We Always Knew You Loved Us:
A Mother's Rite of Passage From Parenting Children to Parenting Adult Children

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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Abstract

The purpose of this autobiographical inquiry is to make sense of the complicated and demanding societal expectations of mothers. Contemporary Western society has constructed an ideology of the *perfect mother* that has contributed to almost epidemic proportions of *maternal guilt*. The family therapy movement, at its peak in the 1970s and 1980s, fueled the flames of this guilt with its notion of the emotional fragility of children, the idea that consequences of childhood experiences would manifest in adult lives, and the apparent culpability of mothers for all of their child's transgressions. In my quest to make sense of these ideas I chose to consult with the two people I felt to be experts on the subject of mothering: my adult children. I invited my *adult children* to embark on what I called a *healing journey* and through a series of audiotaped conversations over a 10 day period we discussed, in depth, my mothering and their childhood. The intent of these conversations was to explore how such candid dialogue could heal the past, allow closure, and provide a rite of passage to a family-defined role of mother of adults. This thesis recounts my journey through motherhood, the healing journey, and my effort to transform the discourse of guilt that so dominated my mothering. It also examines the myth of the perfect mother through the exploration of some of the patriarchal, societal, and socioeconomic influences on the construct of mother throughout history. Finally, it questions the cause-and-effect thinking that resigns children to the role of passive victims and it challenges the idealization of maternal love. Each one of these ideas serves to disrupt the discourse of maternal guilt and offers mothers who are driven by perfection and burdened by guilt the possibility of rewriting their own motherhood story.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

At the time I conceived of my thesis topic my children were no longer children, they were neophyte adults. I too was a novice; a novice mother of adults. During my years of active day-to-day mothering I had embraced, without question, the popular and guilt-inducing maternal discourse of my contemporaries. I had been completely taken in by what Paula Caplan (1990) refers to as *the myth of the perfect mother*. Although I had intellectually grasped the ideology of proficiency-focused postmodern therapeutic models by the time my children reached adulthood, I still had one foot in the door of deficiency-focused family systems therapy. As a result I was held hostage by cause-and-effect thinking that supposed that negative childhood experiences would manifest in the lives of adults. I was also acutely aware that mother was the primary target of blame for this occurrence. Thus I assumed it was an inescapable reality that my children's adulthood would be adversely affected by unavoidable negative childhood experiences mainly perpetrated by me. It was this way of thinking that inspired the idea to embark on a healing journey that would allow the opportunity for my adult children to vent, critique, criticize, and perhaps praise my mothering. I had the idea that this journey may heal the past, allow closure, and provide a rite of passage to a family defined role of mother of adults.

This thesis documents my exploration of these ideas that so captivated me and in some ways debilitated my mothering. I storied and restoried myself as mother throughout the writing process. My research on, and writing of, the history of motherhood revealed the patriarchal, societal, and socioeconomic maternal constructs that produced the societal and personal expectations under which I, and other mothers like me, labored. My

exploration of maternal history also provided a perspective on motherhood I was not privy to while in the throes of mothering. The intimate and candid discussions with my adult children, my reactions to their feedback, the effects of listening to and re-listening to the tapes of our conversations, and our follow-up conversations had a profound influence on my sense of myself as a mother.

What began as a very intentional and specific healing journey became so much more. I quickly discovered that the idea of healing was completely borne out of the dominant societal messages that had infiltrated my perception of the maternal role. Woven within my writing is my struggle to let go of these dominant messages in order to accept Dustin and Djuna's feedback and soften into a different understanding of children and motherhood. I agree wholeheartedly with Barbara Kamler's (2001) distinction between writing as a way of uncovering the authentic voice, "a neutral vehicle for making and expressing preexistent meaning and writing" and writing as a "site of struggle where subjectivity and meaning are produced" (p. 38). As I wrote my way through the thesis the meanings I made about motherhood and my sense of myself as mother evolved and changed. I evolved and changed. The healing journey began with the conception of the thesis idea and continues to this day but it has become more about disengaging from culturally-induced guilt and dismantling the myth of the perfect mother than healing my relationship with my adult children.

My story is not separate from other mothers' stories. Although it is particular to me it exists within and has been shaped by the culture of motherhood. In becoming aware of the particular forces that shaped my motherhood, I have become aware of the complexities of the culture of motherhood. While I do not pretend to speak for all

mothers I am confident in stating that maternal guilt and the quest for perfection is both insidious and ubiquitous. One of my aims in writing this thesis is to evoke a response from readers whether they see themselves in my accounts, see the lives of people they know, or the lives of people they are as yet unfamiliar with (Ellis, 1999). In addition, I hope that my movement through the process, documented as honestly as I am capable of, offers mothers who are driven by perfection and burdened by guilt the possibility of rewriting their own motherhood story.

Conception

This is my story. This journey, this process, this thing called "a thesis" is about me and I make this claim with strength and conviction. I would not have guessed I could be so bold when I enrolled in the Curriculum Studies graduate program. As I had taken research and statistics courses a few months before I entered this program, both qualitative and quantitative research were fresh in my mind. Yet I had no idea that autobiographical research was acceptable in an academic setting. Once introduced to the idea I struggled with the question of why people would engage in this type of research. In what way would a first-person story serve anyone but the researcher? Would not an autobiographical thesis be just another venue for self-growth? Why would it be seen as valid in an academic world? During the period of time that I ruminated on these questions, I was simultaneously engaged in a method of study that would radically change my concept of learning. That change is what led me to state so boldly that my thesis is personal, and it is that personal perspective that will make it useful to others.

I was caught off guard when the instruction for the first curriculum studies course was to "read what stirs you." I had managed to graduate from high school, complete a college certificate, and obtain an undergraduate degree without any suggestion that I could read what stirred me. Even classes that demanded critical thinking included specific textbooks and articles as required reading. It seemed, as well, that the entire curriculum studies class was thrown into shock with our second instruction; we were to base our assignments on a series of unedited writings. The only instructions given were Natalie Goldberg's (1986) rules for writing. What anarchy! Hands were raised, questions were asked. How are you marking us? How many pages do you want? What are you looking

for? No definitive answer was offered and suddenly all academic foundations were pulled out from under us. What happened to the familiar comfort of digesting and regurgitating information? How could this be academic learning at a graduate level?

At a pivotal moment in my struggle for answers I encountered an article by Cynthia Chambers (1996) in which she wrote with chilling honesty about an unquestionably personal and tragic childhood memory. I was captivated by her story and fascinated by its place in academic writing. However, the academic value of autobiographical writing only became clear to me when I read that it enables us "to see our lives [as] part of something much larger than our private 'selves,' to connect in a deep way with communities and histories" (Chambers, 1996, p. 3). This article spoke to me of the connection between *my* story and *our* stories and helped deepen and enrich my writing experience.

Something that I did not anticipate when I began this writing and reading experience was the amount of turmoil and unease it would create within me. Quite unexpectedly I had the opportunity to read whatever I wanted. All the books on therapy that I had wanted to read during my undergraduate degree were no longer on hold until I finished my academic work. Just as unexpectedly, the works of writers and therapists that I had thought I was so keen to read were not as stirring as I had anticipated. I had been invited to participate in a literary feast. I could fill my plate with whatever caught my fancy and it was overflowing. For the first time in my academic life I had to completely direct my own learning. What came to mind was a book with the befitting title of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School and Get a Real Life and Education* (Llewellyn, 1997). In this book the author speaks of children as natural learners and uses

the example of a toddler learning to walk or talk. Llewellyn makes the point that parents do not need to encourage their toddlers to practice walking or talking because there is an innate drive within human beings to learn. Unfortunately, our propensity for learning is easily stilted by the confines of the structure of the education system. We learn quickly to follow the lead rather than take the lead in our own learning. And now I felt like that tiny child learning to walk, except that I had to find anew the excitement, the drive, and the clear unfettered personal thirst to learn.

Stimulated by the instructions to practice unedited writings and spurred on by the words of Chambers (1996), I began to write about myself. Not the kind of journal writing that I had become used to and frustrated with during my undergraduate degree. I was writing about life. My life. At first I felt distanced from the writing. I struggled with who the reader was when I wrote. I struggled with the distance I felt with the event I was writing about. And then, almost suddenly, but not quite, I began to perceive life a little differently. I found myself thinking about how I would write about an experience when I was in that experience. This awareness caused me to savor the experience in a powerful way. I became mindful. I had a faint glimpse of writing my living, or was it living my writing?

At the time of this first semester of graduate studies my personal life was extremely intense. I had quit my formal job as a parent/teen mediator. I was a foster parent for an adolescent, who challenged every maternal bone in my body. I had a 21-year-old friend who was dying of a childhood illness and I had been invited to be part of a small group of friends to help ease her through this most mysterious transformation. She was expected to die in September but by pure will and spunk she carried her body into the

new year. I was living with death on a daily basis. I was acutely aware of the fact that this young woman was close in age to my own children and this awareness strengthened my relationship with them. Dustin, my youngest child, moved out of our home during the week I received the call about my friend's imminent death. I was startled by his sudden decision to move and saddened that I would not be able to be involved, as I would be at the hospital most of that week. At the same time my 21-year-old daughter, Djuna, who had been living on her own for 2 ½ years and working up to 14 hours a day, was back in the world of reasonable work and play. She was now available for more social interaction and frequently called to invite me to spend time with her. All these life events enhanced and deepened my writing.

This time of upheaval in my personal life left me torn between spending time on the computer and spending time with my adult children. At the same time my preoccupation with so many transformations heightened my awareness of the fragility of life and the importance of family. As a result, being with my children always won. But I struggled with that choice. I questioned my commitment to academia and I questioned my ability to be focused and self-directed. I chastised myself and I wrote furiously about this challenge. In one of the writings I handed in for course evaluation I made the statement that it was more important for me to be in relationship with the world than it was to complete a master's degree. It was the written response from my advisor Antoinette Oberg that opened a space for me to view my dilemma in a different light. In fact, it was her written response that helped lead my thesis in an entirely new direction. She wrote, "How do such oppositions get set up? Can they be transformed into something else?" It began to dawn on me that I did not have to choose. My children are my gurus. They

challenge my heart, my soul, and my spirit. Motherhood has a tendency to grow and shape a woman in ways that few other experiences in life do and I have been grown and shaped. So why should I view my life work and my school work as separate, especially when what I want to do when I complete my degree is to continue my therapeutic work with families?

The plan was conceived. I would include my children in my research. Conception happened in a flash but a lengthy period of gestation and plenty of labor pains preceded the birth of the final thesis idea.

Gestation

Over the course of my first semester I became enthralled with the postmodern perspective on research. I had found in a university setting what I had known for myself for many years. Objective, empirical research was being called into question. Academics were beginning to query whether the researcher could ever be separated from the outcome of the research, no matter how pristine the project. At the same time narrative and autobiographical research were gaining credibility. In fact, according to Doll (1998), "narrative with its concern for human intention--instead of cold and heartless truth--reaches into the soul of our very being and draws forth our ability to learn from personal experience, to plan, to project, to act, to assess" (p. 3). Perhaps if I had known that autobiographical inquiry was an acceptable form of research at a graduate level, my thesis topic might have unfolded before I began my course work. Yet I doubt it. I think that the richness of my topic was born out of an intense writing, living, reading, living, writing, and reflecting process. But the topic has lived within me since I became a mother and simultaneously became enthralled with the powerful prevailing mothering messages of the 1970s.

The 1970s were overwhelmingly intense years as I settled into motherhood, left my husband, and became a single mother of two babies. By the early 1980s I had taken up the idea that residual consequences of childhood experiences can manifest in the lives of adults. This perception had evolved from almost every aspect of my personal, professional, and academic life and has become the stimulus for my thesis. In my personal life I was drawn to participate in therapeutic work as the result of the stresses of single parenthood and the pain of divorce. My sister, who is my only sibling, joined me in

this therapeutic journey. Together she and I began to unravel the unresolved issues of our childhood. As we coconstructed our past we were amazed at the different meanings we had made of similar experiences. We were equally amazed at how our memories had created quite discrepant stories about our childhood and our relationship with our parents. Upon reflection I am reminded of a line from the movie *Great Expectations* (Linson & Cuaron, 1998). The narrator, as he is about to embark upon the story of his life, says something to the effect of "I am not going to tell the story the way it happened. I am going to tell it the way I remember it." What my sister and I did have in common was the unfulfilled desire to have conversations with our parents about our childhood. We wanted to discuss past hurts, question confusing memories, and even challenge parental decisions and behaviors. We believed that this type of family discourse would have a powerful and positive impact on our adult lives. We also intuitively believed that such a dialogue would strengthen the family bond.

As I made my way through the murky terrain of my own personal healing I led a parallel life as mother of two children. Based on my own discovery of the impact of my childhood on my adult life, I became very sensitive to my job as a parent. I recognized on a deep level that I could not escape having an impact on my children's lives and that it was up to me to be the best parent that I could be in order to minimize negative repercussions. I chose to read books on parenting, take courses, and seek advice from those people whose opinions eventually became the motivation for my professional and academic choices. I became earnestly interested in effective and healthy communication and took every course that I could in relation to this topic. I attended college and obtained a Social Service Worker certificate and thus began a career centered on serving people.

Whether I worked on a crisis line, or with high-risk youth, or at a women's center, I witnessed what I perceived as the pain and repercussions of unresolved childhood issues. At the same time I was surrounded by friends--most of them single mothers--who like me were struggling to parent their children well. We made mistakes, felt guilty, had fun, made mistakes, questioned our abilities, felt guilty, and tried our best to demonstrate our love to our children.

Over time my academic and professional interests developed and I directed my attention to individual and family therapy. I studied therapeutic approaches through my own reading and through numerous courses with such well-known therapists as Augustus Napier, John Banmen, Stephen Gilligan, Michael White, and InSoo Kim Berg. I completed a degree in Child and Youth Care and received a certificate in Conflict Resolution from the Justice Institute of British Columbia. During the last 11 years I have been a youth and family counselor, and child care worker, a parent/teen mediator contracted to the Ministry for Children and Family Development; a foster parent to adolescent girls; and, most recently, a child protection social worker. This immersion in the lives of children, adolescents, and their parents has served as a constant reminder of the possible repercussions of the past on the present and has provided the fodder for what would become my thesis topic.

In my professional capacity I met many adolescents who suffered from the ramifications of their pasts unfolding in the present. For some children the hurts and the confusions from the past are as extreme as the death of a family member; or verbal, psychological, sexual, or physical abuse. For others, significant scars occurred through subtle slights and the meanings made out of experiences for which they were incapable of

questioning or seeking clarification. Adolescents live with the hurts of their childhood and are old enough to manifest these hurts through troublesome and dangerous behaviors. Many times I have sat with a mother and her adolescent child and witnessed the love between them and the hurt that the child acted out through troubling, risk-taking behavior. Often at a loss as to how to talk with each other about what had transpired in their past they kept a distance and disapproved of each other, thus exacerbating the distance and friction between them.

All of my personal therapeutic work had been based on the modernist therapies that prevailed during the 1970s, 1980s, and even today. These modernist approaches, such as the work of Virginia Satir, Fritz Perls, Alfred Adler, Carl Whitaker, and Carl Rogers, are strongly embedded in a problem-saturated, cause-and-effect way of thinking. Although I had studied the postmodern therapies and been keenly interested in them I had not been able to shake the compelling rationale behind modernist therapeutic models. Therefore, when I conceived of this research project I was still dedicated to the idea that parents are responsible for the emotional, educational, physical, and mental development of their children. I believed that they are responsible for the adults their children will become. I had been seduced by the popular therapeutic perspectives of the 1970s and 1980s and the influence of these ideas on the expectations of mothers during that era. Although I had had the seeds of other thinking planted within my consciousness I still struggled with letting go of blame and, therefore, causality.

The idea to include my children in my research occurred simultaneously with the idea of how this would be accomplished. Like the sperm and the egg uniting, they were born of each other. Through the writing, reading, and reflecting process came the idea to

offer Djuna and Dustin what my sister and I would love to have been offered by our parents many years ago. I would provide them with the opportunity to engage with me in honest, intimate conversations about their childhood. Specifically, I would invite them to focus on their childhood in relation to my role as their mother. We would take a healing journey together and I would write about the effect of this experience on both of them. This was the first form that my inquiry took. The first trimester. The fetus was formed but the heart was not fully developed. I was still locked into problem-saturated thinking and I was searching for cause-and-effect. Then I began to wonder how I could measure the outcome of the healing journey on my children. And what right had I to make them the focal point of inquiry? My intentions were honorable, if misguided.

As previously stated, this research topic came to fruition at a time that my life was filled with intensity. I was drowning in motherhood issues as a parent, foster parent, and surrogate parent to a dying young woman. And, at the same time, my youngest child was leaving home and the active daily mothering of my own children was ending. As I realized that my role of mother had irreversibly changed, my thinking about the thesis idea took another turn. I was at a pivotal moment in my life; a moment that all mothers experience, albeit in their own ways. Eventually, children grow up and leave home. The mother role is redefined. I began to be interested in this redefinition. What is my maternal role now that I am no longer responsible for the day-to-day care of my children? How do adult children and mothers cocreate this new role? How do I let go and how do I know I have done the best job I could? It was this form of questioning that moved my thesis from its previous primitive state to a more evolved form.

This subtle shift in thinking, this novel idea that I could write my thesis from my perspective, affected me in ways that I wasn't prepared for. I hadn't realized how thoroughly indoctrinated I had been by the idea that mothers are expected to be selflessly devoted to their children. Swigert (1998) asserts that "we cling to an image of mothers as born nurturers who do not want for themselves, only for their children" (p. 11) and I had unwittingly clung to that image. Upon reflection I can see that the struggle I had experienced in letting go of my children as the focus of my research paralleled my current experience of accepting my children's transition into adulthood. Placing myself, rather than my children, in the heart of the project was an emotional process. It was through this process that my thesis topic was truly born.

Birth

Finally! I had waited many months for this gift of birth. I had fretted over every detail of the anticipated event and I had nourished and coddled it through self-reflection, writing, reading, and reliving the experience of motherhood. Now I could move from anticipation to action. I knew, once born, this project would have a life of its own, full of surprises, ever changing, and growing. But, at last, I had a place to move forward from, a strong beginning, and a sense of who I was as the guardian of this project.

What I had actually given birth to was a profound knowing that it was permissible for me to place myself at the heart of this study of motherhood. I had stood before the mother police, bared my soul to the "they" who judge all mothers, and had discovered, no had decided, that my own voice and my own needs were as legitimate as the needs of my children. But this realization, this birth, did not come without a great deal of pain. My research idea had been conceived as an offering to my children, it was to be a gift to them. It was what I had wanted from my parents and it stemmed from a strong therapeutic ideology and a deeply felt commitment to the selfless ideology of motherhood. As a result, it was not an easy task to let go of my initial desire to give dominance to my children's voice over mine.

By the time this project was fully formed I had come to realize that it was born out of a transition that had captivated me, not my children. I was the one wrestling with my new maternal role as a mother of adult children. I was also the one who had embraced the therapeutic models that led to this idea of a healing journey. And I was the one who desired closure of my previous role of mother of dependent children. Dustin and Djuna were enthusiastic about participating, but I was the driving force behind the project. This

was *my* rite of passage and, therefore, it called out to be written in my voice. At the same time, my adult children were indispensable collaborators in my motherhood journey from their birth through to these adult years. It was with them that I hoped to find a completion of my mother of dependent children role and cocreate my new role of mother of adult children.

This project is not about collaborating on the truth of our memories. The truth is ever changing. Our memories are fluid. Nor is this project about obtaining definitive answers to specific questions. It is about taking the time to tell each other our stories and in doing so experiencing "the joy of discovering both great and tiny jewels of facts and feelings we hadn't known before" (Caplan, 1989, p. 12). I had created a story of myself based on external media-biased mothering expectations, driven by what Shari Thurer (1994), Jane Swigart (1998), and Paula Caplan (1990) refer to as *the myth of motherhood* or *the myth of the perfect mother*. I had assessed and judged my mothering many times over and my assessment changed depending on external events and my sense of myself at any given moment. What I had hoped to do with my children was to create another story about mothering. Not my story but our mothering story. Ourstory. We would not have an end product when we finished; we would have the beginning of a new story.

Like any new mother, once I had given birth to this research idea, I had a vision of how it would unfold. I had plans. I had strategies. I had a direction. But as psychologist D. W. Winnicott pointed out, "We are always relational, and from the beginning 'the baby holds the mother as much as the mother holds the baby'" (quoted in Jackson, 2001, p. 61). If this journey, this offering of my story to other mothers was to have value I

believed that I would need to plan it well, hold a vision of how I hoped it would turn out, and then step out of the way and allow it to unfold.

Who Cares?

