufficient choice from the material I have selected for them and that what I have selected does not unnecessarily or unjustly limit their choice. This requires that I be in tune with what my patrons like now and what they might be inclined to choose next. In other words, I need to have a sense of their textual-lineage and their current interests. In order to do this I need to have regular conversations with them. I need to ask them about what they are reading and find way to help them articulate what they like and dislike about it. My aesthetic considerations have to account for a wide range of possible tastes, which I can only appreciate if I know students and understand what they are hoping to find.

Third, I have come to see that my fascination with liminality has a lot to do with my perspectives as an outsider both historically and in my current professional capacity as well. I talk about feeling like an outsider because of my religious affiliations and the uncertainty and social trepidation I faced entering new schools. I connected with stories whose characters were often on the outside in one way or another because it helped me come to terms with not only how I was feeling but also how I might begin to carve a space for myself there on the outside. Perhaps it was pride, or some other defense mechanism that made me not crave inclusion so much as to stand confidently apart from the crowd. My fascination with punk, which celebrated and defined itself by its outsider status, certainly provided ample role models and justification for this feeling of mine. For me, being an outsider was never been about driving a stake between myself and others.

I crave connection with others, but not at the expense of my own autonomy. I mentioned in my story that, despite never fancying myself a leader or finding leadership particularly appealing, part of me wants to lead. My career decision to become an educator certainly reflects this desire. However, there are many kinds of leadership. I feel it is important to qualify how exactly I envision myself leading.

My vision of leadership began to take shape when I articulated for myself what it was I hoped to teach, an insight I shared towards the end of my autoethnographic narrative. I deemed this hard wrought understanding so important that I scribbled it down in my journal. It was, once again, this: “You are a doorway. You are another passage way. Multiple directions. Centre me. Centre me” (Personal Journal 2002). What I meant by this had to do with the role I saw myself playing as an educator. I have never wished to fill the minds of students with a particular sort of knowledge or to treat them as blank slates under false the impression that I hold knowledge from which *all* of them will benefit. Certainly there are ways of behaving and treating one another that I hope to reinforce by the example I set in my dealings with them. There are of course basic facts pertaining to life as a human being that are worth knowing and that in many cases need to be taught. This is not knowledge to which I refer. As I mentioned at the outset of this thesis, I am most interested in the unique tastes, interests, and skills of the individual, vital aspects and inspirations that I see being wasted and often ignored by our current education system. I want to expose students I teach to the innumerable doorways and passageways of learning, understanding, and meaning making around them to choose from. Rather than impose upon students a singular vision of education, I want to enable them to discover their own path.

As a teacher-librarian, without my own class, my influence on students is in some ways limited. Yet on the other hand, as the adult they see only occasionally, I remain a bit of a novelty. In this way, my role as an educator has a liminal quality to it. Though I have plenty of documents and established practices to guide me, I am largely free from the impositions of a *prescribed*

curriculum. My interactions with students take place outside of the classroom and are largely informal. Most of our encounters take place between book shelves and across the circulation desk where we talk about stories and sources of information that, more often than not, have little to do with what they are learning in their classroom. Our encounters are usually mediated by the books they are reading. In an elementary school library, most visits are *extra-curricular* in that, for the most part, students are there to choose books for their own educational purposes. Set amidst an environment of learning expectations and pre-scripted studies, the library is a liminal place in which the only expectation is that students find a book they find personally worthwhile. Students come to find and to be filled with stories and information that hold particular interest for them. The books they choose are like doorways and passageways that reveal new experiences and foster new understanding. My role is not like that of a classroom teacher. While I am expected to teach students how to locate information, handle books properly, and be responsible patrons, the educational relationship I have with students is in some ways more personal in that it is based on their individual tastes, interests, and desired skill set. I have the opportunity to help students discover the textual pathways that may become core components of their textual-lineage and ultimately the meaning they make of themselves and the world around them.

All of the characters I identify with in my textual-lineage have leadership qualities that set them apart and make them symbols of empowerment and creativity. Narrative is a creative space in which ideas and experiences can be explored imaginatively. Libraries are empowering places that enable readers to travel afar, voyage to the depths of the mind, to the centre of the heart, and to the far reaches of the imagination. Textual transactions involve any number of dialogues to amuse, challenge, and inspire readers. My goal as a teacher-librarian is through storytelling and one-on-one conversations, to first, demonstrate to students the ways in which story has empowered and made me a more flexible and creative thinker and, second, help them find out what it is what excites and inspires them. In doing so, I hope to help them create meaning

through a very personal, yet culturally enriched process based in the exploration and sharing of stories. Stories create opportunities to bring us together and to make us stronger in our communities and the more personally invested in these stories the members of a community are, the more connected the community they will be.