The importance of relationship, parenting, and family is made very evident with just a casual perusal of *amazon.com*, one of the largest Internet booksellers in North America. I did a cursory search of their website and accessed 3,516 books on the topic of pregnancy, 11,152 books on parenting, 32,000 entries on families, 6,238 on mother, and another 1,078 books on family therapy. This search did not include videotapes, audiotapes, dvd's, or used books. The Victoria Chapters bookstore had 31 magazines specifically about pregnancy or parenting. There were too many magazines to count that were geared to a general female audience but which contained front page articles on the topic of motherhood. Victoria even has a radio station that broadcasts a child development college credit course every Saturday morning. We are inundated with family-related advice columns in newspapers, family-centered television sitcoms, and daytime talk shows exposing typical and atypical family subject matter. Recently, a main character on the popular American television show *Ally McBeal* was heard lamenting to her mother about her internal struggle between being a feminist and feeling incomplete without a husband and children. She had the belief that feeling incomplete without children meant that she was betraying her feminist ideals. Her mother responded with something to the effect of, "Family is everything. It is where we live and where we love." Such a rich resource of literature and media attention tells me that we who are blessed to live in a society affluent enough to afford the luxury of research, self-reflection, and analysis are not only interested but somewhat obsessed with the topic of family. Embedded in this cultural obsession with family is a disproportionate obsession with mothers.

We are all born to mothers and we all become members of families at the moment of birth. These are biological facts whether or not we ever get to know our biological mother or family. Who actually mothers us or what configuration of human beings constitutes the family who raises us are less subject to biological rules. How we view our mother and interpret our family experience is subjective. Society has strongly influenced North Americans to hold their families accountable and to scrutinize their mothers. However, no matter how we judge our mothers, or our upbringing, most of us will concur with the sentiment that Jim Taylor (1999) expressed at the time of his father's death: "It occurred to me, as I sat with him in the darkness, counting the seconds between spasms, that all that anyone really has, in the end, is relationships. Nothing else matters. Nothing else survives" (p. 164).

I agree with Taylor (1999) that all we have in the end is relationships. I honor our societal need to parent well and to heal the wounds of our own damaged childhood in order to preserve and protect family relationships. I think to some extent our obsession with family is healthy. It is what drives us to shelter our children from harm. It provides the momentum for government and non-government organizations dedicated to the well-being and protection of children and their families. The Ministry for Children and Family Development, Single Parent Resource Centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, counseling centers for children who witness or experience abuse, support groups for children of divorced families, poverty groups, adoptive family support groups, and Big Brothers and Big Sisters are only a precious few of the multitude of organizations designed to sustain, protect, and nourish the family system. And no matter how many organizations there may be, there is never enough to meet the demand. As a child protection social worker I was

reminded daily of the struggles of women who are challenged in their ability to mother their children and of the tragically long waiting lists for counseling and for support groups that could make a difference in both the mothers' and the children's lives. I have seldom met a mother who does not want to do a better job or a child that does not desire the love of his or her mother. Even as adults we often seek from our mothers the love that we felt deprived of, or unable to feel, in our childhood years.

Jill Ker Conway (1998) relates example after example of famous people who struggled throughout their adult lives to make peace with their families of origin. In reference to Gloria Steinem and Germaine Greer she makes the point that "strong feminists they may be, but it is in relationship to their fathers or mothers that they first begin to speak to the world about their lives" (p. 126). Ker Conway also states:

> In this closing decade of the twentieth century, there has been an outpouring of autobiographical writing by women and men in their thirties and early forties, focused not on reflections about the unfolding of a long life but on urgent questions of identity and relationships to parents. (p. 152)

Although Ker Conway is speaking of men and women who have had difficult childhoods, this drive for making peace with family is not limited to those who have been overtly wounded.

According to Swigart (1998), "We now understand that what we do with our children, how we feel and behave when we are with them, has profound ramifications on their lives" (p.11). In fact, she goes as far as to claim that "one of the highest ethical achievements in Western thought may be this new awareness of how easy it is to hurt children" (p.11). This new awareness has tremendous implications for family life and

motherhood. On the positive side it has been the catalyst for conscious and conscientious parenting. It is one of the reasons why parenting classes are popular, and it has provided the impetus behind the abundance of family-focused books, resources, and media attention previously mentioned. It has also provided a venue for validation of the experiences of those people who have been sorely mistreated in childhood and an avenue for protection of those children still living in abusive situations.

On the negative side, this awareness that we can harm children has fueled the flame of discontent amongst adult children who have become hypersensitive to any real or imagined slights at the hands of their parents. Typically, the focal point of this hypersensitivity is the mother. In fact, Caplan (1989) laments that not only has society found it acceptable to blame mothers but it has constructed

> the Perfect Mother and Bad Mother images, which lead us to blame Mom for not being perfect when she doesn't live up to our idealized image and, when she does something not so terrific, to blame her for being horrible rather than only human. (p. 39)

The natural consequence of the Bad Mother/Perfect Mother syndrome is an overwhelming number of mothers experiencing maternal guilt. "Of all the faces of motherhood unmasked, perhaps the commonest--and certainly the most crippling--is the face of maternal guilt," concurs Susan Maushart (1999, p. 33). Motherhood has become so complex and so saturated with the potential to do wrong that Maushart likens the role of mother to that of the centipede who got along just fine until someone mentioned how hard it must be to coordinate a hundred different limbs. "He never walked again" (p. 33).

Currently in North America we have generations of adult children, beginning with the postwar babies, who have been raised in a society affluent enough to allow for self-analysis and reflection. As a result, we have countless numbers of adults seeking therapy and reading self-help books in an attempt to resolve childhood issues and reconcile with their families. We also have generations of mothers attempting to stay abreast of the latest motherhood research, who are torn between an abundance of supposed expert knowledge and an attempt to trust their own instincts, all the while feeling the brunt of blame if they should make a mistake.

When I ask myself, "Who cares about motherhood?" I find myself responding with another question, "Who doesn't?" Mothers, fathers, children, adult children, therapists, psychologists, social workers, researchers and authors all seem to have a vested interest in the topic. This caring seems to bring with it the desire to heal our relationships with our parents and to make sense of and peace with our upbringing. We have lofty goals for this healing. We want to increase our capacity to love and be loved, to be able to establish a healthy intimate relationship, find a sense of joy or at least contentment with life, become better parents, find meaningful employment, tackle addictions, and the list goes on. But most seem to believe that the key to our healing is hidden within the murky mire of our childhood. kd lang's (1989) lyrics say it well: "Memories of children . . . linger deep down inside . . . like a seed that's been planted and won't be denied."

As a single mother in the 1970s and 1980s I was particularly susceptible to this idea of healing and this fear that I might contribute to negative memories that my children may bury "deep down inside." I was born into the postwar baby boomer era. I was raised

in a blue-collar family during the 1950s when mothers stayed home and baked cookies, and no one talked about their feelings. As I moved into adulthood I quickly left behind the *Leave It to Beaver* nuclear family ideology and embraced the flower power, love, and peace philosophy of the hippie generation. By the time I was 28 years old I had been married twice and had left my second husband, who was the father of my two children. At the time of our separation Djuna was 2 years old and Dustin was 3 days old. In 1978, six months after our separation, I moved to a small city in British Columbia that had been infiltrated by Americans during the Vietnam War. Many of these people had been highly educated and had chosen to move to Canada to avoid participating in a war they did not agree with. It seems that somewhat remote areas of British Columbia were chosen by these Americans because of a desire to homestead, live off the land, and establish a healthy lifestyle. This healthy lifestyle was premised on politically conscious left wing, feminist, antiestablishment values that flew in the face of the predominant right wing, sexist, "keep up with the Joneses" values of their parents.

What an exhilarating time to parent. We, as in the collective hippie, counterculture *we*, established alternative schools for our children. Parents in my little city of Nelson founded a Waldorf School, based on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, and a free school based on the premise of the child guiding his or her learning process. We gave our children names like Rainbow, Karma, Leaf, Skye, and Sundance. We lived communally and we lived off the land. We changed partners on a regular basis and began to open the doors to the acceptance of same gender relationships. Single mothers joined together to support each other. We challenged gender stereotypes in raising our children and attempted to promote peace by not allowing our sons to play with guns and by

picketing department stores that sold war toys. We danced to the wee hours of the morning in community halls while our children slept on the floor around the periphery. We had jobs, not careers, and worked at what we could to support an alternative lifestyle in a small city. And we were snuggled in a kind of innocence that allowed for children trusting adults and a comforting sense of safety in the community.

Coinciding with this counterculture era was the development of another antiestablishment movement known as *family therapy*. Family therapy training was neither accepted by, nor taught at, medical schools or universities. Previous to this time therapy was in the hands of psychologists and psychiatrists and was monitored by the governing bodies of each of these professions. In this era of family therapy a practitioner could enter into a field of therapeutic study that did not call for a university degree and was not sanctioned by traditional mainstream institutions. Although family therapy was "born in the 1950s and grew up in the 1960s," the period between 1975 and 1985 was possibly "family therapy's golden age" (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995, p. 57). According to Nichols and Schwartz this 10-year period marked a very lucrative time for private therapists. An untold number of therapeutic training institutes were established. All over North America therapists and therapeutic workshops were in an abundance and Nelson was no exception.

Nelson was a hotbed of the antiestablishment therapy movement. Gestalt therapists, some who could legitimately claim to have been taught by its founder Fritz Perls held residential workshops. Rebirthers, whose work was based on a breathing technique developed by Leonard Orr, presented 2-day, 5-day, and 7-day intensive residential workshops. Reichian therapy, bioenergetics, Warner Erhardt's EST training,

and Adult Children of Alcoholics groups were just a few offerings from the veritable therapeutic feast available to those who wanted to come to terms with childhood issues. All of these therapies and more could be found in Nelson or in nearby bigger cities.

Again I go back to the question, "Who cares?" Again I respond, "Who doesn't?" We have discovered that how we behave has an effect on our children and we have discovered that we can hurt our children--not just physically but psychologically. Since the 1950s we have been inundated with numerous therapeutic strategies from strategic, structural, Bowenian, experiential, and feminist in the modern era to narrative and solution-focused in the postmodern era. We are equally saturated with self-help books and autobiographies focused on childhood experiences. Everything from the inability to love, or be loved, to addictions have been blamed on a person's upbringing. The Western world has wholeheartedly accepted the premise that how parents treat their children can have long-lasting repercussions in their adult lives. And an inordinate attention has been focused on the responsibility and culpability of mothers for how children turn out, which has created a ripe breeding ground for maternal guilt. I think there is no denying that we care about families and we care about motherhood.

Why Me?

While in Nelson during the 1980s I took full advantage of all available therapies that piqued my interest. I participated in 2- and 3-day gestalt workshops and weekly Gestalt therapy sessions for 2 winters. I immersed myself in the Rebirthing process, attending as many workshops as I could afford. I steadfastly strove to rid myself of the residue of what I saw as the unhealthy aspects of the parenting I experienced. At the same time I sought to heal myself, I was committed to mothering my children in a way that would leave them with as few emotional scars as I could manage. This task was complicated by the stresses of single-parent poverty. I had chosen not to work outside home and to stay on welfare until my children were in school because of my belief that full-time day care would be emotionally damaging for preschool children.

In retrospect I am grateful to have raised my children in the powerful climate of an alternative community in the 1970s and 1980s. At the time I felt tremendously challenged, overwhelmed, and frequently inadequate. Rochelle Yamagishi (Houtekamer, Chambers, Yamagishi, & Good Striker, 1997) succinctly expresses the intensity of the motherhood experience with these words, "There is no turning back with motherhood. It's an 'all or nothing' proposition. Sometimes I wish that I could have had a practice run, a tryout child on whom I could have made all my mistakes" (p. 153). Alas, mothers are not afforded the opportunity to practice parenting, to try out a particular child, to erase their mistakes, or for that matter, to have a trial run to ascertain whether they want to be mothers at all. Given that there was no turning back, I did what I could. I did my best, I loved my children and mothered them as conscientiously as I knew how.

Motherhood is behind me now, at least the hands-on, hypervigilant, day-to-day form of mothering. My children are legally adults and emotionally growing into this new stage of life. They can vote, have children, support themselves, and for all intents and purposes they no longer need me. Yet, I find myself still very much attached to their lives. I feel passionate about mistakes they make, hurts they experience, joys they feel. I worry about their health and their safety when I discover that they are at any risk. Judging from my mother's responses to me this will not go away. She still cautions me to eat better, to drive safely, and to take care of myself. I don't recall being warned before I accepted this motherhood position that I would feel like this forever. It is not that I am constantly concerned with or involved in the lives of my children, but they live in my heart and are seldom far from my mind. There is always that fear of loss and pain that goes hand in hand with loving someone deeply. The yin and the yang. The shadow behind the clear image.

Arthur Maslow and Moira Duggan (1982) share an interesting perspective in regards to what they call "offspring separation." They observe

> that a sense of connectedness is more liberating than a sense of isolation or severance from family. [We] think of this connectedness as something like the tether that keeps a spacewalker vitally connected to his ship, secure in the void of the universe. Everyone should have a "tether". It is our link to the essentials of life. Without it we fly off. (p. 21)

It seems that Maslow and Duggan are referring to the family as the ship and with that analogy imply that the parent keeps the grown child from floating off into the "void of the universe."

Because my research is situated in motherhood, and I am steeped in the motherhood experience, I think of the ship as the mother ship. So what is it about the ship that keeps the "spacewalker" connected? I assume that for an actual spacewalker the ship represents some form of safety, but is that true for the child and mother? Does the passion, the deep caring of the mother, even as the child becomes an adult, have a role in the weaving of the tether? At what point does this caring become meddlesome behavior and, consequently, drive the child further into the void? Are the child and the mother weaving this tether throughout the child's life and, if so, how important are those early years of mothering? Is there ever a time when the tether could and should be severed or is it forever a part of the mother/child relationship?

These tether questions, and many others, are what have given form to my research journey. I had traveled the territory of motherhood with my children from infancy to adolescence and was now faced with the unfamiliar terrain of their adulthood. When my children were young I was guided by both internal and external forces. Internally I had my intuition, which sometimes assisted me in sifting through the external forces in the form of parenting classes and books, therapeutic workshops, and books on self-growth. All of this expert advice was rooted in the problem-saturated modern thinking that was rampant in the 1970s and 1980s. My synopsis of the message to mothers embedded in this problem saturated thinking was, "Everything you do has the potential to damage your child in the immediate or far reaching future." In fact, "seventy-two different kinds of psychopathology are attributed to mothers" (Jackson, 2001, p. 71). This way of thinking so much informed my mothering that I entered into my own therapy to heal the damage

from my childhood, not only to become a better person but also to become a better mother.

When I embarked on this research project, I felt that I was standing on a precipice between two worlds, two roles, almost two lives. The life of a mother of children is much different from the life of a mother of adults, but I was unsure what the difference would be. I had watched my children grow from helpless infants to almost solid young adults. We had done the dance of letting go together for many years. I had no desire to hold them back as I looked forward to my new life. However, when my youngest child moved his last piece of furniture out of my home and shut the door behind him I experienced, in a completely new way, what it meant to have a heavy heart.

I know that this heavy heart, this sadness when the last child leaves the proverbial nest, is not an experience unique to me. I have spoken to and read about many mothers who have had a similar experience. This leave-taking, though often welcomed by the mother, marks the end of a long journey and can be experienced as a loss. I cannot speak for all mothers, but I can say that for me this loss precipitated a need to make sense of my mothering journey. I became reflective. I felt a need to make peace with myself in regards to the job that I had done as a mother to this point. I had been profoundly influenced by the accumulation of the myriad of elements present in the culture of the baby boomer era. My mother heart embodied this era. I was particularly held captive by the notion that "popular mother culture implies that our children are exquisitely delicate creatures, hugely vulnerable to our idiosyncrasies and deficits, who require relentless psychological attunement and approval" (Thurer, 1994, p. xi). This cultural belief had fueled the flames

of the perfect mother myth and provided the impetus for a sickly epidemic of guilt to permeate the consciousness of mothers. And I was no exception.

After dedicating 21 years to this full-time, all-consuming, heartrending job of mothering I was left with many unanswered questions. I had trusted experts to guide me on my motherhood journey, but "the truth is that neither experts nor mothers know as much as each might wish; to a great extent, all of us fly by the seat of our pants and try to learn as quickly as possible" (Caplan, 1989, p. 105). With the contradicting advice given by the so-called experts how was I to assess which expert to put my faith in? I was guided through the maze of expert knowledge by my intuition and what some may call "maternal instincts," but given that I too was flying by the seat of my pants, how was I to know that I had made the right decisions? And if I hadn't made all the right decisions, and the odds were that I hadn't, had my mistakes caused harm to my children?

Having grown children has provided me with the gift of hindsight. Now armed with this gift, substantiated by a degree in Child and Youth Care and my knowledge of family therapies, I am no longer at the mercy of the experts. Yet I still believe that children are delicate and vulnerable creatures who have the potential to harbor memories that could be understood, retained, and recalled in such a way as to cause emotional damage. This pivotal moment in mothering, this movement towards becoming a mother of adults, brought with it a desire to speak out loud all the questions, all of the what-ifs and should-have-beens. I wanted to make my mothering transparent to my children. I wanted some assessment of my mothering to date. I also wanted to ensure that both my children had a means of expression so that what may be buried deep down inside of each of them would be invited into the light of day.

There was no academic or therapeutic expert to consult for this process. Although bookshelves are overflowing with expert advice for mothers of babies, children and adolescents, there is an obvious dearth of information regarding the transition to mothering adult children. Regardless, I was not looking for advice or for therapy. I simply wanted an honest, open adult-to-adult conversation with my grown children. No one outside of Djuna and Dustin could know or understand their experience of childhood or of being mothered by me. To my mind they are the experts, they are my consultants and coconspirators on this journey of life. We had done this dance of mother and child together and I had come to realize that I had never been a mother *to* my children, but in fact, had mothered *with* them. Just as I had been an influence in my children's lives during my active mothering years, they in turn had been an influence in mine. My mothering had changed somewhat in response to each of them and my life had changed because of them. Who better to consult regarding my mothering than the true experts, Dustin and Djuna.

I imagined this healing journey with my adult children to be a point of entry into the map of our new lives together. I anticipated that our reflection on the past would provide the direction for the future. Once our travels to Nelson were over and we had arrived back to our respective homes and snuggled back into our individual lives, I expected the internal journey to continue. I believed that Dustin and Djuna would guide me through this next stage of mothering and together we would charter a route through the unfamiliar territory of the parent and adult child relationship.

I am of the belief that we construct ourselves through the stories that we tell ourselves and each other and the meanings we make of them. These stories, as I see it, are

ever changing as new characters, events, and experiences influence the plot. I concur with Jill Freedman and Gene Combs (1996) when they state that "every time we ask a question, we are generating a possible version of life" (p. 113). Through the questions I intend to ask of Dustin and Djuna I anticipate that we will generate a story of their childhood and my mothering. As Djuna and Dustin grow older and embody more life experience--for instance, marry, divorce, or become parents--their perceptions of their childhood may change. As well, my questions of them may be different as my life changes through the years. Therefore, I want to make it absolutely clear that this journey with my adult children is not an attempt to discover a Truth. Instead, I will offer a point of reflection on a map, a story of a journey to this point.

I have not stopped to ask myself "why me" or "why my story." Once my research idea was conceived and I had the time to nurture it I became convinced that the most compelling story that I could tell was my own. I have been inspired by the words of Dr. Rachel Remen (1996), who declares on her audiotape, "Everyone is a story. Sitting around the table telling stories is not just a way of passing time. It is the way the wisdom gets passed along." She goes on to explain that "the kitchen table is a level playing field. Everyone's story matters. The wisdom in the story of the most educated and powerful person is often not greater that the wisdom of a child." These words touch a nerve in me because I am drawn to stories about peoples' lives. It is the richness of the text and the intimacy of the shared experience that stirs me and stimulates me to reflect on my own life experience. Tweela Houtekamer in (Houtekamer, Chambers, Yamagushi, & Striker; 1997) elaborates:

> As we change our stories about our pasts, as we create nets of thought, memory, and new knowledge, we change our understanding of and our actions in the present moment, and our visions of ourselves in the future. And, if we choose our words carefully, those who read our stories may be changed in some way too. (p. 158)

Participating in this deeply personal research journey provides me with a venue to "create nets of thought, memory, and new knowledge" with my children, regarding a particularly poignant period in our lives. Sharing my story offers me the opportunity to take my seat at the kitchen table and, if I choose my words carefully, perhaps another person's story will be changed in some way.

Preparations

The very nature of this thesis project was rife with challenges and potential problems. I was flooded with questions, both my own and those posed by others. How could I assure honesty from Dustin and Djuna? Would they edit their responses to take care of me? How could I plan our journey in a way that would most assuredly stimulate and provoke memories? How would I move the memories stimulated into meaningful conversations? How would I keep our intimate conversations from being misconstrued as therapy? How would I maintain the role of mother and researcher and not move into the role of counselor? If Djuna and Dustin should have substantial negative feedback about aspects of my mothering, how would I remain open and receptive to hearing it? How could I write my story of our experience without betraying my children's privacy, or the privacy of their father or stepfather, or any one else that Dustin and Djuna should choose to bring into our discussions? It wasn't just myself and my adult children that I had to satisfy with answers to these questions. I had to assure my thesis committee and the university ethics committee that this research project would be performed with the utmost of integrity. What follows is an overview of the details of the journey and the answers to questions this project demanded.

Planning for this journey with Dustin and Djuna was a delightful process. My preparations were guided by a vision of the unfolding of salient memories that would provided the stimulus for rich conversation. According to Kvale (1996), the original Latin meaning of *conversation* is "wandering together with" (p. 4). That is precisely what I wanted to do with Djuna and Dustin--wander together with them through the telling of stories and the re-creation of and reflection on childhood memories. I did not want our

time together to become a superficial remember-the-time event. I felt the need to guide the process without controlling it. In order to invite the rich conversation I desired I did my best to devise a plan that would revive memories through visual, auditory, and feeling cues. Bandler and Grinder (1979), pioneers of Neuro Linguistic Programming, believe that people think primarily in one of these three senses, or three main representational systems. Bandler and Grinder were particularly interested in using the knowledge of people's primary representational system to gain rapport through language. I was not as interested in gaining rapport through the provision of visual, auditory, and feeling cues as I was in stimulating a deeper, more rich source of memory than mere talk would allow.

One thing that I put together as part of the visual and feeling component of the journey was what I call our "memory chest." I poured through all of our family photographs and intentionally chose pictures that either marked specific occasions, contained images of significant people, or marked a particular period of time. I then put the pictures I chose in chronological order in 8 ½" by 11" envelopes. The first envelope contained pictures of myself as a child and as a young woman before becoming a mother. The reason for including myself in these pictures was personal to me, somewhat whimsical, and not directly relevant to the research. I merely wanted Dustin and Djuna to have a sense of me as a child and as a young woman at much the same age they were when we began this thesis journey together. Each envelope was designed to reflect a specific time frame. For example, the first envelope contained birth pictures of each of my children, their birth father, myself, as well as pictures of the homes we lived in during their early years.

The envelopes I prepared covered the years until Djuna was 10 years old and Dustin was 8 years old. I purposely focused on these years because they held especially heartfelt maternal meaning for me and had been the focus of my attention from the conception of this research journey. This precious 10-year period marked a time in which I felt both my children were most impressionable, vulnerable, and receptive to their environment, and consequently to my mothering. It was also a bittersweet and powerfully emotional time in my life. I had taken on motherhood, single parenthood, and a move to a new city during those 10 years and there were times that I felt I was sinking more than I was swimming. In retrospect, however, I am not sure that I would have had it any other way.

Pictures were not the only items that I tucked away in envelopes and placed in the memory chest. In addition to pictures I included other objects that I felt might evoke thoughts, feelings, memories, and conversation. Journals I had written during the time I was a single mother were included as they revealed both the joy and the angst of motherhood. I did not intend to edit them for Dustin and Djuna. I also included poems written to the children by their birth father, drawings the children had done through the years, and feedback about each of them from their school teachers. In fact, everything that I assessed would have meaning to my children or to me was carefully placed in these envelopes. Each item was chosen wisely as I believed that too many memory stimulants would serve to overwhelm us and thus defeat their purpose.

In an attempt to stir auditory memories I purchased two tapes that were important to Djuna, Dustin, and me during their early childhood years. The tapes were *Baby Beluga* (Raffi, 1980) and *Free To Be . . . You and Me* (Hart, 1985). *Baby Beluga* is filled with

wonderful, innocent, and whimsical sing-along songs. My children and I used to listen to and sing-a-long with this tape on lengthy journeys to visit their grandma and grandpa, on short trips to the grocery store, and on rainy days at home. Everything on this tape, from the title song "Baby Beluga" to "All I Really Need [Is Love in My Family]" and "Oats and Beans and Barley," (Raffi, 1980) conjures up delightful memories and casts me back into the arms of early motherhood. *Free To Be . . .You and Me* was like a bible to me. A nonreligious bible filled with life messages, like it's okay to be fat, short, tall, or thin; girls can do anything boys can; boys can play with dolls; it's all right to cry; each of us is okay just the way we are; and cooperation and working together are important. I had so wanted my children to take in these ideals and values. We used to play this tape as much as the *Baby Beluga* tape, never tiring of hearing ourselves sing. Now that Djuna and Dustin were adults I was curious to find out whether they recalled paying attention to the meaning of the words that were so crucial to me. I did not have a plan as to when I would play these tapes on our journey together, I just assumed the right time would be obvious. I was confident that these tapes would be strong auditory triggers for all of us.

The trip itself would provide other auditory, visual, and feeling cues as I had planned to replicate the exact journey that the three of us had taken during our move to Nelson in 1978. At the time of this research project Djuna lived in Victoria and Dustin lived in Vancouver, so the plan was that Djuna and I would travel to Vancouver, stay 2 nights and then the 3 of us would begin our trip to Nelson. It was fitting that Djuna and I should begin this trip together as she was the firstborn and thus I had begun this motherhood journey with her. During the first morning in Vancouver we would tour the maternity ward of the hospital where Djuna was born. We would then drive to the coastal

town where Dustin was born, visit the house where I gave birth to him, and explore this town that was our home until Djuna was 2 ½ and Dustin was 6 months. Our tour would include visiting a park that was sentimental to all three of us--even I had spent time there with my family as a young child. The park would provide an ideal environment to tape-record our first conversation as we viewed the first envelope of pictures from the memory chest.

The next part of our journey would be the drive to Nelson. When we originally made the move in 1978 we made a detour to attend a spiritual retreat in a town located in the interior of British Columbia. The retreat site was not on a direct route to Nelson; therefore, if we were to reenact the same trek, it would mean a much longer drive than was necessary. I was keen to do this extra driving and to stay in the same hotel that we stayed at on the original trip because both the drive and the stay in the hotel were poignant motherhood experiences for me, due to my fragile, yet determined state of mind and heart at the time. Both Dustin and Djuna were in agreement. During the drive to Nelson I had assumed we would engage in nostalgic dialogue, preparing ourselves in an informal manner for the more focused conversation we would have once we reached our destination. I had not designed specific questions for this part of the journey and I had decided that any use of the tape recorder in the car would be spontaneous.

As part of my preparations I had rented a suite in one of the major old hotels in the center of Nelson. This hotel was a familiar landmark and would also provide us with easy access to the core of the city. We could wander at ease through the downtown streets of the city that had been our home for 8 years. I did not have set plans for this time together other than an expectation that we would spend some sentimental time visiting

old haunts and at least 1 to 2 hours a day with the memory chest and the tape recorder. Any other poignant moments outside the taped sessions I would have to record on my laptop computer in the evenings.

After our return from Nelson I had arranged to meet alone with each of my children in an overnight setting away from the distractions of friends and family. I would later meet with the two of them together. The reason for these meetings was to provide Djuna and Dustin with a format for completion. I could not anticipate whether our conversations during our journey together would bring up issues that each of them would want to talk about with me in private, but I wanted to allow for that possibility. I also had no way of knowing whether the time that we would spend traveling, remembering, and talking together would result in a need for further conversation once we had time for reflection. Because of these unknowns I was prepared to allow as much time as was necessary for this completion process, but had built in the initial three meetings, as previously mentioned.

The enthusiasm that I had for this research with my children and my delight in planning our journey together did not leave me blind to the possibility that this project tickled the fine line between healing communication and therapy. I was clear within myself that this was not going to become therapy for either Djuna, Dustin, or myself. This inquiry was about adult-to-adult conversations, the sharing of the "great and tiny jewels of facts and feelings" that Caplan (1989) wrote about. I have enough training, education, and experience in therapeutic models and language to know the difference between invitations to frank and open conversation and the evocation of therapeutic dialogue. At

the same time I am comfortable with the expression of feelings therefore tears, laughter, expressions of anger, or resentment do not pose a threat to me.

I had more than a year to prepare myself for the possibility of Dustin and Djuna negatively critiquing some aspects of my mothering. In truth, I had 23 years of preparation. Time and time again I had experienced, both in my personal and professional life, the deepening of relationships that can occur when family members are free to speak the truth about a hurt or slight and the accused is strong enough to accept responsibility for his or her actions. Belief in the value of this experience had become deeply ingrained in my psyche and I felt committed to being available to accept responsibility for any actions that might have caused my children pain, confusion, or anguish. I held no fantasies that I was beyond reproach. I had made mistakes and I was ready to face them. This was a rite of passage, an opportunity to review the past, atone for past mistakes, celebrate successes, and prepare for my new role as mother of adult children.

In the mist of all my preparations two questions percolated that begged to be answered: How could I assure that Dustin and Djuna were willing participants and were not participating out of a sense of obligation to their mother? As well, how could I assure that Djuna and Dustin would be brutally honest? Maybe they would attempt to be nice because I am their mother. Or for that matter, not be nice, for the same reason. I recognized that I was engaging in a unique type of research that warranted or, more accurately, demanded careful consideration.

I entered into this project with my own internal maternal answers to the questions regarding Dustin and Djuna's willingness to participate in this project and their ability to be honest. The ethics committee provided guidance and direction that I felt

complemented and provided a framework for my intuition and maternal knowing. I had raised my children to be strong, independent thinkers. From the time they were toddlers I was determined to separate person from behavior, always making it clear that what they did was not who they were. It was during these early years that I became a dedicated student of effective communication and felt compelled to integrate clear communication into my daily life. My children were my daily life. I learned to own my role in upsets between us, to communicate as quickly as possible when I was perturbed and to use "I" messages without the blatant blame of "you" messages. I was far from perfect but I believed that I had at least laid the foundation for open, honest, nonblaming communication. I, therefore, anticipated that Dustin and Djuna's decisions to either participate in this project or not would come from a place of personal comfort with honesty and a safety to communicate their decisions to me. Their quick and spontaneous positive responses were an indication to me that not only were they willing but, in fact, keen to be part of my thesis research.

The ethics committee directed me to complete a number of tasks to assure that my adult children were willing participants. The first task was to write a letter to Djuna and Dustin explaining the project and my expectations of their involvement. They were requested to sign the letter if they agreed with what was written. The second task was to have each of them write a letter or a note in their own words expressing their willingness to participate. And finally, I was requested to arrange for a neutral third party to interview Dustin and Djuna and glean from that interview whether either of them was feeling coerced in any way. This neutral third party was to be someone well versed in academic, specifically autobiographical, research. I chose Dr. Leah Fowler, a professor at the

University of Lethbridge, who herself had chosen autobiographical research for her doctorate degree. I felt that Dr. Fowler was a person who would create a safe and open environment conducive to a candid conversation with both my children. (See Appendix for copies of my letter to Dustin and Djuna.)

The same maternal knowing that led me to believe that Djuna and Dustin were sincere and earnest in their desire to assist me with my research guided me to trust that they would both be capable of being honest and frank. The ethics committee could offer little in the way of concrete suggestions to help insure my children's candor. Eliciting frankness and honesty could present a challenge for any researcher and there are no means of measuring success. The researcher must depend on the responses of her subject and assume that the subject has been sincere and forthright. The same holds true for Dustin and Djuna, although the fact that they were my children was reason enough to be particularly cautious, careful, and thorough in my preparations. As part of my preparation I was diligent in my explanation of my project to Djuna and Dustin. Along with the letter I gave them explaining my research topic I also spoke with them individually and together to clarify the purpose of my research. I made it abundantly clear that this was not a "make Mum feel good" project and that it was important to my research that they speak freely and honestly. I had raised my children to voice what was on their minds and in their hearts immediately, thus not running the risk of resentments building up and having a negative impact on relationships. Even so, I took pains to reiterate this to each of them before embarking on our research journey. I did not anticipate an abundance of criticism during this journey as I had a modicum of confidence in my mothering. I just didn't want

any of us to leave unsaid what would best be spoken out loud. I anticipated that I might need to reinforce this message during our discussions

When I first broached the possibility of the research project individually to Djuna and Dustin, they each spontaneously brought up an incident regarding one of my maternal blunders. I had not expected that we would enter into such a discussion so readily and I was taken aback. Although I was surprised, I managed to listen and ask questions in order to acquire more understanding of the difficulty they had experienced as a result of my behavior. I hoped that my ability to listen in the moment and not behave defensively helped them to trust that I would be receptive to such feedback during our research journey. The fact that they both were able to speak so freely contributed to my confidence in their ability to speak openly throughout the project. It also provided me with food for thought for many months. I was face to face with the reality of what I was about to embark on. It gave me a chance to strengthen my conviction and prepare myself to be open and receptive.

Another obstacle regarding ethical considerations was that of confidentiality. How could I protect my children's privacy? There would be no mistaking who my children were as I have only two. When I brought the subject up to both Dustin and Djuna they surprised me by saying that they did not feel they had anything to hide. Neither of them felt that any dark or secretive issue would arise during the research that would need to be kept confidential. We did agree, nevertheless, not to include anything in my thesis that was specifically about either of them unless they gave me permission. Most of my writing would be about my experience of this rite of passage, and I expected that I would be able to write it without having to compromise candidness for confidentiality. We also agreed

that if a delicate subject arose for either of them they could stop the tape recorder and discuss it, knowing that it would not be used in my thesis. By the same token, anything written about my children's father or stepfather would not be included in my thesis until each of them read and approved it.

Gipsa

How old are your children? What does your child do for a living? Do your children live near you? These are frequently asked questions that most people in our society think nothing of. Some years ago, after asking a colleague how old his children were, I was struck by the fact that his children were in their 30s and that the English language did not have a word to differentiate offspring who had grown into adulthood. Years later, when I became absorbed in my thesis topic, I was once again fascinated with this limitation of the English language. I began to wonder about the effects on the relationship between parents and their offspring of not having a word that both reflected the depth of relationship and the letting go of childhood. Could the lack of a word to mark this passage to adulthood in some way perpetuate a hierarchical relationship? Could it in some symbolic way make it harder for parents to let their adult children take responsibility for their own lives? Or, for that matter, for adult children to act like adults in relation to their parents?

In the beginning stages of formalizing my thesis topic I felt myself stumble over the words *adult child* and *adult children*. Are my offspring children or adults I wondered? They can't be both. I did not want to refer to them throughout my thesis as my children because they are not children. I also did not want to refer to them as *adult children* because I find the phrase awkward and contradictory. I began to pose this dilemma to colleagues, friends, and family. I found to my surprise that this lack of a word in the English language and its possible implications stirred people's interest.

Over time I became determined to find a new word—something fanciful, meaningful, or both. My determination guided me to many possible sources, one of which

was foreign language dictionaries. I must have consulted 100 books, from Arabic to Zulu, looking up in each one the word *child* and the word *adult*. I did not find one language that had a word that recognized the relationship between parent and child and, at the same time, acknowledged the child's movement into adulthood. My search also led me to inquire about such a word of anyone I encountered who spoke a language other than English. I asked people who spoke various African languages, Arabic, Spanish, French, and the list goes on. I also sent emails to 11 linguists at the University of Victoria. Although I did not receive a response from all of the professors of whom I inquired, none of those who did respond knew of an alternative word for adult child. And over the course of a year, not one person who I had challenged to come up with a creative word managed to do so, including myself.

Although finding a new word was not the focus of my thesis, it had become germane to the writing of it. And it certainly had become a project. One idea that I considered came from a colleague. He suggested that I find a word for *adult* and a word for *child* from different languages and combine them to form a new word. I considered this idea for a time but rejected it because it would still reflect the sentiment that "once a child always a child." It was suggested by some people that I use the word *offspring* but I rejected that idea because to my sensibilities offspring is a cold and distant word. It does not connote the complicated relationship of a parent and an adult child.

Undaunted I continued my search. At last an exciting idea came to my attention, oddly enough, from my own family. My husband suggested that I get together with Djuna and Dustin and brainstorm all the words we could think of that described the parent and adult child relationship and then coin a word from fragments of those words. What an

inspiration! I was completely taken with the idea. It was an exercise that would include the very people I wished to create a word for. It was also very fitting that Djuna and Dustin be part of this naming ceremony as they have provided the stimulus for this thesis. Best of all, both of my adult children were keen to participate in this process.

With a great deal of enthusiasm I arranged to meet with both Dustin and Djuna in Vancouver to proceed with this naming process. First we headed to the nearest coffee shop to purchase our favorite hot drinks. We then retreated to a local park, laid a pad of flip chart paper on the ground, and each of us, with felt pen in hand, began to generate a list of words that individually we felt best described the relationship between an adult child and his or her parent. The paper was soon filled with a colorful and messy array of words. Balance, love, trust, participation, compassion, dependable, challenge, teamwork, dependence, knowledge, growth, support, and openness were some of the words we came up with.

Once our list of words was complete we chose another sheet of paper and rewrote our words in columns to view them in a clearer fashion. It was at this juncture that we engaged in a conversation regarding the biases and assumptions we brought to this exercise. We discussed the fact that most of the words on our list had positive connotations and that we had generated our list purely from the perspective of our family and not families in general. The list might have looked quite different had we broadened our scope to include a range of family experiences. We also talked about our good fortune in living in a country that affords us the luxury of not only having the time to participate in this exercise but the safety and comfort to pose the question. These were not

particularly long nor involved discussions. It seemed enough to verbalize our awareness of these factors.

Once the list of words was written in column fashion we began the task of formulating our new word. I had anticipated that this part would be easy. Not so. There were 26 words on the page, each one made up of a minimum of two syllables that could be borrowed to formulate a new word. Suddenly the task seemed overwhelming and I could feel all of us falling into a stupor. This was the first time I felt that this process may not be productive. After a time I verbalized the doubt I was experiencing. My son, who finds pleasure in challenges such as these, took a few moments to walk by himself and rethink the plan. When he returned, he picked up a pen and began to write a number of the words on a separate sheet of paper. Once done he circled the first letter of each word. Aha, I thought, perhaps he is on to something.

Our new list contained 12 words from the larger list. Once completed we strung the first letter of each of these words across the top of the page. Realizing that we could not likely find an easy to pronounce word with 12 letters we narrowed the list to 5 words. The words we chose were ones that all three of us agreed on, although each of us had a particular favorite. Our final list included the word *growth*, because we felt that growth is a key factor between parents and their adult children, whether the relationship is harmonious or not. For the same reason we chose the word *support*. All three of us felt that even the most conflictual families support each other in times of dire need. *Passion* was my word. I don't think I am alone as a mother when I say that my feelings towards my children are filled with passion. My children, no matter what their age, touch my heart in a way that no other beings do. *Apprentice* was Djuna and Dustin's word. They believe

that children, young and old, apprentice from their parents. This apprenticeship encompasses what a child becoming an adult ultimately decides to discard or to embrace. Finally, we chose the word *independence* as we all felt that independence is a common goal for adult children and, as well, for the parent.

Once we had our words we began to play with the order of the first letter of each of them. We had *p*, *s*, *g*, *i*, and *a*. Surprisingly quickly we came up with *gipsa*. This word seemed right to all of us. It was easy to pronounce, it sounded like a word in the English language, and we liked the sound of it. After a year of inquiry it took only a couple of hours to create a word that the three of us felt good about! I have shared this word with friends and colleagues and without fail all have liked the sound of it. Some have likened it to the gypsy whose nomadic nature, in some ways, reflects the moving away of the adult child from the parent.

What we had created was an acronym. As described in the *Oxford Guide to Canadian English Usage* (1997), an acronym "is a pronounceable word formed from the first letter or letters of words in a phrase or name" (p. 2). Acronyms can be written with capitol letters only, such as NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) or WHO (World Health Organization). These capitalized acronyms are found in the dictionary, but rather than defining them the dictionary simply supplies the phrase that the acronym serves to abbreviate. A few acronyms are written in lower case and have become so integrated into the English language that many people are unaware that they are acronyms, for example, *laser* (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation) and radar (radio detection and ranging). In the *DK Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* (1998), definitions of these words come first, followed in brackets by the phrase for which the

acronym stood. I envision *gipsa* fitting into this latter category, becoming a full-fledged word acronym. In this thesis, beginning with the recounting of our healing journey to Nelson, I will use the words *gipsa* and *gipsas* to refer to my adult child or children, respectively.

How We Got Here From There

> We must have the most enormous respect toward this instant of birth, this fragile moment. The baby is between two worlds. On a threshold. Hesitating. Do not hurry. Do not press. Allow this child to enter.
>
> Leboyer, *Birth Without Violence*, 1975, p. 64

What! Focus the birthing process on the infant? When I was born the focus was on preventing a painful birth. Bring on the drugs! Sedate the suffering woman! Then, when it was my time to give birth, I and my peers were expected to breathe through the pain and focus our attention on the infant "caught between two worlds [and] on a threshold" (Leboyer, 1975, p. 64). What about the incredibly frightening threshold of a woman giving birth to her first baby? Shouldn't someone facilitate her entry into this fragile state of motherhood?

Dr. Leboyer (1975) was my guru during my pregnancy. I was adamant in my desire to welcome my baby with the soft and gentle birth he advocated. I did not want to repeat the mistakes of my mother's generation. I wanted to ease my baby peacefully into this sometimes harsh world. I wanted a home birth. I wanted dim lights and soft music so as not to blind and deafen my baby at the moment of birth. I wanted an atmosphere of peacefulness to greet my baby and I wanted a drug-free, natural birth because I knew that drugs would harm both of us. But my doctor told me I was too small to risk a home birth. He sent me to a specialist. Although I found one who believed in the teachings of Dr. Leboyer, as luck would have it he was in Hawaii when my baby girl was born.