As I mentioned, there are a few texts outside of the textual-lineage I have explored in this paper that I consult from time to time and that inform my activities as a teacher-librarian. Mentioned at the onset, *Information Power*, *Empowering Learners*, and *Achieving Information Literacy* are all standard references for those in my profession. More recent efforts, such as the “Points of Inquiry” document put forward by BC Teacher-Librarian’s Association (BCTLA) continue to reflect the desire on the part of teacher-librarian’s to redefine their role for the 21st century. The document, authored by the BCTLA’s Information Literacy Task Force (2011), emphasizes the importance of not only critical thinking and skilled information retrieval but also, of students being able to construct and answer *their own* questions. This focus on the student and his or her own curiosity is a good sign and one that seems to reflect, at least in part, an attitude towards learning espoused by the BC Ministry of Education.

Going back as far as 1996, The BC Ministry of Education’s “Information Technology” IRP, which outlines the importance of students’ information literacy skills and their facility with technology, demonstrates an encouraging attitude towards the nature of learning. It is worth noting that the “Information Technology” document for K-7 has been removed as an official IRP, even though students are still expected to “gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes described in this document” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1996). But what I find encouraging from this now nearly two decades old document are the principals of learning upon which it draws are stated as follows,

- Learning requires the active participation of the student.

- People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates.
- Learning is both an individual and a group process (p. 1).

While I see here acknowledgment of that which my thesis aims to emphasize, I do not yet see these principles as fundamental to the way we approach education in this province. Certainly the Ministry's (2012) promotion of "personalized learning" that has come in advance of introducing a completely revamped curriculum would suggest a sea change, but the absence of a satisfyingly clear definition of what is meant by this term has left the public and the professionals ultimately tasked with this new mandate, unclear about the government's intentions. While a statement like "Imagine an education system that actively involves learners in designing their own learning experiences that integrates their interests and passions" (2012, p. 8) is a promising indicator; the emphasis on *design*, despite the olive branch of *involvement* extended to learners, suggests a continued focus on a curriculum that is planned and pre-scripted, as opposed to one that is lived and reflected upon. While a greater importance might be placed on the unique "interests and passions" of students, the drive to achieve "high standards" of learning, which have all been pre-established by an "education *system*" (italics mine) does seem to subvert this uniqueness and preclude the spontaneity, unpredictability, and diversity of experience inherent in the lived curriculum (p. 8). The lived curriculum cannot be systematized, which is perhaps why the Ministry's promotion of personalized learning seems incongruous with the maintenance of prescribed learning. The lived curriculum is made up of individual stories that are not prescribed but in the process of being written. Taking the time to look back on what has been lived and learned through experience, and allowing that knowledge to guide further exploration, rather than focusing solely on arbitrarily defined standards of excellence conceived by panels of experts, might prove to be more worthwhile than a mere recreational diversion.

Storytelling is a useful tool for personal exploration that has facilitated my understanding of self as it has evolved and now informs my practice. The understanding I have gained from this

exercise has reaffirmed my suspicion that the lived curriculum holds as much if not far more value for students and teachers than that which is planned and delivered in classrooms around the province each day. The educational journey I have undertaken since childhood that has held most significance for me both personally and professionally has been that which I undertook under my own direction. In relaying this educational journey, it is my hope that I will have adequately demonstrated the value of the curriculum I lived and the textual lineage I traversed, not only in the lessons I have learned and described, but in the ways you, the reader has found yourself either relating to my experiences or thinking back on the experiences and textual influences that have educated you. If I have accomplished this at all, it is testament to the power of narrative and the imaginative spaces created by stories that allow two or more individuals with diverse perspective an experiences the chance to convene and communicate understandings about world in which they live. The understanding we draw from texts and personal experience and the ways we convey these experiences to one another are the cultural threads that weave us together and connect us to the larger cultural narratives that clothe all of humanity. Understanding our connection to this larger fabric and helping student discover the ways in which they too are connected, by examining the filaments of personal experience not only reinforces that connection but allows us to see, as objectively as we might hope to, the meaning of our own interests, investments, and desires. As Freire suggests, once we demystify our contextual reality it is revealed that embedded in the personal frameworks of understanding we each have in us lies a challenge that must be met (2009, p. 152). The challenge of my “storyworld” (Herman, 2004) understanding is to actively foster my individuality and creativity and to empower my students to do the same. In doing so, they might come to a greater appreciation and understanding of the diversity of perspectives and meaning that exists in the world in which we live. The pursuit of such knowledge, I believe, will make us more tolerant, empathetic, and intelligent human beings capable of far more than we can currently fathom.