"Epidural? No! I don't want an epidural! Don't you understand that I want to do this naturally? I want the best birth for my new baby. I don't want your drugs! If I take drugs my baby will be drugged," I screamed inside. I was extremely tired after 6 hours of

nonstop labor. Not the ebb and flow of contractions I had been led to expect, but one long pain that never subsided. I had been rushed through the underground tunnels in the belly of the hospital. My water had broken but my baby hadn't dropped. "X-rays! Quick! This baby could have its cord wrapped around its neck! It could be losing oxygen to its brain! It may even be dying!" These were the words that rang through my head as the attendants rushed me through the tunnels. All the while I lie helplessly on my back, alone and frightened. Once the x-rays were complete these same attendants retraced their steps with the same urgent pace. By the time we reached the delivery room I was exhausted. The nurse held the epidural needle behind her back. The doctor--this new and unknown doctor--flatly uttered, "How about if we do it my way for your first baby and you can do it your way for the second one?" I looked to my husband, David, for strength. I wanted him to stop them. To tell them that I was strong. But he felt my pain and weakened for me. I succumbed. I accepted the needle.

I hadn't even given birth and I was already a bad mother. I had surrendered to drugs. My baby's tiny body would feel the effects of my decision. And what about the x-rays? What long-term effects would they have on this beautiful baby? Two strikes against me and I hadn't even officially become a mother! I remember David standing behind me as I lie on the birthing table. Djuna was born and wrapped in a cloth and placed in a tiny hospital crib beside me. The birthing table was narrow. Just big enough for me. I lie there exhausted, limp, overwhelmed, and in a kind of after-birth shock.

Everything had been done contrary to what my guru, my mentor, Dr. Leboyer (1975) had taught. Her cord had been cut too soon. She had been passed amongst strangers to be suctioned, weighed, and assessed. Moments later, she lay beside me in her

own tiny bed, just out of my reach, and I was too bewildered to voice my desire to have her lie with me. I needed to be still, to catch my breath. Failed again. Dr. Leboyer said that a baby needed to be on the mother's belly immediately after birth: "Her belly has the infant's exact shape and dimensions. Swelling a moment before, hollow now, the belly seems to lie there waiting, like a nest" (p. 43). Where were my maternal instincts? Why did I let her down like that? Everything went against my wishes. I had believed what Dr. Leboyer had told me. I wanted what was right for my baby but I didn't have the strength to follow through.

From There to Here

Why was I driven by such a strong sense of perfectionism? How did guilt march so surely into a mother's consciousness and find such a ripe environment for survival? As a new mother I did not ask these questions. I was enveloped in the myth of the perfect mother, so much so that I was unaware that it was a myth. I believed that I had to strive harder when I made supposed mistakes. I am now, however, a little less entrenched in this myth. I have hindsight. My children are grown. So I look back and wonder in the dazed way one does after an exhausting emotional experience and try to understand how perfectionism got its ugly clutches around my throat and the throats of so many mothers.

My desire to make sense of the image of Mother that so captured my heart, and created such yearning in me to emulate, has led me on a rather cursory journey through the history of motherhood. Although somewhat brief, given the scope of this subject, my exploration has afforded me a perspective that eluded me when I was too immersed in the motherhood role to concentrate on the bigger picture. I have chosen two women as my primary guides through the complicated terrain of motherhood. Sarah Hrdy (1999), an

anthropologist, is considered a leading scientific authority on motherhood, and her book *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* provided me with an enormously rich and complex source of historical information. Shari Thurer (1994), a university professor and clinical psychologist, offered an equally thorough study of maternal history in her book *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*. Both women examine the subject so thoroughly and conscientiously that I felt I could rely on their research to situate the context of motherhood in the 1970s and provide a springboard into my own personal study. The descriptions of mothers throughout this history section are generalizations intended to establish a feeling for, and an understanding of, the ever changing array of maternal constructs.

Society has not always treated infants and children kindly. Both Hrdy (1999) and Thurer (1994) a multitude of incidents throughout history in which mothers commonly rejected their infants. According to Hrdy (1999), children have been a dispensable commodity since the beginning of recorded history. During the first three centuries, 20 to 40% of children born in Rome were left along roadsides or in gutters. In fifth century Athens, at a time referred to as the Golden Age, infants, particularly females, were left by roadsides, near temples, or in dung heaps or cesspools. Overt infanticide and roadside abandonment gave way to the use of foundling homes from medieval time onward. In some places rotating barrels were set in the walls of foundling homes so parents could anonymously deposit an unwanted baby. Mortality rates were as high as 90% in these homes. By 1539, in Tuscany, 5,000 infants a year were left in foundling homes. Wet nursing, which had been engaged in since 2000 B.C., reached a peak in the eighteenth century (Hrdy, 1999; Thurer, 1994). "Of 21,000 births registered in Paris in 1780, only 5

percent of them were nursed by their own mothers" (Hrdy, 1999, p. 351). The mortality rate of infants sent to surrogate mothers to be wet nursed was exceedingly high.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this seemingly unnatural motherly behavior was that reproductive life for our foremothers was untenable. Giving birth brought with it the threat of death, for both the mother and child. Women did not have the advantage of readily available birth control. Abortions, if performed at all, were dangerous. As well, mothers had to face the peril of multiple births, the absence of safe alternatives to breast-feeding, and the need to work unencumbered by babies. Even older offspring were not safe as famine, plagues, smallpox, dysentery, syphilis, and the like crept through history claiming the lives of countless children. Is it any wonder that mothers chose to selectively abandon their babies, commit infanticide, or send them to wet nurses? Nevertheless, the fact that they were able to carry out these deeds, regardless of the circumstance, calls into question the very essence of maternal instinct. Is there such a thing as maternal instinct? Is it different from maternal love? These are questions that have troubled researchers since the 1970s. I do not intend to provide answers to these questions in this thesis. I merely want to bring to the forefront the idea that expectations of mothers in the1970s and beyond have not been based on a universal, biological, instinctual, and womb-driven logic. Mothers have been consistently coerced into succumbing to societal pressures and have not been free to indulge in their own conceptions of motherhood.

The reported history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offered further insight on my journey to understand this mysterious construct of motherhood. The eighteenth century ushered in the Victorian era. Motherhood was exalted at this time due, to a great extent, to the Industrial Revolution. It was during the Industrial Revolution that

men left the family home to seek their livelihood and women stayed in the home to raise children and tend to household management. Never before had the gender roles been so well delineated. Mother was romanticized. She became idealized as the symbol of selfless giving and gentleness. She was seen as having no other abilities than to give birth and create a refuge for her family. She provided the prototype for June Cleaver of *Leave It to Beaver*, the 1950s sitcom, possibly caught between the pleasure of her newfound status and the pain of having no voice to express discontent.

It was also during the Victorian era that John Locke and Jacques Rousseau espoused their theories on child rearing. For the first time books, such as the ones written by Locke and Rousseau, were being read by women. Even though these two men were diametrically opposed in their theories, together they set the stage for "an overall movement towards concern and sympathy with the child" (Thurer, 1994, p. 196).

Concern and sympathy for mother certainly did not permeate the hearts and minds of people in the nineteenth century. In some ways, the feeble ground motherhood gained in the eighteenth century was lost in the nineteenth century. Although Mother as a mindless entity was still idealized, science took over from the Bible in disparaging women. Charles Darwin, in his evolutionary theory, claimed that men were driven to find a mate and women were driven to procreate. Darwin not only believed in this difference between men and women but also believed that the drive to procreate made women inferior. Darwin's theory was reinforced by the "popular but bogus science of craniology" (Thurer, 1994, p. 212) that claimed that men were smarter than women because their brains were larger. Even with these blatant beliefs about the limited intelligence of women, the feminist movement took hold in this century. Women were determined to

free themselves from domestic tyranny. They fought for equal rights, equal education, and equal work, all the while performing the daunting tasks of motherhood without question. Susan B. Anthony was the only women's rights activist to avoid what she ironically called "the ineffable joys of maternity" (quoted in Watkins, Rueda, & Rodriquez, 1992, p. 52). In fact, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the woman who organized the first women's rights convention, had seven children.

The nineteenth century was an era of contrasts and contradictions. Victorian prudish morals reigned in the home and yet child molestation and large-scale female child prostitution were rampant. Locke and Rousseau had turned people's attention to the well-being of children, and both of them regarded children as "delicate persons who evolved through developmental stages and needed constant loving care" (Thurer, 1994, p. 219). Yet in England nearly half the labor force was made up of children, and an estimated 2,250,000 North American children under 15 were full-time workers. Because of the toll of multiple births on their bodies, and possibly the desire for quality not quantity, mothers attempted to space childbirth by nursing and nursing longer. On the other hand, fathers, particularly in France, insisted on wet nurses because the church prohibited sex between a husband and a nursing mother (Hrdy, 1999).

Even feminists were participants in the multitude of contradictions of the nineteenth century. Many were not in favor of birth control because they feared that contraception would make women more available as sex objects. But great strides were made by the end of the nineteenth century. Anesthesia became available to ease the pain of birth, the nature of bacteria was understood, and new surgical techniques were developed. These three factors combined to make childbirth safer for both mother and

child and less painful for the mother. Also occurring at the end of the century was the discovery of pasteurization and the creation of the rubber nipple, allowing for a safe and viable alternative to breast-feeding and the opportunity for someone other than the mother or wet nurse to feed the infant. And, finally, as Thurer (1994) so aptly expresses, "it was the acceptability of birth control that made mother love--on a macroscopic level--possible" (p. 223). Once mothers were able to control conception they no longer had to be subjected to such drastic measures as infanticide and were, therefore, freer to love the babies they gave birth to.

Strolling through the history of motherhood with anthropologist Sarah Hrdy (1999) and psychologist Shari Thurer (1994), shielded by the distance of the written word, I try to make sense of what I read. But I cannot stroll through history purely with the eyes and ears of a researcher. I walk with Hrdy and Thurer with a mother's heart and I am angry that I have been led astray. I am angry that I did not question the mother construct I embraced in the 1970s. I was enthralled by a particular myth and did not have the luxury of perspective. I was a single mother, in poverty, with a strong streak of perfectionism. It's not that I wasn't painfully aware of feminist issues. But I did not understand what effects the oppression of women had on the very ability of mothers to let themselves freely and confidently love their children and to find their own ways of mothering. How can we really know what maternal instinct is, or if it actually exists, when mothers have not been free to embrace their own constructs of motherhood? And, as incredulous as it may be, motherhood became even more complicated in the twentieth century.

Although there was not a lot of sympathy or concern for mothers during the nineteenth century they were still as exalted as they had been in the eighteenth century. The ideal of Mother, not the woman who is mother, was placed upon a pedestal. In the early twentieth century mothers fell from that pedestal. Fighting toe to toe with men for the rights they deserved made it indisputably obvious that women were a gender to be reckoned with. Yet these feisty women were the backbone of motherhood (Thurer, 1994).

Motherhood's fall from grace has also been attributed to the rise of science in the early 1900s. Science had a twofold effect. On one hand, science threatened to elevate motherhood into the position professional. A mother could take her child's temperature, put her baby on a schedule, and record and chart everything from feeding times to bowel movements. She had a new and impressive vocabulary, which included words such as *unhygienic*, *bacteria*, and *vitamins*. On the other hand, faith in mothers instinctively knowing what to do was faltering. Now she needed to consult a specialist or read a manual in order to perform her job with precision. In 1914, a White House conference was held in the United States to declare Mother's Day a national holiday and to establish a mechanism for disseminating expert child-rearing advice to working-class mothers. Motherhood was truly becoming a profession (Hrdy, 1999).

As the twentieth-century mother came down from her pedestal and became a professional one would have hoped that the move would afford her a position of respectability. A woman was no longer a chattel of her husband, she had control over her own body, she had the vote, and she was no longer valued just because she could reproduce. Strong female figures entered new territory and gained public acclaim. Women had fewer children than in previous centuries; more women attended college and

held jobs; and female professions, such as nursing and social work, became available (Hrdy, 1999). And, as stated previously, motherhood had been irreversibly affected by the advent of science. Mothering became more measured, more systematic, and the language of motherhood expanded to include the new scientific terms (Thurer, 1994). Shouldn't all of these changes mean that motherhood was finally coming into its own?

Why do I feel disturbed by this idea of professionalism of motherhood? Isn't it progress? To get a handle on my discomfort I looked up the word *profession* in the *DK Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* (1998). The definition of *profession* is "a vocation or calling, esp. one that involves some branch of advanced learning or science." I know that in order to qualify as a professional for most occupations, a person must study under the tutelage of learned people who are considered experts, or at least knowledgeable about their field. So who are the experts that mothers gain their professional knowledge from? Once again, it was men who dominated this newfound profession. Although there was a slight twist in the male dominance over a female affair, it was still present. I am not saying that rearing babies and children is solely a woman's job, I am simply saying that men can't mother and, therefore, they can't know a mother's experience. I have come to view this as a catch-22. Mothers were, thankfully, removed from the pedestal of the previous two centuries, and they were given credit, to an extent, for being intellectual beings. However, their new status was not built upon the knowledge of mothers, it was built upon the knowledge of others. My curiosity about professionalism led me to also look up the word *profess*, as I assumed that the words *professional* and *profession* have their roots in this word. I was surprised to find that *profess* means "claim openly to have

(quality or feeling) [or] pretend." If the root of the word *profession* means "to pretend," what does that suggest about the foundation laid by motherhood experts?

Who Were Those Experts?

The professionals who laid the foundations of motherhood in the first half of the twentieth century were theorists, educators, psychiatrists, and scholars. Very few of them were women and none that I am aware of worked collaboratively with mothers. Research seemed to be based on using mothers, children, and animals for observation rather than eliciting mothers' stories. And even a simplified overview of child-rearing theorists is enough to make a person's head spin. The modern trend began with Locke and Rousseau in the eighteenth century and from there momentum grew, picking up in the late 1800s and snowballing into the twentieth century. A mother needs a degree in Child and Youth Care to make sense of the complex, competing, and contradictory ideas generated by these theorists. Fortunately I have such a degree, although it was achieved much too late to be useful in mothering my own children. I have corroborated my academic knowledge with a dependable text on child development written by William Crain (1992) in order to present a concise and correct overview of some of the eminent childhood theorists.

To begin to make sense of this onslaught of child-rearing ideas it is important to have at least a superficial understanding of Locke and Rousseau (Crain, 1992), as they are the founding fathers of modern motherhood theories. Locke was an environmentalist in that he believed that whatever a child became in adulthood was completely due to learning and experience. In fact, Locke stated that a child is born with a mind that is a blank slate or a *tabula rasa*. He felt children should learn self-control and discipline and recommended reward and punishment (though not physical punishment) and repetition as

methods of learning and character development. Conversely, Rousseau believed that children are not born blank slates, but rather are born free spirits who become slaves to social order. Nature is the child's guide, according to Rousseau. Children grow to be independent-thinking nonconformists if left to work in harmony with Nature itself through the normal developmental stages of childhood. He felt that children should be left to learn from their own mistakes and successes and not be molded by outside value judgments through reward and punishments. Rousseau is considered the father of developmental psychology. Although I don't know whether Locke had any children, it is interesting to note that Rousseau and his wife had five, all of whom he placed in foundling homes because he believed that he was too poor to provide a suitable life for them.

Even though their theories conflicted, Locke and Rousseau (Crain, 1992) shared a common focus of sympathy towards children. Before the eighteenth century the focus of attention was on survival not on sympathy towards children. However, severe living conditions in the Western world had eased and the time was ripe for new ways of viewing children. Both Locke and Rousseau had staunch supporters, some of whom expanded on their ideas. Locke's descendants were called *learning theorists* and his ideas laid the foundation for the works of the behaviorists, cognitive behaviorists, and social learning theorists, such as Watson, Pavlov, Skinner, and Bandura (Crain, 1992).

By dispensing pellets to rats, Skinner discovered that "behavior is determined by its consequences" (Crain, 1992, p.162). Skinner believed that it was important to be consistent and to reward desirable behavior and ignore undesirable behavior in order to shape the development of a child. He called this *operant conditioning*. Watson believed

that he could mold any child into any type of adult he wanted them to be, whether it be doctor, lawyer, or thief, by simply controlling the child's environment. His most famous research was done with an infant named Albert, whom he conditioned--in what would now be considered an unethical manner--to be frightened of rats, by making a loud noise each time the baby saw a white rat. Albert Bandura, a social learning theorist, felt that children learned from observing other people's behavior and noticing the consequences. In other words, he didn't believe that behavior was learned strictly through reinforcement.

Descendants of Rousseau's theories (Crain, 1992) were considered *developmentalists* although there was a great deal of diversity among their ideas. Gesell keenly followed in Rousseau's footsteps with his theory of *developmental maturation*. He was child centered and was devoted to the idea that children have an innate wisdom regarding their development and should not be pushed to go beyond their developmental readiness. Freud also believed in biological maturation, but he thought that a child's social experiences played a role in development. Each one of Freud's five stages of psychosexual development, *oral*, *anal*, *phallic*, *latency*, and *genital*, are rife with potential dangers. Premature toilet training, for example, could lead to a fixation with or a regression to the anal stage in adulthood, resulting, perhaps, in stinginess, frugality, or stubbornness.

Erikson expounded on Freud's stages by adding three more stages that encompassed adulthood. He was also more thorough in his examination of stages and, as a result, included a socially focused struggle for each stage. For example, *trust versus mistrust* are negotiated in the oral stage and *autonomy versus shame and guilt* in the anal stage. Piaget, on the other hand, believed in an invariant sequence of stages, but unlike

maturationists he did not believe these stages were genetically determined. He believed they resulted from the child exploring and making sense of her environment and developing ever more complex ways of thinking. Vgotsky, a Russian scholar, agreed with Piaget's idea that children needed to explore their environments in order to develop, but, unlike Piaget, Vgotsky believed that children needed formal instruction in order to push them beyond their current level of confidence.

I believe it is obvious from the opposing perspectives of the learning theorists and the developmentalists--let alone the variations within each perspective--that advice from professionals was at the least complex and at the most overwhelming. Each theory espoused its own set of instructions for educating and rearing children. Each one posed potential problems for children in adulthood if their mothers did not heed the expert advice and follow their instructions. Learning theorists might have feared that children left to evolve as nature intended, with minimal adult guidance, would become anarchists, unable to conform to societal rules. On the other hand, developmentalists might have worried that children molded through external consequences and conditioned responses, with little regard for their intrinsic natures, would become conformists unable to think for themselves.

Mothering in the early twentieth century in North America was predominantly influenced by behaviorism. Dr. Luther Emmett Holt (Thurer, 1994) was the child-rearing guru of the first quarter of the century. Holt was a pediatrician who wrote the book *The Care and Feeding of Children*, a title that more than hints at the philosophical perspective of its author. He was a powerful advocate of scientific mothering and his instruction included a propensity for schedules, a focus on regularity and discipline, and a disdain for

affection lest it spread germs. Watson (Thurer, 1994), of the infamous experiment with poor Albert and the white rat, followed on the heels of Holt. Unlike Holt, Watson was not a pediatrician but rather a behavioral psychologist. Watson controlled the thinking of the second quarter of the twentieth century with ideas that were even more rigid than Holt's. Punctuality, schedules, and discipline reigned and mothers were even more adamantly cautioned not to kiss or hug their children, only now it was not because of the fear of the spread of germs but because of the fear of spoiling the child. According to German sociologist Yvonne Schutze (as quoted in Harris, 1998), Watson, was "the first to attempt to scientifically supervise the *psychological* relationship between mother and child" (p. 85). Watson also wrote a child-rearing guide entitled *Psychological Care of Infant and Child.* Under Holt's guidance mothers had been responsible for the physical well-being of their children. Then with Watson's new psychological perspective the mother's role expanded to include responsibility for her child's psychological health.

It is interesting to note that three of the human being's most basic inner urges were either strongly discouraged or controlled during this behaviorist influenced period. The need for nourishment, for one, was tampered with in that mothers were cautioned not to breast-feed their babies, thus reducing the natural process of suckling of the young to an interaction between bottle and baby. Not only that, but mothers were also told to put their babies on feeding schedules, thus completely ignoring nature's hunger signals. As well, human touch and expressions of love were seen as detrimental to children's psychological health, supposedly rendering them weak and spoiled. And finally, the child's natural instinct to eliminate was seen as needing to be regulated by adult interference. Under Holt's direction toilet training was to start as early as 2 to 3 months;

under Watson's it was to begin at 1 month. It seems that the intrinsic nature of the human being was essentially stifled.

Although I am only a voyageur of the past, viewing it solely through the window of the written word, I feel a deep indignation. I can only imagine the internal anguish of the mothers who obediently followed the popular advice of these culturally dominant male experts. They must have cried out in silent anguish as they stifled the urge to cuddle and caress their precious babies or to hold their toddlers when they skinned a knee. The very desire to mother well and to do the right thing drove mothers to follow the advice of experts, the professionals who professed to know. I am sure many mothers rebelled against the advice and many escaped the pressure to conform, as literature alludes to the fact that it was primarily middle-class women who latched onto these ideas. I am also sure that there were mothers for whom the advice resonated, for whom it was not a struggle. But what about the women who denied their inner urges and followed the advice of the experts they trusted only because they wanted to be good mothers? What about the babies and children who yearned to be held and told they were loved? These are the very children who became the parents of my generation.

While Holt and Watson were having their way with the mothers of North America during the first half of the twentieth century, Freud, the psychoanalyst from Vienna, was sowing the seeds of an idea that would change the face of motherhood for at least the next 50 years. Freud, whom I have previously mentioned within the context of developmental theories, was interested in much more than developmental stages. According to Thurer (1994), Freud was the bridge between the rigid behaviorist era and the beginning of the more permissive postwar years. Children, claimed Freud, have instinctual drives fueled

primarily by sexual impulses and aggression, causing them to interact with the *objects* in their environment. The word *objects* may be interchanged with the word *people* or *mother*. So mothers, in Freud's view, are faceless and either inhibit or aid in the fulfillment of their children's impulses. Infant and child behavior which had previously been viewed as something to be controlled, became seen as essential for development and not to be trifled with.

More World News

Before discussing Freud further I feel compelled to mention a few more contradicting but fascinating notions regarding mothering in the first half of the 1900s. My intention is to emphasize the blatant lack of an absolute global Truth regarding child rearing even though the early twentieth century declared itself to be child-focused in a way that no time before had ever been. Once again I turn to Thurer (1994) to guide me through this tumultuous period. As the prestige of children grew so did government interventions, such as health care services and welfare to poverty-stricken mothers. What constituted a good mother by North American standards was viewed as beyond the capability of poverty-stricken mothers. Consequently, daycare centers were formed so that these presumably unfortunate women could be taught the new scientific method of parenting and their children could receive at least a modicum of proper care. Apparently poverty signified that a woman was incapable of mothering without expert intervention. Daycare was for the underprivileged; certainly not for the middle-class mother. However, World War II marked a significant change of heart regarding daycare. Suddenly women had to enter the workforce to support the war movement and daycare conveniently became an appropriate place of care for children of even middle-class women.

These mid-twentieth century years marked a time in which the hope for the future was seen to rest on the shoulders of the children. And yet, birth rates were falling. Perhaps women of the developed world were still recovering from the centuries of multiple births that so wreaked havoc on their lives. The fear of a diminishing population took precedence, however, and in many European countries multiple births were seen as a patriotic duty of women. Prizes were awarded to women depending on the number of births they had. For example, in France a bronze medal was given to women who had 5 children, a silver medal for those who had 8, and a vermeil medal for 11 or more. In Italy a meeting with Mussolini was arranged for any woman who had more than 14 children. In Germany, Aryan mothers were not only encouraged to breed but the obsession with the notion of racial purity added a sick twist to the demand. Only white-skinned, blond Aryan women were seen as worthy of being mothers, not because of a predisposition or skill, but because of their physical attributes. I am left wondering how the North American child-rearing experts would judge the mothering capabilities of these women who had lost all sense of political and economic equality, and who were likely exhausted by the shear number of births, let alone the overwhelming job of raising many children.

A cursory look at Russia and Israel will do much to emphasize the blatantly discrepant motherhood ideologies throughout the world that were made popular in order to meet changing economic and political needs. The revolutionary founders of South Russia believed that maternal child rearing was a product of capitalism. They adhered to the ideal that children should be raised institutionally, thereby allowing for a more complete indoctrination of moral values and freeing women up to work alongside men. These ideas, though experimented with, never received wide support, and economic

disaster brought an end to it all, leaving children disease ridden, deserted, and hungry. Once Stalin came to power the responsibility of child rearing was returned to the family, primarily the mother. She was expected to work all day and care for her children and complete her domestic duties during her so-called free time.

Israel borrowed the Bolshevik idea of the institutionalization of child rearing and from this idea they developed the kibbutz. Children were not raised by their mothers on the kibbutz but by the whole community. In fact, they did not even live with their mothers. The theory was that children raised by the entire community would be loyal to the country and the common good and not specifically to their families. Even in this period of time when children were considered the hope for the future, mothers were still pawns of social, economic, and political climates and still did not have a voice.

Back to the Experts

Freud has had such an impressive and pervasive effect on the psyches of the peoples of the Western world, and eventually motherhood, that he is worth exploring in a little more detail. He was born in 1856 in Vienna, "the home of the frivolous and decadent" (Osborne, 1993, p. 97). This description fits well with the historical information put forth so far, in that it seems to take times of plenty to provide a safe environment for attention to be paid to matters other than survival. Once the tensions of the outside world are somewhat in abeyance the mind is free to ponder abstract concepts. Before his death in 1939, Freud had a tremendous influence on the field of psychology. However, his impact on mothering, at least in North America, was not felt until after his death. The North American public was not yet ready to accept the idea that a child was in

any way driven by sexual energy. Nonetheless, after World War II Freud's ideas caught on like wildfire.

Freud's theories have had such an influence on Western society that Freudian terms have become a part of everyday language. Words like *projection*, *repression*, *resistance*, and *Freudian slips* are understood by a large percentage of the population. Freud taught us that we have an *ego*, a *super ego*, and an *id*. He coined the term *psychoanalysis* and let us know that the vast, amorphous nether region called the *unconscious*, or *id*, is only accessible through complicated psychoanalytic techniques. Consequently, he brought us a new frontier to conquer. His ideas were the antithesis of Watson's. According to Freud, children were the captains of their own ships, navigating through the treacherous territory of drives and impulses. Unlike Watson, who wanted to tame the impetuous child in order to mold the personality, Freud believed it was the child that determined his or her personality and should be given free rein to do so. Initially, Freud believed that mothers were benign and it was fathers who had the most effect on children's lives (Crain, 1992).

Originally this idea of the ineffectual, benign mother was prevalent only within the psychoanalytic world. Pathology was believed to exist within the individual and blame had not yet shifted to include the family system. By the time Freudian ideas hit mainstream parenting manuals, they had been adulterated to the point that Freud may not have agreed with the concepts credited to him. Jung, Reich, Adler, and Rank (Osborne, 1993) were all Freudians during the early 1900s. They eventually broke rank with Freud and, in due course, psychoanalytic theories were varied and bountiful. Each one of these men had an impressive influence on the field of psychoanalysis as well as on the way we

view children and, therefore, how we mother them. Feminist Freudians challenged Freud and broadened his theories from being primarily biologically driven to socially driven. They accused Freud of having "womb envy" because it is women who hold the "ultimate power of creativity" (Osborne, 1993, p. 133). By the end of World War II, Freud's followers had provided mother with a makeover and the benign turned potentially malevolent (Thurer, 1994). Furthermore, therapies and counseling challenged psychoanalysis as a way of healing emotional and psychological ills, and the focus moved from the pathology of the closed system of the individual person to the problem-saturated state of the family system. Each family member played an integral role in the whole system but the mother became the scapegoat. According to Thurer mother was "held to be the cause of her children's miseries, and indeed, of the ills that beset humankind" (p. 247).

As we moved into the second half of the twentieth century we brought with us a construct of mother that was unprecedented. This modern postwar mother was bestowed with a power she had never known before. But one must not confuse this newfound power with personal power. She did not have the power to develop her own theories of motherhood, but merely the power to hinder, hurt, protect, and support her child. She was the accumulation of dozens of theories beginning with a trickle in the early eighteenth century and building to a crescendo by the 1950s. By midcentury mother was drained of life. Not that she had much life previous to this point. But I think the mother of the 1950s was particularly void of spirit. She was enveloped in *shoulds* and *should nots* to the point that she lost her personhood. At no other time in history, save the 1800s, had there been such a restrictive construct of the nuclear family and of the devoted, all-giving mother. In

fact, Thurer (1994) refers to the 1950s family construct as an "aberration" and claims that "had the 1950s not happened, today's blended families, birthrates, and illegitimacy rates would look normal" (p. 250).

By virtue of being born in 1949, I viewed the 1950s through the eyes of a child. I had no idea that my mother was a person with her own feelings, dreams, and goals. I thought she existed solely to take care of my sister and me, and there was very little in my environment to challenge this way of thinking. Television had entered our living rooms and become an instrument of propaganda. We, the children of the 1950s, watched advertisements showing mothers happily cleaning their houses, cooking meals, and baking delicious, nutritious snacks that they lovingly served to their children. We also watched television shows that portrayed mothers as antiseptically perfect: not a hair out of place, never frustrated or angry, intuitively aware of their children's every need, espousing subtle wisdom while being careful not to outshine their husbands, and, most of all, completely fulfilled by motherhood. Parents were supposedly happy together. They apparently never fought, and if they did it was behind closed doors. And if television's portrayal of our parents was accurate they most certainly did not have sex. Every sitcom on television showed Mum and Dad in pajamas to their ears, on top of the bedsheets with at least a full foot of space between them. They were only allowed quick pecks on the cheeks and fleeting hugs. Divorce was almost unheard of. I can recall only one child in my elementary and high school years that came from what was called a " broken home." The very word *broken* speak volumes about the bias of our culture. We were indoctrinated to expect the unattainable and to believe it was normal. One only has to

recall the 1999 Hollywood movie *Pleasantville* (Soderbergh, Kilik, Degus, & Ross) to grasp the superficial, one-dimensional, black-and-white reality of the 1950s.

Along with the influences of the media came the voice of Dr. Spock, the child-rearing guru of the postwar years. Spock gently cajoled mothers into giving up their rights as multifaceted human beings. He convinced them that their meaning in life, their joy, and their pleasure were derived from motherhood. Even with the most altruistic intentions, Spock in some ways dealt a cruel blow to motherhood by solidifying the prevailing tendency towards maternal guilt. What woman could live up to such ideals? Spock's expectation of maternal fulfillment was also accompanied by a confusing paradox embedded in the original title of his famous parenting book *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. The title implies that the mother, or caretaker, has a certain amount of common sense. In fact, Spock (1977) prefaced his book with a section entitled "Trust Yourself" and went on to claim "you know more than you think you do" (p. 1). And yet, as sociologist Susan Maushart (1999) points out, this message of trusting yourself was accompanied by 600 pages of expert advice.

The construct of the contrived, stilted, and seemingly shallow mother of the 1950s was short lived. The 1960s marked the dawn of a new age. Women once again rose up in arms against patriarchy. Unlike the suffragettes who fought for equality without questioning motherhood, the women of this new wave of feminism took a stance against it. As author Anne Roiphe (1997) points out, in the early days of feminism it became unfashionable to want to parent, and motherhood was thought of as a "secondary activity." Women who felt fulfilled by motherhood and desired to stay at home with their

children were condemned by members of their own gender. Women's Liberation, as it was originally called, had given birth to yet another reason for maternal guilt.

Coinciding with this renewed fight for women's equality and denigration of motherhood was a growing permissiveness in child rearing. Although the 1950s mother was much more permissive than generations of mothers before her, there was still a societal expectation that she raise obedient, polite, and well-mannered children. It seems that she struggled between two ideologies: one being that of empathy and leniency towards children in order to protect their newly discovered delicate psyches, and the other being that of rigid discipline and structure, a residue of the Watsonian behaviorists. Generally speaking the 1960s mother tended to let go of the need to control everything from toilet training to food consumption. She was more inclined to allow her children the freedom to make daily life decisions to the point that it was not uncommon for her to feel tyrannized by her children.

Although responsibility for this somewhat rampant permissive child-rearing practice lay at the feet of Freud and his followers, Dr. Dreikurs (1964), the well-known child psychiatrist and author of *Children: The Challenge*, identifies yet another reason for this shift in attitude towards children. Dreikurs credits this permissive attitude to the Western world's movement from an autocratic "superior-inferior" (p. 8) society to a democratic society. According to Dreikurs, as democratic principles became less a political ideal and more a "way of life" an upheaval occurred in the family home. Not only were women claiming equal status to men but society also viewed children as equal to adults. Dreikurs claimed that children were quick to adopt this idea of equality and would "no longer tolerate an autocratic dominant-submissive relationship" (p. 8.)

Unfortunately, democratic principles of parenting practices were in their infant stages. As a result, children born in the 1960s generally had few rules, grandiose expectations of their own personal power, and a great deal of freedom. If mothers were expected to cater to each individual child's needs and wishes, I am left wondering how she had time and energy to cater to any of her own needs and wishes.

Before plunging headlong into the 1970s, the era in which my mothering was situated and which informed my research, I want to take a moment to reflect. My intention behind summarizing hundreds of years of mothering in a relatively short chapter has not been to provide a detailed history of mothering, but rather to provide a perspective. I have written about patriarchal, societal, and socioeconomic influences on the construct of mother with a specific objective. In this brief summary I hoped to bring to light the idea that there is no such thing as a perfect mother or a perfect construct of motherhood. In fact, expectations of mothers have consistently changed from century to century and from country to country, and they are still in flux. Historically mother love was mediated by high mortality rates of both mother and child, poverty, and the struggle for survival. These factors continue to exact a toll on mothers' ability to love and care for their children. Differences between those that have and those that don't have are frequently made glaringly apparent even in the twenty-first century.

Some time ago I came across two articles, a page apart, in the *Times Colonist*, that blatantly demonstrated how circumstance is still a primary mediator in the creation of Mother. One article was obviously written for the middle-to-upper-class mother of the Western world. It was entitled *Birthday Party Survival Takes Planning* (2000). The purpose of the article was to help a mother organize a perfect birthday party for her child.

A quote from the article reads, "the average five-year-old has attended 24 parties and by age 10, the number triples. They have seen it all and done it all" (p. C5). The other article was about a 14-year-old girl in Toronto who was working to raise public awareness about child labor. According to the article ("Children's Plight," 2000) there are 250 million children in developing countries who have to work. The article made reference to a young Pakistani carpet-weaver who was rescued from bondage at age 4 and murdered at age 12. He spent his short life campaigning against child labor (p. C7).

Reading these two stories I thought about the mothers of all of these children. The mothers of the party-going children who have seen it all, and the mothers of the children doing hard labor who have also seen it all. We haven't escaped history. Poverty, war, famine, unsafe birthing conditions, multiple births, and the preference for male children, continue to mediate mothers' responses to their children, as does the privileged environment and expectations of the majority mothers in developed countries. And to further complicate matters, even in the seemingly affluent Western world not all women are caught up in the latest expert child-rearing advice, because they are overwhelmed by poverty, spousal abuse, or just plain physical and emotional survival. Some are driven by almost unfathomable reasons to commit infanticide and to abandon their babies.

In the summer of 2001, a woman in Victoria was accused of infanticide in the drowning death of her 10-month-old baby and a woman in Calgary was charged in the death of her two babies. There have been a numerous well-noted cases of young women in the United States giving birth and dumping their babies in garbage bins. Social workers (Helm, 2000) in Berlin, Germany, have established a system by which mothers can anonymously drop unwanted babies through a chute in a daycare center, in order to

prevent infant deaths or unsafe abandonment. Officials in a number of American states have considered instigating a similar system.

Through my short historical journey I have come to understand that motherhood, mother love, and maternal instinct are very complicated constructs. Hrdy (1999) calls into question the hitherto accepted notions of maternal instinct. Thurer (1994) challenges the construct of the perfect mother. And Harris (1999), in her book *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do*, asserts that the emphasis on the importance of parental--let alone maternal--nurturing is sorely misguided and that parents have minimal influence on the adults their children become. And still the market is flooded with limitless books and countless experts espousing grandiose motherhood ideologies that have the potential to erode the self-confidence of even the most self-assured mother. I was one of those mothers. Thankfully, this brief historical journey has provided me with a fresh lens with which to view myself as a mother and a context in which to situate the overwhelming motherhood messages of the 1970s and 1980s. I now understand how perfectionism has managed to have such a tight grasp around the throats of mothers and how guilt has found such a ripe environment for survival.

Mystory

I had originally intended to include the 1970s and 1980s in the history chapter but I discovered that I could not adequately express the essence of this time period from an historical perspective. It was not history to me; it was mystory. Consequently I chose to tell the story in my voice and to address it to the two most significant people on my motherhood journey. The reason I have chosen to not go beyond the 1980s is because it was my children's early years that most influenced my mothering and which sparked my interest in terms of this thesis

A Letter To Dustin and Djuna

As I write this letter I wonder whether you will read it in its rightful place in my thesis or in isolation from the rest of my writing. I am aware that reading a thesis can seem like a daunting task even if it is written by your mother. Consequently, I have no investment in either of you doing so. You have already given me the most precious of gifts with your enthusiastic willingness to participate in my research journey. I would, however, love you to read this letter because I believe it will offer you further insight into your childhood and into my motherhood.

One of the chapters in my thesis entitled, *How We Got Here From There*, consists of a 34-page summary of the history of motherhood up to and including the 1960s. The process of writing this history and the resultant summary proved to be vital to my heart and the heart of my thesis. It provided me with a perspective on motherhood that was impossible to accomplish while immersed in the role of mother. Without this perspective I would not have had sufficient insight and information to question the manufactured expectations of and attitudes towards mothers throughout history. Nor would I have

known that there is no such thing as a perfect mother or one ideology of what a mother is supposed to be. I was too busy trying to attain this illusive ideal to question its validity.

I do not claim to speak of every mother's experience. I speak for myself but also for a particular societal group of women that could best be described by such cliché words as baby boomer, hippie, and counterculture. We were the offspring of a generation of people who had survived a world war and a depression. Many of our parents had faced battle in the front line. Those that hadn't most certainly experienced other emotional and physical hardships that are the natural ramifications of war. For example, your grandmother can still vividly recall terrifying incidences of running for bomb shelters not knowing if she and her family would be wounded before they reached safety or what would be left of their homes and neighborhoods once they reemerged. Your grandfather was in the Merchant Navy and spent 4 months as a prisoner of war after his ship was torpedoed off the coast of Africa. He returned to Canada only to be plagued by the after effects of beriberi and malaria for the rest of his life. When victory was finally declared these survivors worked hard to regain normality and to reaffirm the status quo. They were determined to recover the monetary and material losses brought about by the war and equally determined to insure that their children did not endure the same hardships they had.

We did not suffer the hardships of our parents but instead of appreciating what they accomplished we called their values into question. We resented their expectations of us. We didn't want to sell our souls to our jobs for the almighty dollar as we believed that they had done. We judged our fathers for working their entire lives for one company with nothing to show for it but a gold watch upon retirement. We wanted to explore our

sexuality and experiment with commitment, unlike our parents whom we concluded had wasted their youth on monogamy and matrimony. We would not settle for mediocrity. We wanted freedom. We questioned authority. We protested. In fact, we heartily opposed the war that gained prominence in our time. Although the Vietnam War was not in the same class as World War II it was monumental in its own right. It provided the impetus for hundreds of thousands of people world wide to speak up against war as a means of resolving conflict. Could any of us forget Kent State University? Innocent students shot dead by military police during a peaceful demonstration. The Vietnam War symbolized the tone, tenacity, and tempermant of the rebellious baby boomers. Our parents stood together in support of a war and we stood together to condemn a war.

Not only did we challenge the ideologies of war, work ethics, marriage, and mediocrity we were also determined to live our lives as differently from our parents as we could. We dropped acid, embraced rock and roll, experimented with sex, dropped out of university, traveled the world with a pack on our backs, and used our thumbs as a ticket to transportation. Love-in, be-in, flower power, make love not war, were some of words and phrases coined by this new generation.

As I tell you this I am conscious of the fact that it is not all new to you. The reputation of my generation is well known even to this day. But I want to paint a picture that will provide a backdrop for the culture into which you were born. Not every young person of my generation rebelled against their parents and the system. And not everyone who did rebel retained his or her idealism. Many rejoined the society they detested in their youth. In fact, you would be amazed to find that many adults in your life, whom you would least expect, could surprise you with stories of the exciting, freewheeling, hippie

lifestyle of their youth. Nonetheless, the baby boomers challenge to the status quo did have a lasting effect on many people, and I was one of them.

I was a member of a large population of people whom maintained a commitment to the ideology and lifestyle choices espoused by the rebellious baby boomers. Though never a radical, as it was not my nature to be extreme, I did not accept the societal norms that were integral to the culture in which I was raised. I did not succumb to the pressures to conform that were just as much a part of the baby boomer generation as the desire to rebel. And I was not alone. For some unknown reason, the west coast of North America was the heartland of the grassroots movement that began in the 1960s and continues to this day. The small town in which you were raised had been thoroughly inundated by the counterculture movement. This was what attracted me to move there. I trusted that I would find solace, support, and friendship in an environment of like-minded people.

When I think back on this early period of mothering a word that comes to mind is *overwhelm*. I was definitely overwhelmed by the responsibility of single motherhood but it was more than that. The counterculture idealism embraced by my peers brought with it a combination of unachievable expectations and intriguing opportunities. Attitudes towards family structure, religion, physical and emotional health, women's roles, and education, no longer adhered to the predictable formula of the 1950s. I realized that we were involved in exciting times of change and I resonated with the new ways of thinking. Unfortunately, I was so preoccupied with following through with the expectations these new ways of thinking brought to my daily life that I was incapable of assessing whether they were possible to achieve.