Autoethnography is the study of individuals and the cultures in which they are situated. The cultures in which we find ourselves immersed educate us in ways of being, believing, and behaving. Our individual experiences and cultural investments inform the textual lineages and storyworld understandings that make each of us unique. As an educator, my experiences, textual lineage, and storyworld understanding intersects with those of my students and colleagues. Each of us arrives from directions and upon pathways particular to our own personal experiences and interests. The purpose of my autoethnographic research has been to understand and take responsibility for the knowledge that informs my professional identity. Having examined the implications of my knowledge, I now see how vital it is to honour the unique life and cultural experiences of the students I encounter. By modelling curiosity and an open-minded attitude towards experiences *outside* my own, I hope foster in students an appreciation for the cultural diversity and multitude of narrative pathways traversed by those around them. In addition to this awareness of this difference, I hope to foster greater self-awareness, by encouraging students to reflect on *their own* experiences, tastes, and interests. These lived curriculums provide a wealth of knowledge. If as educators we are diligent in our efforts to engage students in their lived curriculums, they might find themselves empowered with knowledge that is relevant to their daily lives and the lives of those around them. This knowledge is the material with which we in our school communities might create more widely representative school cultures that address the educational needs and interests of our students. Our stories educate us, help us relate, and come together to create joint narratives that bring together our diverse experiences and understandings. Stories feed the culture that grows between us and, in turn, are what enable us to grow.

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Appendix A Participant consent form



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**Department of Curriculum
and Instruction**

Participant Consent Form

Textual Lineage: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Storied Self

You are invited to participate in a study entitled **Textual Lineage: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Storied Self** that is being conducted by Travis Richey.

Travis Richey is a Graduate student in the department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by phone at 1-250-415-2933.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to explore the ways in which life history and cultural influences, specifically, the significant texts of our lives, contribute to the formation of identity. To determine this, I will examine the ways in which I have been educated through personal experience and textual encounters and explore how this constitutes a personal curriculum, has contributed to my identity, and influenced my practice as an educator and life-long learner.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because as the education system grapples with questions of how to become more responsive to the needs of students, educators must themselves engage in and model innovative approaches learning.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you may be an identifiable individual in the research report.

What is involved

Your participation will include reviewing all sections of the report that make reference to you. You have the right to refuse the inclusion of any such reference that causes you discomfort or embarrassment.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including discomfort or embarrassment.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include that in gaining a greater understanding of the ways in which texts and experiences shape the identity and practices of an individual educator, others may, in examining the confluence of their own life experiences and connection to cultural artifacts, come to a better understanding of who they are and who they are becoming as educators.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher may have a relationship to you as son, brother, husband, or friend. To prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, be assured that this consent form gives you the right to refuse the inclusion of any data that identifies you as an individual and gives you cause for discomfort and/or embarrassment.

Anonymity

All efforts will be made to use pseudonyms where possible. In the event that as a friend or family member you are an identifiable participant, you will be asked to review the applicable sections of the research report and grant or withdraw your consent.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing information that identifies you personally in password protected files on Travis Richey's personal computer.

Dissemination of Results

The results of this study will be shared with others in the form of a Master's thesis and thesis defense. Results will also be shared with all other participants in this study may also be shared via the Internet, published article.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be kept in password protected files on the researcher's personal computer. He may decide to make use of it at a later date at which point your consent or refusal of consent to *Future use of data* (see below) will apply. Data will be kept for five years and destroyed by deleting the hard drive.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the researcher's supervisor James Nahachewsky who can be reached at 250-721-7780 and committee member Kathy Sanford who can be reached at 250-721-7804.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
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PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT only if you consent:

I consent to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

I consent to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

Future Use of Data *PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT:*

I consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research:
_____ (Participant to provide initials)

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.