Although I would never have accepted the traditional role of wife and mother, I most certainly assumed that I would raise a family with a life partner. That didn't happen. What did happen was a reconfiguration of the family structure. One-parent families and blended families became the norm. In fact, I recall a recent conversation with two young adults who joked that it was common amongst their friends to wonder who their parents were going to be by the end of tree planting season. Tree planting was a typical occupation for many parents and it was within these residential, summer-long camps that intimate relationships would end and new ones would begin. Yet, not all of society was in agreement with this new family structure. We spent our first month in Nelson in a motel because each time a potential landlord asked me what my husband did for a living his house was mysteriously rented when I replied that I was a single mother.

This refusal to commit to relationships that were less than ideal and the resultant reconfiguration of the family structure was commonplace to both of you. However, I wonder whether you understand that I did not enter into single motherhood by choice and that my preference would have been to provide you with both a mother and a father. Having a father for you and partner for me could have made all three of our lives easier. But I learned early that having no partner at all was better than feeling as though I had a less than dependable partner.

Although I did not choose single motherhood I did willing accept other influences in our lives that I previously described with words like; opportunities, expectations, overwhelm, and idealism. Some of it you are aware of but what you might not know is that the life we lived was not the norm but the exception. The circumstances that made it

the exception brought with them many more pressures to be a perfect mother than even those experienced by my mother's generation.

Religious education was one duty of mothering that changed radically in the 1970s. No longer was faith limited to mainstream religion. Gurus were in abundance. Enlightenment was the goal. Ram Das, Rajneesh, Yogananda, Baba Free John, and Mahareeshi were popular spiritual guides offering the new generation a revival of faith and a reprieve from the religious dogma many had rebelled against. Yoga and meditation took the place of prayer. Past lives and their impact on the present became a focus of concern, as did actions in the present because of their Karmic impact on the future. Some people even struggled with the choice between living the life of the householder or rejecting family for the austere life of the yogi. Do you remember retreats with Baba Hari Das, the silent yogi with the long flowing hair? He was the one that gave me my name. Do you remember Sufi dancing, and the chanting we used to do together, and the pictures throughout our house of spiritual teachers? All of it was an attempt to open our hearts to a life beyond superficial responsibilities, pleasures, and hardships.

Spiritual education was not the only responsibility rendered both more complicated and more exciting for mothers of my peer group. Feeding our children also became more complex. My mother's generation had been coached by experts to put their faith in the newly invented processed foods. TV dinners, white bread, Cheez Wiz, Kool-Aid, instant puddings, and cake mixes, as well as the traditional meat and potato fare were acceptable food choices for our mothers. We, on the other hand, turned our noses up at what we judged as a misguided perspective on nutrition. Meat and potatoes gave way to a vegetarian diet, which was deemed not only to be healthier but certainly more

humane. We replaced processed foods with whole foods, and commercially frozen and canned vegetables with an abundance of raw and steamed organic vegetables. I wholeheartedly adopted this healthy approach to nutrition but with it came the burden of preparation.

This burden of preparation included a weekly drive to a farm rather than a quick stop at the corner store. Yogurt wasn't store bought but carefully cultured at home. Fruit and vegetables were either consumed as fresh from the garden as possible or were canned and frozen in the home. I clearly remember our pantry lined with canning jars filled with fruits, jams, and pickles; and the freezer overflowing with berries, vegetables, and fresh pressed juice made with apples gathered from abandoned orchards. Just as clearly I remember the hours that went into accomplishing this. Even your baby food was ground, mashed, and strained by hand because commercially bought baby food was not considered healthy. Cooking a vegetarian meal was much more labor intensive than cooking meat. And there were those people who added to their workload by cultivating organic gardens and raising goats, cows, and chickens to provide themselves and others with chemical free eggs, dairy products, and meat.

I am not suggesting that my peers cornered the market on cultivating and preserving food. Many of my contemporaries, though not of the counterculture community, carried on family traditions of hands on, wholesome food preparation. But *we* did it out of a sense of righteousness. We did not accept the belief that all food was created equal. Preservatives, additives, synthetic fertilizers, and pesticides were rampant during those years and popular media continued to portray these foods as healthy and delicious. We were determined to not repeat the mistakes of our mothers, many of whom

had been fooled by experts into thinking that white flour, white sugar, and processed foods were healthy choices for feeding children.

Attention to a healthy diet went hand in hand with an alternative approach to the treatment of disease. Traditional medicine became suspect. We were much less inclined than our parents to view doctors as infallible experts and we turned our attention to the prevention of illness and to a natural approach to the treatment of disease. Naturopathy, homeopathy, iridology, herbology, and even less tangible forms of healing such as Reiki and psychic healing were often preferred over allopathic medicine. It is not that these approaches were new. They had simply been relegated to the category of quackery by a 20th century North American society who idolized statistics, measurable outcomes, and supposed scientific evidence. However, my peers did not have the same confidence in science as our parents' generation and as a result grew wary of mainstream medicine and its heavy reliance on prescription drugs.

This confidence in the natural approach to healing, though embraced by my peers, was not accepted by the general public or by the medical profession. Perhaps you can imagine the internal struggle that sometimes accompanied my decision to resist medical advice in regards to your childhood illnesses. Should I make the wrong decision and you became sicker I was at risk of being condemned for my choices. You were born at a time when antibiotics were seen as a panacea and were administered for every sniffle, cough, or earache. Can you imagine the look in your doctor's eyes when she found the garlic clove your ear, which I used to treat an ear infection, or her reaction to my choice to give you echinacea and golden seal instead of antibiotics?

Physical and spiritual health were not the only aspects of life that my peer group sought to improve upon. Conservation and environmental groups gained momentum. Individuals became accountable for post consumer waste. For example, there was a newfound recognition of the difference between biodegradable and non-biodegradable substances. Although disposable diapers were popular many of us chose the drudgery of cloth diapers in order to protect the environment. Peace organizations were still strong and active but the center of attention by the time you were born was nuclear war and nuclear fallout from waste sites. I had a close friend who had a bumper sticker that said, "I wanted to save the world, but I couldn't find a babysitter." Motherhood and saving the world do not always go hand-in-hand because both take considerable time and attention. And yet our children are the very motivation behind our attempt to save the world.

I had not intended to write such a long letter. Once begun I have found it hard to condense such an important period, in both your lives and mine, to an even briefer summary than I have so far. I have only a few points left to cover that I feel are of particular significance. One is education. When I was a child mothers registered their children in the neighborhood public school, or perhaps a private Catholic school, and put their faith in the education system. Not so for the mothers of my generation. When you were of school age traditional education was seen as lacking. Mothers worried that their children's spirits would be stifled and their natural desire to learn would be crushed. Teachers were not automatically viewed as experts of education. Alternative schools flourished. What this looked like for you and I was that I hand picked your teachers through community reputation and by individual interview. When it appeared that mainstream education was not doing you justice I moved you to the newly founded

Waldorf School that dedicated to the nourishment of the heart, the mind, and the will of the child. It was not easy to pay private school fees but like other Waldorf parents, I found ways to do it. It took constant vigilance during your school years to assure that you were being treated well and getting the best that education could offer.

In some ways the expectations of women in the 1970s and 1980s ran counter to the lifestyle embraced by my female peers. The feminist movement experienced a resurgence during the 1960s and motherhood was condemned by feminists in favor of seemingly more worthwhile and worldly endeavors. They had, however, retracted their condemnation of motherhood by the time you were born. I am sure, nonetheless, that they had not intended the pendulum to swing so far as to embrace such child centered and domestic lifestyles as my peers and I were engaged in. But there was a difference.

I know that I am not alone in saying that my peers felt courageous and strong. We made the lifestyle choices that we did from a place of honor. We had experienced the consumer-orientated society that began in our childhood and had escalated since then, and we wanted to be free of it. We chose to take a stand against marriage if it was more of a drain than a support and we were proud in our single motherhood. We formed a tight community. We looked after each other's children, we stood up for each other, and took care of each other. We chose the labor-intensive food preparations for the sake of our own health as well as our children's, not because it was demanded of us. We embraced the more complicated and time-consuming alternative to mainstream medicine because we believed in it. We engaged wholeheartedly in our children's education because we felt protective of their learning. It was at times exhausting to keep up with all of the demands

of this lifestyle, especially as a single parent, but it was a choice and it felt right at the time.

A fascinating spin-off of the feminist influence during the 1970s was a movement towards women reclaiming their bodies. Books such as, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1976) and *Hygieia: A Woman's Herbal* (Parvati, 1977) encouraged us to rejoice in our bodies and to educate ourselves regarding women's health issues. Informal, in-home clinics emerged in which women fitted themselves for birth control devices. Women began to take control of their own healing through herbal and natural remedies and by seeking out similar minded female doctors. Euphemisms for male and female body part were discouraged, particularly in regards to child rearing. We were committed to breaking down taboos and freely using the words *penis* and *vagina* with our children in order to promote acceptance of their bodies. Our attempt to embrace our own bodies and celebrate our womanhood flooded over into an attempt to raise our girl children to do the same and our boys to respect and honor this process.

Accompanying this movement towards women reclaiming their bodies was a growing awareness regarding gender inequality in child rearing. This was not a new concept but it certainly gained a place of priority with my peers. We took great pains to assure that both male and female children were treated equally and were given every opportunity to explore activities that had previously been classified as gender specific. We allowed boys to play with dolls, we taught them that crying was not just for girls and sissies, and we made sure they participated in domestic chores previously assigned to girls. At the same time we encouraged our daughters to play with cars and trucks and join the local hockey or baseball teams. We taught them that crying was only one way of

expressing their feelings and that assertiveness was another, and we made sure they shared the so-called boy chores with their brothers. Remember the tape *Free To Be . . . You and Me*? (Hart, 1985). The tape was filled with songs like *It's Okay To Cry* (*Crying takes the sad out of you*), *Parents Are People*, *Housework*, and *William's Doll*. I don't suppose you had any idea at the time that these were not just meaningless sing-along songs but that they were designed to encourage you to assimilate values that I cherished.

At the crux of all of these new ways of thinking, behaving, and mothering was the view that children were intelligent, wise, and perhaps even enlightened beings. This attitude was partially borne out of our intrigue with Eastern religions. Not only did most of these religions instruct us to have respect for all living creatures but they also taught us that each of us have experienced many, unremembered lifetimes. Chronological age had no bearing on the number of times a soul had incarnated. The possibility, therefore, existed that any one of our children could be wise old souls; perhaps even spiritual guides for their parents. This conviction that children were wise and intelligent was also a consequence of the rebellious baby boomer mentality. We had tenaciously fought to find our own voices, we had questioned authority and had not allowed so-called experts to control our lives. Now we wanted to cultivate this attitude in our children. If we wanted our children to be self confident, self aware, and self actualized we had to give them the freedom to explore their world, experience the consequence of their actions, and we had to respect their opinions.

I took these notions about children's intelligence and wisdom especially seriously. I followed what could be described as mothering guidelines that were gleaned from books, parenting classes, therapy groups, the teachings of Baba Hari Das, Waldorf School

philosophy, and conversations with like-minded mothers. I was very careful not to insult or personally put down either of you even if I was furious. I was committed to making sure you understood that when I was mad at either of you it was because of something you did and not because of who you were. Sometimes I even yelled, "And don't think I don't love you just because I'm mad at you!" It was of primary importance to me that you felt loved, and safe in the fact that I would never reject or leave you. I took interpersonal communication classes so that I could learn to speak responsibly, clearly, and without blame. I made a point of listening to you and treating your feelings and thoughts with consideration and respect. I attempted to teach you to speak the truth and to listen to your conscience. And, as well, I was dedicated to talking about conflicts, concerns, or upsets in order to prevent unresolved resentments. I am not professing to have been perfect in carrying through with these ideals, as you of all people can attest to. I am merely saying that they were my guiding principles and I did my best to adhere to them.

The last, but in some ways the most significant, impact on my mothering that I want to discuss is the family therapy movement that was at its peak in the 1970s and 1980s. What family therapy succeeded in doing was making epidemic the belief that children were delicate beings that needed to be safe guarded from harm if they were to grow up to be emotionally healthy adults. Doctors, psychologists, child development specialists, and educators brought to the attention of mothers the myriad and sundry ways in which harm could be done to their children. To say that we were child focused would be an understatement. To ensure that our children grew to be well functioning and psychologically healthy adults we had to welcome them to this world through a gentle, drug-free, preferably home birth. We were expected to breast feed for at least a year and

some women nursed for 5-6 years for both the physical and emotional health of the infant. We were encouraged to have the baby sleep with us and there was even a movement towards having all the children sleep in the family bed, I think until they grew up and left home. We worried about having too many or not enough boundaries and about being too strict or not strict enough. A quote that I cited in another chapter in this thesis sums up his way of thinking quite accurately, "We now understand that what we do with our children, how we feel and behave when we are with them, has profound ramifications on their lives" (Swigart, 1998, p. 11)

Self-help books were rampant. Shelves were filled with books geared towards adults who desired to improve their lives through healing their childhood suffering, and towards mothers who wanted to prevent such damage with their own children. Some of us went so far as to attend intensive, residential workshops to deal with our childhood issues. I know that you have memories of my participation in residential Gestalt and Rebirthing workshops. I don't know if you know that this participation was not something that I had in common with the majority of the population. Even amongst my peers there were only a small portion of people actively involved in self awareness and self healing through personal therapy. My experience with therapy served to reinforce my commitment to being the best mother I could. Everything that I learned about my childhood experiences caused me to be hypersensitive to the likelihood of unintentionally harming you.

Breath work was the main tool of rebirthing and during rebirthing workshops we would use breathing techniques to release memories that had been trapped in our bodies since before or after our birth. Destructive or hurtful childhood experiences would be the

subject of group discussion after the rebirth experience and a common outcome of these discussions was the generation of negative messages received from our family of origin. These messages commonly included such themes as; it is not okay to trust people, it is not okay to feel good about myself, I am not lovable, it's not okay to be sexual, it is not okay to be myself, my body is unattractive, and on and on. Our acknowledgment of these negative messages was one of the first steps in healing, as was the recognition of the source of the messages; most commonly our parents.

Gestalt therapy utilized other methods than the breath to get to the source of our discontent. A person might come with complaints such as a dissatisfaction with the quality of her intimate relationships, an inability to succeed at a particular life goal, a life long feeling of inadequacy, or a deep sense of loneliness. Even though the methods varied from those of rebirthing the cause of upset still traced to the family of origin. I entered into both rebirthing and gestalt therapies because I experienced an inability to express or communicate my feelings about a number of life events that had been exceedingly difficult for me. I had come to the conclusion, supported by the code of beliefs of these therapies that I needed to take responsibility for dealing with each of these painful events in my life before they took control of me.

On one hand I am eternally grateful for the years I spent involved in both Gestalt and Rebirthing. I touched deep places within myself that I had previously ignored and undernourished. I became skilled at communication and I learned a tremendous amount about my family, my intimate relationships, and myself. On the other hand, I regret that my captivation with therapy only served to entrench my conviction that I could not avoid damaging you, just as my parents had damaged me. I had all but inhaled the in vogue

parenting books. I had a command of the popular therapeutic jargon that was used to describe childhood damage, such as *adult child of an alcoholic*, *codependent*, *enmeshed*, and *inner child*. And as a result of my therapeutic work I had firsthand experience with the repercussions of misguided mothering.

A further challenge to this already demanding situation was that of integrating my therapy with the task of mothering. I would come home from groups feeling exhilarated because of all that I had uncovered and discovered about my past. These therapeutic weekends were personal, intimate and self-focused. Motherhood, on the other hand, is not self-focused. You needed me, I wanted to be there for you, and yet, sometimes I needed time to process what was going on for me. What a dichotomy. I believed that I needed to heal myself so that I could be a good mother to you and a good person for myself. And yet, the very act of focusing on myself instead of on you carried with it the risk that I could cause you to feel abandoned or hurt and as a result harm you in the process of healing myself. It sounds pretty complicated doesn't it?

The fact is it was complicated. My generation of mothers, or at least the peer group of which I have been writing about, had declared a kind of earth-mother status. Although we still claimed to question authority, and we did in many respects, we did not question the authority of the experts with whom we resonated. We so wanted to raise our children to be non-violent, non-sexist, spiritually aware, socially responsible, fulfilled, healthy, and happy adults that we didn't question the means; and we didn't question the toll this desire extracted from us. We rejected the social structure and values of our mothers but in doing so we had unwittingly fallen prey to the myth of the perfect mother.

Even though my peers and I, rebellious as we were, had succumbed to the perfect mother myth there is very little that I would change about our lifestyle and philosophy. I am proud to have been part of a courageous generation of mothers who took stock of their environment, assessed that changes were necessary, and forged ahead to make those changes. I do, however, regret a few things regarding the expectations of mothers during that somewhat dramatic period of time. I regret that we bought into a belief that any mistake we made in regard to nurturing our children's body, mind, and spirit would result in a damaged and unhealthy adult; and it would be our fault. This belief placed a tremendous burden of responsibility on the shoulders of mothers and signified a limited faith in the resiliency of our children.

I also regret that we did not allow ourselves to voice our discontent with motherhood. There was no shortage of books teaching women how to be better mothers but none reflected the mother's experience. Even our community voice was somewhat muted. We would discuss our upsets and frustrations with our children, or with our mothering, but it was usually within the context of self-improvement. The quest was always to do better. Because we had created our lifestyles through personal choice we felt liberated from the oppression our mother's experienced but we were trapped by our own creation. We envisioned an ideal world and we envisioned an ideal mother, but we were mere mortals.

Now I know that no one loves what they do every moment of every day. I am sure that every passionate, dedicated runner has days when she doesn't feel like training, and every devoted teacher must, at times, feel discouraged enough to contemplate quitting; but they go on. These are normal reactions but I did not know this when you were young

children. I felt guilty if I became discouraged, or if I wanted to run away, or if I did not want to make one more decision. I wish I had known that this was a common motherhood experience.

I hope that after reading my story, albeit simplified, you can better understand my interest in this research project. You were coconspirators on my motherhood journey. It was my love for you coupled with the counterculture ideology and my own sense of perfection that informed my mothering. And it was all of these factors that caused me to move through motherhood as if every step I took would leave an indelible footprint on your soul. It is with you that I chose to assess those early years. You are the true experts of my mothering. This research project was borne out of the belief that providing a format for us to speak freely and frankly about your childhood and my mothering will bring closure to those early years and will help us define my role as mother to you in your adult years.

Ourstory

Ourstory is written in chronological order, in primarily short vignettes that document our thesis journey from the day Djuna, Dustin, and I left Vancouver to the day I returned to Victoria. The major portion of the story is addressed to the reader. Exceptions arise when a particularly poignant and personal topic compelled me to directly address Djuna and Dustin. These exceptions are few and are scattered amongst the writing without introduction. I trust that this forewarning will provide adequate transition for the reader.

Here We Go

I awoke early on the morning we were to leave Vancouver. I organized pictures, took time to write, and checked the functioning of the tape recorder. I was nervous. We were about to embark on a project that had been almost a year in preparation and I was anxious for it to be successful. Our trip promised to be unlike any we had taken in the past, partially because we had not traveled together as adults, and partially because of my need to maintain some sort of structure for the sake of the thesis. I imagined it would be tempting to slip into a holiday mode and let ourselves be dominated by the impulse to reminisce and have fun. Structure and discipline were areas of motherhood weakness for me, whereas adapting to childhood growth and life changes was one of my strengths. Consequently, I worried about maintaining structure when my gipsas were little and I worried about it as I prepared to leave Vancouver. My worry was quite unnecessary, as I was to find out.

Even now, 3 years later, I feel a deep sense of gratitude and gratification as I listen to the tapes of our conversations during the drive to Silverton. Although this 12-hour

drive was not without its stresses it did establish a harmonious tone for the rest of the trip. To begin with, we did not manage the early morning start we anticipated because, oddly enough, the professional tape recorder I had rented from the university malfunctioned. I did not want to spend a lot of money on a recorder that I might not use after this research project was complete, therefore, I settled on an inexpensive substitute without the external microphone and other bells and whistles of the original recorder. I felt appreciation for the early morning anxieties that led me to check the recorder, and yet I was worried about the capabilities of this new, less technical machine. Not only was our early start delayed but we also miscalculated the time it would take to reach our destination. A projected 9-hour trip became 12 hours with an estimated arrival time of 1:00 A.M. And to add another element of stress, the sun shone so hot, despite it being a spring day that we felt as though we would be baked alive in our non air-conditioned car. Although these obstacles could have caused ill humor and a rough beginning, we spent the day in good spirits.

In the midst of this event-filled day I carried within me a sense of exhilaration and delight. Our conversation flowed effortlessly from superficial prattle to personal, heartfelt sharing. At the time I could not have assessed what made it work and why this long drive set the tone for the rest of the project. With 3 years of accrued hindsight and an opportunity to review the tapes more than once I can now put into words what worked for us and why.

Of uppermost importance to the success of this undertaking was the commitment of all of us to fully participate. Once established, commitment itself provided a format for the evolution of the necessary depth of conversation. It afforded an unspoken

understanding that I could pursue topics of relevance once they bubbled to the surface and both Djuna and Dustin would willingly engage in discussion. The day we left Vancouver Dustin said, "We're doing this for you so let us know what you need and we'll do it." It was as if they viewed me as both their mother and a researcher and they trusted me in this dual role. This tone of collaboration, once achieved, continued throughout the rest of the journey. If I asked either one of them a confusing question, as I am wont to do, they would ask for clarification and stay with the question until they understood it; or until I realized I needed to let go of it. Dustin and Djuna's maturity, dedication, and level of cooperation constantly amazed me and without it this project would not have been as rich and full as it grew to be.

Just as I had no way of knowing beforehand that commitment to the project would in itself establish a structure, I was also taken by surprise by the positive impact of reminiscence. I knew that a certain amount of remember-the-time ramblings would be unavoidable and imperative yet I was convinced I would have to control these ramblings or they would distract from our main purpose. I was wrong. Nostalgic free-flowing conversation led our discussions to places they would not have gone if I had attempted to choreograph our interactions. When I first realized that valuable conversation would evolve out of our 12 hours of confinement together I had a brief discussion with Djuna and Dustin regarding my desire to capture what we were saying on tape. From that point on the three of us shared the responsibility for what we would record.

By the time we reached Silverton we had discussed their lifelong sibling rivalry, their desire for a close and supportive relationship with each other, and what they thought it would take to achieve this. We also had honest, frank dialogue about their school

experiences, their drug and alcohol experiments during their teen years, their relationship with their maternal grandparents, and their daily childhood routines, or lack thereof. Occasionally I would direct the discussions to focus on the impact of my mothering in regards to the various topics and sometimes they naturally flowed there. Either way this slight direction in no way slowed down our conversations, in fact, it seemed only to enhance and broaden the scope.

I assumed from the planning stages of this journey that it would be a pleasurable, entertaining, and fun adventure. Initially, however, I anticipated that I would have to curtail the fun times somewhat in order to keep us on track and focused. It is clear to me now that laughter and fun opened the door to a collaborative climate and made it easier for us to get down to the work we had come to do. I made no attempt to control, contain, or subvert humor to the point that I chose not to monitor either of my gipsas rather colorful language. As I was the only person who would listen to the tapes I felt that it was more important to avoid criticism of them than it was for me to worry about how a nonexistent audience would judge any of us. Out of a sense of camaraderie and fun came the desire to work together, to cooperate with each others needs, and to focus our attention on the completion of our thesis discussions.

We had not visited Nelson together for 7 years and our mutual eagerness to return to this place of such fond memories afforded us a common bond. We were a cohesive group with a shared purpose bent on reacquainting ourselves with our much-loved hometown and exploring the inner world of our mother-and-child relationship. I quickly discovered that I had no need to worry about my ability to maintain structure and form. Dustin and Djuna were not children who needed a mother to keep them on track; we were

three adults who had taken on a group project. Although this came as a bit of a surprise to me it was nothing compared to the revelations that were to come.

First Stop On The Way To Nelson

Many years ago, when I was still Linda and you were babies we stayed one night in the Silverton Hotel. We had no choice. We were a heartbeat from our destination but the night was black and the gas station attendant warned me of the danger of the one lane highway that lay ahead. Just a mile stretch of road but long enough and treacherous enough to end a journey that had just begun. Dustin you were 6 months old and Djuna, you were 2 1/2; too young to understand where we had come from or to have a choice about where we were going.

Behind us were your father and your history, and in the moment a small blue car, a few possessions, and my hope for our future. I never questioned my desire to move to Nelson because in my heart I knew it was right. But I was fragile in my determination. Still reeling from a relationship gone wrong and dreams gone awry I had little time to take stock. I just knew that I loved you both and that you depended on me and I had to be there for you. We were on the threshold of our new life but forced by circumstance to stay, yet another day, away from our destination.

New challenges emerge. How do I get both of you and all of our belongings into the hotel? Only two of us can walk and only one of us is big enough to carry anything substantial. Not enough arms and only one of me. What about food? Yogurt and fruit from the only open store in this small town will have to do. I do not even want to think about the money. With only the remainder of a welfare check in my pocket and no assurance of money in the future I could scarcely afford this hotel. Yet I had no other

options, as I did not want to erect a tent in the dark in this unfamiliar environment. You were so tiny and so defenseless and I felt fiercely protective of you. Yet I felt alone and vulnerable. I had taken a risk, abandoned the familiar, and was uncertain of what lay ahead.

Twenty-one years later we enter the same hotel. Still the three of us, but I am no longer a vulnerable, dogged young mother and your tiny bodies have matured into adulthood. My heart giggles with a joy that only I can know in that moment. Simple, to be expected gestures thrill me in a way that I can scarcely comprehend. You both carry in the luggage and I check into the hotel. We are a team and we work together. I sense a confident, take-charge attitude exuding from both of you and it stuns me.

We made it! Again! Back to where we started! It is as if all of the years that I had imbued with earth-shattering importance were suddenly irrelevant and the only thing that matters in this moment is the contrast between then and now. Twenty-one years ago we were on our way, today we have arrived, and if this thesis journey should end here I would feel satisfied.

Free To Be . . . You and Me

I don't care if I'm pretty or not
I don't care if you never get tall
I like what I look like and you're nice small
We don't have to change at all

A person should wear what he wants to and not just what other folks say
A person should do what she likes to. . . a person's a person that way

Now mommies are women,
Women with children. . .
Yes, mommies can be
Almost anything they want to be. . .
When parents were little they used to be kids

Like all of you and then they grew

A sissy is a person who doesn't cry
Because he is afraid people will call him a sissy if he does cry.

It's all right to feel things
Though the feelings may be strange.
Feelings are such real things
And they change and change
And change. . .
It's all right to know
Feelings come and feelings go
And it's all right to cry
It might make you feel better

Sisters and brother, brothers and sisters, each and every one
Ain't we lucky every body looking out for one another

There's a land that I see
Where the children are free...
Every boy in this land
Grows to be his own man
In this land, every girl
Grows to be her own woman. . .
And you and me
Are free to be
You and me (Hart, 1985).

In all honesty I would understand if people were to question my sanity. What else would explain the tears streaming down my cheeks upon hearing such cheerful words sung by such equally cheerful singers? But I can't help it. Perhaps I have been lulled by the elation that has filled my heart during the two days since we left Vancouver. Now, as we rapidly approach Nelson the *Free To Be . . . You and Me* cassette is blaring from our car stereo. The decision to play this tape precisely at this moment had only come to me since we left Vancouver. I predicted that this timing would prompt an animated discussion but I was not prepared for the intensity of my reaction.

Neither of you are crying. In fact, the three of us are belting out the words and giggling and laughing together just as we did when you were children. But there is a difference between your memories of this tape and mine. Your memories are innocent. You thought of this music as fun, and we certainly had fun, but I also thought of it as a teaching tool. There was so much that I wanted you to learn from singing these words over and over again. I wanted you to transcend the physical inhibitions and gender stereotypes that had plagued my generation. I wanted you to learn to be true to yourselves, to appreciate your bodies, to be comfortable with a range of emotions, to understand that "mommies are women," and to feel like a member of a global community of "brothers and sisters." I admit this was a tall order for one small cassette tape. Nevertheless, I hoped that our lifestyle supported these ideals and that the songs were just a fun way of integrating the messages on an unconscious level.

So here we are heading into Nelson playing this captivating little tape while both of you sing the words with the same naiveté you did when you were children. I have lost my innocence. It's too late. I cannot go back and there are no second chances. Any opportunities I thought I had to positively effect your self esteem are gone. Any thought that I could shield you from the multitude of cultural messages that threaten to undermine the human spirit have slipped through my fingers. You are what you were becoming in those early years when I played these tapes with such hope and optimism. In this moment my motherhood dreams for the future stand face to face with the limitations of reality and in the midst of our laughter I cannot stop the tears from streaming down my cheek

Where To Go . . . What To Do

Once in Nelson we were immediately swept up in a flood of memories. We scoured the streets in search of old haunts and familiar stores and landmarks. We drove up and down main streets and side streets, past the waterfront, and around the mall. It was fun to see what had survived through the years and what was new. We did not attempt to have a formal research-focused conversation on that first day but instead made the decision to plan the days ahead over breakfast the next morning. From the beginning stages of this project I knew it was important to include Djuna and Dustin in its design. This thesis idea would never have been born if I did not trust that they were competent adults quite capable of reflection and insight. It therefore followed that they were equally capable of contributing ideas as to how we would undertake this inquiry. It was clear to me that I needed to provide the direction and guidance of a researcher and at the same time respect Djuna and Dustin's adult status and my emerging role of mother of adults.

When we sat down for breakfast the next day I had only a general sense of how to proceed with the rest of our journey. We turned the tape recorder on during our meal as we made our plans. I had the memory chest, a tape recorder, a list of topics I wanted to cover, and a rough idea as to how we could carry out this project. I began by revealing that I had never felt good about my ability to make the multitude of daily decisions demanded of mothers but I had made those decisions because I had to. I told them that I was delighted to be able to let go of being in charge and to work together with them on this project.

Djuna informed me that she would need an overview of my expectations in order to be part of the planning. Of the three of us she is the most structured and decisive and I

am often grateful for her direction. This was one of those times. I gave them the list of topics that were important to me to cover and invited them to add to the list. Djuna then arranged it into categories to better facilitate dialogue. Next I requested input on how to best utilize our time so that we could immerse ourselves in the memory chest and still be able to explore the list of topics. The last item that came up for discussion was the use of the tape recorder. I was undecided whether we should structure specific times for recording or whether we should keep the tape recorder with us and capture dialogue spontaneously.

We accomplished a number of things during the first planning session. We agreed that each morning over breakfast we would decide where and when we would meet for 1-2 hours to delve into one of the envelopes from the memory chest and tape-record the consequent conversations. Weather permitting we would choose a place of sentimentality such as the city park or the local campground. Aside from these specifically designed recording sessions we would not keep the tape recorder with us but would depend on our collective memory, if necessary. We assumed that some of the topics from the list would naturally come up during our planned discussions. If not we would make a point of addressing them before the trip was over. And thus began the next stage of our journey together.

Great Expectations

I made mistakes. I know I was not a perfect mother. I also know that the concept of a perfect mother is a myth. I just wish I had realized that perfection was impossible before my children reached adulthood. Perhaps I would have relaxed more and expected less of myself. I may even have escaped years of worry and guilt, and just maybe my list

of motherhood transgressions would not be as long as it is. But I did not know and my list is long. After careful consideration I have made the decision to reveal my self-assessed motherhood errors. My decision to become transparent in the context of this thesis is not born out of a desire to absolve my sins in a public forum. Instead my intention is to provide sufficient information for the reader to better understand what I carry in my conscience as I begin the taped discussions with Dustin and Djuna. I feel confident that what I write will resonate with a variety of mothers who may not identify with all of what I say but will have an equally substantial list of their own. What follows is a record of my concerns, my worries, and consequently the sources of my mother-guilt.

- I had x-rays hours before Djuna was born, I had an epidural when I wanted a natural birth, and I did not hold her until 6 hours after she was born even though I fought to have her brought to me. I may have compromised her future physical and emotional health as a result of these actions.
- I split up with my husband when Dustin was only 3 days old and Djuna was 2 years old. She gained a brother and a lost a father at the same time, and Dustin never had the opportunity to bond with his father. Maybe I should not have left their birth father, or at the very least, maybe I should have stayed in White Rock so the children could be close to him.
- There were a few times when Djuna was around 3 years old that I hit her. This was not the premeditated, designed to punish type of hit. Rather it was the desperate, end of the rope lashing out of a mother who had no more that 3 hours sleep a night for too long, who sometimes felt unable to cope with the awesome responsibility of raising two children alone and in poverty, and who felt terribly alone at times. The

smacks were always over clothing and nighttime diapers and never inflicted physical pain, only emotional hurt. There is no excuse for my behavior.

- I had boyfriends during those early years and each one had different ideas about their role with Dustin and Djuna. This could not have been good for them.
- My children did not have a father figure they could depend upon on a daily basis until Dustin was 8 years old and Djuna was 10 years old.
- I lost my temper, I yelled, I cried, and sometimes felt depressed.
- I was indecisive. I had a tendency to see all sides of an issue so I had a difficult time stating a definitive *yes* or *no*. Djuna was strong and I think she needed me to be a more decisive person.
- I did not provide a great deal of structure. I don't tend to live by much structure in terms of meal times and schedules so it was not easy for me to do so with my children.
- I had a personal commitment to not confront or challenge my children's spirits with excessive *no's* and certainly not unexplained *no's*. I wanted them to experience life as mystical and fanciful and I believed that there would be plenty of time in the future for them to discover the harsher aspects of life. Perhaps I was wrong. Maybe more childhood *no's* and frustrations would have better prepared them to tackle adult challenges.
- I loved being a mother and I was very dedicated to Djuna and Dustin, but I needed more time on my own than single motherhood provided. I would sometimes feel claustrophobic. Did they feel this and take it personally?
- Did they spend too much time in daycare when I was in school?

- Did I read enough to them? I regret not providing them with more intellectual stimulation.
- Did I make a mistake with Djuna by not following medical model advice to put tubes in her ears? Instead I attempted to address the cause not the symptoms of the fluid in her ears by controlling her food intake due to food allergies. Did these years of restricted eating affect her current relationship with food?
- Dustin was an easy-going child and Djuna was strong-willed and challenging. Did she grasp how hard she was to mother and has it had a negative effect on her self-esteem?
- I was caught between the counterculture movement that advocated gentle, almost permissive, mothering and the still popular more mainstream, behavior modification models. I was in sync with the gentle approach but intellectually I understood the benefits of decisive mothering. Unfortunately, it seemed beyond my capabilities to be systematic and to remain consistent.
- Both Dustin and Djuna struggled with school. Was there more that I could have done to positively effect their school experience? Did I make the wrong choice in moving to Victoria before they completed Grade 7 in the Nelson Waldorf School?

This is not an exhaustive list. Motherhood is rife with opportunities to make less than ideal decisions from moment to moment. What I have written is a tally of broad themes and it was from these themes that I narrowed the list to six topics to discuss during the taped conversations with Djuna and Dustin. These topics were; food, men in my life, discipline, decisiveness, school, and things that I would do differently if by miracle I could do it all over again.

We Always Knew You Loved Us

Of all the possibilities I had imagined for this journey I had not anticipated this one. I am at a loss as to how to explain or even make sense of it. No matter how hard I try, no matter what I say or do to elicit memories neither Djuna nor Dustin have a negative or troubling word to say about my mothering. The bottom line for both of them, no matter where our conversation takes us, is that they felt loved throughout their childhood. It is not that they believe that I was perfect. It is just that none of my motherhood transgressions dominated their deep sense of feeling genuinely loved by me. Love, it seems, was like a salve that soothed their child hearts and relieved the pain of childhood wounds. I never imagined that all that I had fretted about for all these years would be secondary in intensity and effect to this feeling of being loved.

What about my list? What about the guilt? What about the years spent worrying about wounding these "exquisitely delicate creatures hugely vulnerable to our idiosyncrasies and deficits" (Thurer, 1994, p.vi)? I do understand, perhaps all too well, the theory that much of what deeply impacts children is on an unconscious level. From this perspective a family systems therapist might suggest, for example, that Djuna would have no conscious memory of not being held by me until 6 hours after her birth and yet may still suffer the consequences of not immediately bonding with her mother. According to the Rebirthing perspective infants typically assimilate any number of potentially negative personal laws at the time of birth. "No one is there for me, It's not okay for me to feel close to anyone, or I am alone in the world" are just a few of the possibilities." Yet it was Djuna who first declared, "I always knew you loved us."

When I think back to my experiences with Gestalt and Rebirthing I am reminded

of my desire to move from group therapy to intimate conversations with my parents. Not all of what I wanted to say arose from unconscious memories exposed through therapy. Most important to me was the conscious memories, the remembered events indelibly imprinted on my heart. Therefore, even with the awareness that my gipsas may not be able to invoke memories they were unaware of, I had every confidence they would have plenty to talk about that they did remember. I was right, they certainly had plenty to talk about but what they had to say was not what I expected.

That's Not All

Dustin and Djuna's dominant childhood theme of maternal love challenged my problem saturated family systems background and drove me to dig deeper. I had the idea that if I made my gipsas aware of the issues I grappled with during their childhood it might bring a more rounded range of memories to the surface. As a result I became both storyteller and historian. I read them unedited journals about motherhood that I had kept when they were young, I read letters that their birth father had written to them, and I embellished on the topics that I had brought for discussion. My journals were filled with my love for both of them; my joy, pain, and frustrations with mothering; and my difficulties with each of them at different times. I had also written unabashedly about my struggles with mothering Djuna because of her strength of character and her strong will but my writing was tempered with my admiration for her spirit and spunk.

According to experts my gipsas could have felt jealous of the men that I dated when they were young children. They could have resented them, felt competitive, experienced anger, felt a loss when a relationship ended, and possibly integrated negative messages regarding the dependability of men. Instead they do not have memories of any

of my boyfriends except my husband, whom they consider to be their father, and one other man. This other man was someone whom I worried could have had a less than positive impact on Djuna and Dustin. Yet they both recall good times with him as well as upsetting times and they don't think of him as having been around all that much. Once again they expressed the sentiment that they always felt loved by me and always believed they were my priority.

We spent a considerable amount of time talking about food during the 11 days we were together. I have not spent this much time with my gipsas since they were adolescents and consequently have not been so acutely aware of their daily eating habits. Neither of them eats healthfully and Dustin smokes cigarettes and drinks copious amounts of coffee. I struggle to find the courage to let go of my need to influence and control the way they treat their bodies. I am aware that they are not out of sync with what their peers are eating and I am bolstered somewhat by the idea that their bodies are young and healthy and can withstand a certain amount of abuse. I well remember friends of my generation who ate almost nothing but Kraft Dinner for a substantial portion of their early 20s. Still I cannot help but worry about their future health and about the impact I may have had on their current relationship with food.

In order to gain an inkling of my possible historical role in Dustin and Djuna's eating habits I asked them if they would individually brainstorm on paper what they learned from me about food. During the conversation that followed this exercise they laughed about being teased at school for taking rice cakes in their lunches and about the joy of eating at friends homes because eating out often meant eating meat. They reminisced about special food moments like sharing peanut butter and banana sandwiches

with neighborhood friends and making whipped cream from the milk we brought at the farm each week. They expressed gratitude for a healthy childhood and the healthy eating practices they plan to return to in the coming years. Djuna stated that she learned about generosity because of our open refrigerator policy with their friends. Neither of them felt they suffered any negative consequences from not having regular sit down meals as they got older because they thought the freedom of choice and flexibility about when, where, and what to eat was good learning for them. They both feel that I worry too much about my role in their current food consumption and they take full responsibility for it. So once again my anxieties have been allayed.

It was the subject of decisiveness, or my lack of it, during Djuna and Dustin's childhood years that first elicited their experience of feeling loved by me. Dustin described my indecisiveness as "yes *no's*, maybe *no's*, if I try a little harder I might get a yes *no*, and then there was the definite *no*." Neither of them felt any upset or distress as a result of my full repertoire of *no's*. What's more Djuna summed up both their perspectives by saying "I think that I just knew that you loved us with your indecisiveness. Even if you couldn't decide and then you decided 'Okay, fine,' it just meant that you loved us because a lot of parents would be really mean to their kids or maybe even resent their kids. I always thought you loved us more than anything." I never would have imagined that my indecisiveness was an indicator to my children of my love for them.

I could continue to elaborate on the other topics I brought for consideration or even the conversations that resulted from the pictures, or the journals and letters I read to Dustin and Djuna but what I would have to say would be redundant. The bottom line is

that nothing in their childhood or their experience of me as their mother stood out as being wholly negative, traumatizing or terribly upsetting. They do not remember me being sad or angry or depressed or frustrated. They did not like all my choices and there are things that they would have had me do differently but these were in the range of more major life decisions. For example, they might have chosen to stay in the Waldorf School in Nelson until they graduated from Grade 7, but then again, they both valued their Sundance School experience in Victoria. As hard as I worked at stirring up a range of responses to my mothering, both Djuna and Dustin maintained the perspective that my love for them spoke louder than any of my self-assessed motherhood weaknesses. In spite of their unwavering positive regard for their childhood and my mothering I began to regret the means by which I had chosen to generate their responses.

Another Opportunity

Have I done the wrong thing by telling Dustin and Djuna about my struggles with mothering? They both have wonderful memories of their childhood. They remember us as a close family that had a lot of fun together. Although this is true I have dispelled the notion that I was perfectly content to be a mother. And for what reason? For years I believed that the unconscious remembers the past even if the conscious has forgotten. Before embarking on this project with Dustin and Djuna I believed that it was imperative to discuss old hurts and come to new understandings in order to clear up the past and move into the future. In spite of this, neither of them appears to carry much conscious baggage and now I question whether it is right for me to bring my difficulties to consciousness for them. Did I need to clear my conscience? Was I seeking forgiveness? Was this a selfish endeavor and not as selfless as I thought it was? Who am I to judge that

these conversations are necessary? Maybe it is better not to discuss negative aspects of motherhood unless the gipsa verbalizes a need to do so. Maybe I should have only talked about neutral subjects and allowed Djuna and Dustin to move the conversations into the painful stuff if they felt the need to do so.

Does mother guilt ever end? Not only do I feel guilty about all the motherhood transgressions I so boldly made public in this thesis, I now feel guilty about how I handled some of the conversations with Dustin and Djuna during this thesis journey. Have I only reinforced ideas that I had hoped to dislodge? I experience these misgivings despite the knowledge I gained through research into the historical constructs of Mother that have promoted maternal guilt. Furthermore, I thought I had loosened the grip of the cause-and-effect, problem saturated thinking that has had such a tight grasp on mothers' self-esteem for much too long. So why do I stay so entrenched in this dominant problem saturated story of my mothering? Rather than feeling guilty, perhaps this is my opportunity to bring to the foreground a parallel story of positive mothering cowritten with my gipsas. There is, however, something of more immediate importance I must tackle first.

There Is Something I Need To Say

Djuna, when we began this journey you spontaneously said that sometimes you would like to be little again because we had so much fun and we were such a close family. Dustin, you echoed your sister's sentiments and added that you had such pleasant memories of your childhood that you could not imagine this project being emotional or difficult. You have both maintained this stance since leaving Vancouver and you have been unwavering in your expression of the positive repercussions of feeling deeply loved

throughout your childhood. I am warmed, encouraged, and heartened by your feedback. At the same time I feel strangely sad and more than a little guilty.

I have not yet disentangled myself from years of indoctrination regarding my responsibility for your apparently fragile physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The belief that I could not escape harming you has so completely captivated me that I find it most difficult to accept your positive feedback as conclusive. Consequently I have pushed you to dredge up feelings that I have been convinced must lurk in the illusive, infamous unconscious. My talk has been less about the pleasures of mothering and more about the heartaches. The result is that the guilt I felt regarding my potential impact on your childhood hearts is now rendered more complicated by a feeling of guilt that what I have divulged to you over the last days has hurt you in some way. I am caught in a proverbial vicious circle.

I am grateful that I do not have to wait another 23 years to find out whether my concerns are grounded in reality. It will come as no surprise to either of you, I am sure, that I want to clear things up before they could be problematical for any of us. I have a few questions and a few things I feel the need to articulate and if it fits your needs I would like to start with the things I feel compelled to say and move from there to the questions.

I want you to know that motherhood was and continues to be a wondrous experience for me. Do not be dissuaded by the stories of my hardships. The joy far outweighed the heartache and I love you in a way that I believe only a mother could fully comprehend. Djuna, I am saddened by the possibility that the talking we have done over the last few days regarding your feisty nature may have solidified for you a detrimental picture of yourself. The last thing I would ever want was for you to think that you were

not or are not a good person, or a perfectly delightful child. One of the purposes of this research journey was to hopefully resolve negative childhood stories not strengthen them.

It is daunting task for a high energy, demanding child to compete with an easy-going sibling. In my family I was the mellow child and my sister was the challenging one. She really disliked me and was jealous of my existence. I do not blame her for that. It took us until we reached adulthood to resolve our issues. Unfortunately both of you experienced a similar sort of sibling rivalry and I know first hand that it is not easy for either of you. Djuna you were not solely responsible for the conflict between you and your brother just as my sister was not responsible for the conflict between her and I. It was up to me to guide you through the murky terrain of sibling jealousy and personality differences and I did my best that I could.

We talked earlier about the times that I hit you, Djuna, and at first you said you had no memory of it. Later you said that you have had a few flashbacks about it and you went so far as to say that you probably deserved it. You absolutely did not. No one ever deserves to be hit and I apologize to you. You came into this world with a pure and vivacious spirit. You were intensely curious about control and experimented regularly with exerting your power. I think you have done a beautiful job of learning how to utilize the power and strength you were gifted with and you have become the dynamic, energetic, resourceful woman I knew you would grow to be. My stresses with mothering you were my shortcomings and in some ways the repercussions of single motherhood. You were and are wonderful.

This brings me to the questions I have for you. I want to know what the effect is on you of hearing about the hard times that I experienced as a single mother? I thought

that you were aware of them because I was grouchy at times and sometimes short-tempered. Now that you know about my struggles how does that knowledge alter your view of your childhood, or does it? Do you think it is typical of young adults to have an idealized picture of their childhood and of their mothers? Does it matter how a mother mothers her children, or in the long run do most people forgive and forget? I ask this because I am aware of a couple of friends of yours who had traumatic relationships with their mothers and now that they are adults they appear to have let go of their past and consider their mothers to be close friends. This confuses me. I am curious to hear your responses to my questions, as I know they will help deepen my understanding of motherhood.

More Surprises

Djuna and Dustin's answers to my questions were short and simple. Their answers came quick and easy and they saw eye to eye on all responses. Neither one of them gave any credence to the idea that young adults possibly idealize their childhood. Djuna commented that her friends have discussed their desire to raise their children differently then they were raised. She said that her friends have expressed frustration with her when she states her desire to mother her children in the same way she was mothered.

In response to my inquiry about their lack of critical feedback to me, Dustin stated that "most of the decisions you made as a mother were pretty good ones." He also concurred with Djuna's comments that "we have been a pretty up-front family that dealt with problems at the time they happened" consequently, "there are not a lot of hidden emotions." When I expressed my wonderment about the tumultuous relationship turned friend relationship between two of their mutual friends and their mothers they cited a lack

of communication as a factor. According to Djuna and Dustin a common thread between these two families is an absence of communication about difficult subject matter either during childhood or in adulthood. As a result, they both expect these friendships between mother and gipsa to breakdown at any point if even superficial conflict should arise unless they decide to talk honestly about the past. I must admit I was pleasantly surprised to hear what I judged as wise words. This way of thinking corroborates my core belief in the importance of honest communication.

I am aware that Dustin and Djuna may not be able to adequately assess the impact of our discussions while still in the midst of our explorations. At the risk of confusing the chronology of this thesis journey I will state that I have posed these questions both during our research journey and 2 years after its completion and have gotten the same responses. They both asserted that my story telling and expression of motherhood heartache has not solidified detrimental narratives of themselves or their childhood. Again they clearly and simply spoke their truth and are in agreement with each other. Djuna pointed out that hearing my stories makes me "a real person." She said, "I have more respect for you. You had all that stress and you were still a good mother." Dustin added that my stories gave him a different viewpoint to look at his childhood from but they did not alter his childhood memories. He also made the point that as much as he found our conversations rewarding he did not have a personal need to initiate talk between us to clear up the past. What I found fascinating was that what was most crucial to Djuna was her conversations with her brother. Hearing Dustin's perception of their childhood relationship was especially meaningful to her.

Once again it appears that my complicated maternal thinking has not been grounded in my gipsas' reality. I am heartened by Dustin and Djuna's feedback that my honesty has not damaged their childhood memories or their perceptions of themselves. This is especially meaningful to me given that their feedback has been consistent over the 2-year period since the completion of our research journey. Granted there may lurk below the surface a complicated maze of unconscious, unresolved childhood issues but we cannot talk about that which we are not privy to. Their responses to my questions have afforded me the emotional space to relax and absorb the conversations we had over the last few days.

New Thoughts

I am dumbfounded by the outcome of my discussions with Djuna and Dustin. I did not expect this response and I now I have to make sense of all that I have heard and experienced during this intimate time we have shared together. It is not over yet. We still have a few more days in Nelson as well as the journey home. I am filled with questions or perhaps they could best be described as wonderings. For instance, I wonder about the culturally generated narrative of the fragility of children. Again Swigart's (1998) words come to mind. "What we do with our children, how we feel and behave when we are with them, has profound ramifications on their lives" (p.11).

What seems to have the most profound ramifications on my gipsas' lives was my love for them. They do not remember me being grouchy, depressed, distressed, or overwhelmed. They don't even feel deeply affected by matters of more consequence such as being without a dependable father until they were in elementary school. When asked about their experience of being raised by a single mother they said that they thought I had

enough love for both a mother and a father. It is as if they experienced the hurts and upsets of childhood as more like rolling hills then jagged twists and turns. Given that my life was as turbulent as any number of typical mothers and much more so than some, I am left wondering if children are as vulnerable as we have made them out to be.

I wonder, as well, what the impact would be on a mother's self esteem if she focused her attention on what she did well instead of what she did wrong. I know that I was so focused on the so-called awesome power I had to harm my children that I forgot to give myself credit for doing as well as I did. If this is true for me then it is likely true for a large number of dedicated, yet guilt-ridden mothers. Perhaps it is time that mothers collectively took a deep breath, let go of their guilt, and turned their attention to what they are doing right.

What About The Unconscious

When I think of the unconscious the image of an abyss comes to mind. I also imagine a doorway to this abyss that affords the opportunity for all that is good and bad in the world to enter. Once inside, that which gains entrance can, I think, become all-powerful because it is hidden, secret, lost in the black void. How can we mortal humans stand up to what we can't see or hear or touch? How can we protect our children from the havoc the unconscious can potentially reign over the conscious mind? I don't know that we can. Nevertheless, when my gipsas were young children I saw it as my responsibility to act as guardian of their unconscious. What an impossible and exhausting task.

I see things differently now. I no longer feel it is, or was, my responsibility to protect my children from the outside world. We are inundated 24 hours a day with stimulus whether it is during our waking or sleeping hours and no mortal could possibly

protect another human being from all that crosses into the unconscious threshold. As a result of this thinking I am now satisfied with the conversations that I have had with Dustin and Djuna over the last few days. I am content with the idea that what they have to say to me is limited to what they can consciously recall and verbalize. Their feedback may change as life circumstances evoke other memories but for now we have had the most honest and up front conversation that we can have.

Dependency to Companionship.

We have moved into another phase of our discussions. The talk about childhood has progressed to talk about Djuna and Dustin's maternal needs now that they are adults. I began this new exploration by asking them how they experienced our relationship since living on their own. Djuna has lived in her own home for 4 years and Dustin for 2 years. Dustin responded that he felt our current relationship was "more like companionship than dependency." Once verbalized these words became the catalyst for an intriguing dialogue.

I was immediately curious about what Djuna and Dustin thought needed to be in place in order for them to move along this seeming continuum from dependency to companionship. Dustin explained that as the role of a mother decreases she becomes "someone to talk to and relate to, and someone who supports you and therefore is more of a friend." From my perspective the words *talk to* and *relate to* describe a close and sharing relationship. What, I wondered out loud, had I done that either helped or hindered their movement towards friendship or companionship?

Both Dustin and Djuna think that a mother's respect for her children during adolescence is paramount to an honest and friendly relationship between them once the adolescent reaches adulthood. The fact that I did not try to stop them from experimenting

but did not condone it, and that I did not ground them but discussed dangers and consequences of their decisions, allowed them to feel considered, understood, and respected. Apparently my flexible mothering style facilitated their respect for me. Dustin did not agree that it is imperative that a mother be flexible and open minded in order to gain or demonstrate respect. His attitude is that the temperament of the youth is a significant factor. In some cases, he feels, a mother can be "harsh" and can ground and otherwise "consequence" her teenager, and if he or she accepts it and feels cared for, they can still respect each other and enjoy a "good relationship."

The discussion regarding respect expanded somewhat when Djuna mentioned that she had a friend that did not respect her mother because she experienced her mother as self focused and unable to put her children first. The feeling of hurt was so deep for this young adult, according to Djuna, that although she loved her mother she would never trust her and would never regard her as a trustworthy friend. We concluded that it is impossible to generalize respect because it is a complicated concept. However, we agreed that in our family it was established on the premise that we viewed each other as equally valuable individuals with equally valuable opinions. It is this aspect of respect that has afforded us a comfortable transition towards companionship.

My mind wandered to thoughts of where Djuna and Dustin imagined themselves on the continuum from dependency to companionship. I spontaneously invited them to choose a number from 1-to-10 that best described their current location on the scale. In order to set the tone I defined a *1* as the total dependency of an infant and a *10* as feeling internally strong and grown up. I should not have been surprised to find that both of them chose numbers primarily based on their financial situations and not on qualities of

companionship. I think I influenced their responses with my not so neutral description of what a *10* would be. Then again, companionship may be just one possible outcome of a continuum from dependence to independence. More questions come to mind. Is complete independence from mother, or a 10, a fitting goal? Is it possible? Is it desirable? Can a mother and her gipsa be strictly friends or will there always be a difference due to the nature of the relationship? How influential are finances in the continuum? In other words if a gipsa surpassed her mother's financial status would she move closer to a *10,* in either companionship or independence?

I recognize that these questions warrant more consideration than I am able to give them in this thesis. I can, however, write about Dustin and Djuna's responses to my queries, and our consequent conversation. Djuna declared herself to be a *9* since she feels she would be completely self-sufficient should anything happen to me. Dustin, on the other hand, assessed himself at a *7* because he is struggling financially and "in other ways." Despite Dustin's 21-year-old vulnerability I am confident that both of them could survive should I die. It would be a forced independence but independence nonetheless. In truth, there are many adolescents I have met in both my professional and personal life who were more responsible and dependable than their mothers. Conversely, I have known adults who remain financially and otherwise dependent on their mother, or parents, all of their lives. It just may be that a continuum does not adequately express the complex relationship between a mother and her gipsas as they journey through life.

Our conversation took many twists and turns as we attempted to unravel these rather perplexing notions of dependence, independence, and companionship. Regardless of whether a continuum exists or not we remained focused on this illusive *10*. The *10*,

however, eventually reclaimed its original status of companionship. In retrospect I see that Dustin never explicitly mentioned a continuum, he merely said that our relationship was more like companionship than dependency. My interests and curiosity lie more with understanding companionship and friendship between a mother and her gipsas then with the continuum itself. To that end I asked Djuna and Dustin if either of them thought a mother and her gipsas could attain the same sort of friendship that could be had between close friends. They concurred that such a friendship was not likely and that it was not a goal for either of them.

Why would the friendship between a mother and her gipsas not be equivalent to a friendship amongst peers? And why is it not a goal, at least from my gipsas' perspective? Does a mother and her gipsas not become peers at some point? For example, once Dustin and Djuna have acquired as much life experience as I have at the age I am now would we not be peers? And if we talk about our lives together and share vulnerable moments and intimate secrets are we not friends? Not according to both of my gipsas. After some deliberation I came to understand that from their viewpoint there would always be disparity between a mother and her gipsas and it has nothing to do with equality or inequality, or finances; it simply has to do with difference. This difference does not deny closeness and friendship but it does imply an imbalance. Dustin's description of the imbalance between us is that our relationship "is like companionship except you have been there forever." To him there is great significance in the fact that I have been witness to every cycle of their life and that I will always be able to recount stories of their childhood.

I recognize that companionship or friendship is not necessarily a goal of every mother. My mother and her generation were less likely to nurture a friendship relationship with their gipsas than my peers. The majority of my mother's peers would not have thought it proper to discuss their hopes, fears, and vulnerabilities with many people, but most certainly not with their children. Consequently, I would not think of sharing the same sort of intimate details of my life with my mother as I would with a close friend. My peers, on the other hand, advocated self-expression. We exposed our humanness to our children and encouraged them to do the same with us. I know that Djuna and Dustin do not tell me everything. I do know that they told me almost more than I wanted to know about their teenage antics and angst. At times I jokingly, but half truthfully said, "Can't you wait until you're 35 before you tell me these things?" I have listened to many friends express the same sentiment about their teenagers. As well, we have been somewhat awestruck that our gipsas talk to us about things we would never have dreamed of sharing with our mothers.

I feel honored by Djuna and Dustin's willingness to talk to me about important and personal aspects of their lives. I know I am not invited into every crook and cranny of their heart and souls. Even if they were to share as much with me as they do with their partners or closest friends I will always have a place of difference in their lives. I am the only one who nursed them, diapered them, watched them take their first steps, and held them in my arms physically and metaphorically until they were safely over the threshold of adulthood. And still I watch out for them. Sometimes I hold my breath and grit my teeth while they work their way through one life challenge after another. Our relationship is unique by nature of motherhood and I am grateful for that.

So What Is My Role Now?

How do I mother Dustin and Djuna now that they are adults? Who better to ask but them? Once again their advice to me is simple. They expect me to badger them somewhat about healthy eating, wearing seat belts, smoking, drinking, finances and other matters of maternal concern. They see this as a demonstration of love. If I have more major issues about such things as a relationship either one of them may be in or lifestyle choices they are making they expect me to approach them like I would a friend. In other words be curious, ask questions, listen, and offer my opinion. If I have some action that I would like to carry through on, for instance, speaking to their birth father on their behalf, I should ask permission before doing so. They do not need me to be quiet and keep my worries to myself just because they are adults. Both of them believe that the maternal instinct is life-long and they expect me to care enough to express concern. They have assured me that they are quite capable of letting me know if I have trespassed beyond my motherly duty, and to date they have been true to their word. Something that I would add to Dustin and Djuna's advice is the crucial role of humor in making a point in a nonabrasive manner. Sometimes I have said to one of them, "I just have to give you this lecture because I am a mother and I can't help it." They laugh and listen and then do what they do, and I hope I have had an influence. These are all guidelines of any close and caring relationship and I can live with them.

Letting Go

Let go. What a cliché. I gave my heart and soul to my children and now I am supposed to let go. Letting go is one of the hardest lessons of love and yet where is the expert who will tell me how to do it? I know that I can nag, cajole, and playfully harass

Djuna and Dustin when I am concerned about them. I know we can have heart-to-heart talks about more serious topics. I now realize that they do not, at this time in their lives, harbor anger or resentment towards me as a result of my mothering and that they are confident in my love for them. Still, something is missing, something that could, perhaps, further facilitate this mysterious letting go process and contribute to the rite of passage which is core to my motherhood and to this thesis.

The missing piece did not occur to me until almost the end of our thesis journey. What a revelation! It suddenly came clear to me that what I needed was a sense of Dustin and Djuna's primal need for me. For example, should either of them be seriously injured in body or spirit would I be the first person they would need or want by their side? I know young as well as mature adults who, when they are in dire straits, experience a childlike need for the comfort of their mother. Not receiving this comfort can have a detrimental effect on their healing process, whether it be emotional or physical. I know this need varies between individuals but when does it end? Or does it?

I have a strong drive to protect and nurture Djuna and Dustin but I wonder if they still need me in that role. I know that when either one of them are in emotional pain my reaction is to make it better. Should either of them be physically injured or become seriously ill I would want to be by their side as soon as possible. If I knew that this was my need and not theirs I would experience a sense of relief that would stem from the knowledge that my presence was not pivotal to their recovery. I would find it liberating to know that they did not need me or that they had replaced their immediate need for me with a close friend or partner. It would be yet another step in letting go and trusting that

my children are no longer children but are indeed adults with their own inner strengths and support systems.

This revelation has been a catalyst for a series of questions that I plan on posing to both Djuna and Dustin. I want to know whether they experience depression. If they do I am curious if they can see their way through it when they are in the midst of it. I want to know what they do for consolation should they feel sad or depressed and who they talk to about it, if anyone. And I also want to know what they think my role should be if either of them were depressed or in physical or emotional pain. I have observed and supported both of my gipsas through many ups and downs in their lives but I have never spoken openly with them about their life philosophy. I now feel that having a clear sense of how each of them face life and all its instabilities would further facilitate this mysterious letting go process. Unfortunately, this discussion with them will have to wait until we return from our journey because our time together is almost over.

The End of the Beginning

I am saddened by the speed at which this most remarkable experience is drawing to an end. All three of us have expressed the desire to continue our adventures together. This is only wishful thinking, as tomorrow we will make the drive back to our respective homes. On this eve of our return to what some may call the real world, I am preoccupied with the motherhood rite of passage that is at the heart of my thesis. Uppermost in my mind, once more, is the concept of letting go that appears to be a most crucial and significant maternal task and one that is most intimately linked with the passage to mothering adults. I remain fascinated by the inherent incongruity of having to set free those whom we most desire to hold near. At the same time I appreciate that this task

begins at birth when the umbilical cord is severed and the baby takes his or her first breath. Everyday and every stage is a rehearsal for the moment our children leave home for the last time. I am acutely aware, nonetheless, that absolute liberation is not possible, at least not for me. I will never reach a place of indifference to my gipsas. I will always delight in their happiness and successes, and grieve for their suffering and loss. My mother heart would be forever devastated should either of them become gravely injured or, god forbid, die. This passionate bond was firmly established from the moment I knew I was pregnant. However, just as my maternal bond has staunchly stood its ground so has my resolve to step increasingly into the background of my gipsas' lives. This thesis journey has served as a rich and rewarding means towards that end.

Letting go of my gipsas is predicated on a complicated set of factors. Most of them I was conscious of before embarking on this inquiry and some arose as a result of it. I was confident, for example, that making peace with our past would free us to cocreate our future relationship. I was also certain that lifting the great weight of motherhood guilt from my shoulders would help alleviate my inclination to make up for my perceived mothering mistakes, thus allowing all of us to move on with our lives. The almost hyper vigilant attention I have focused on mothering was a result of my unchallenged conviction that children are exceptionally fragile creatures who are constantly at risk of being harmed by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of their mothers. Our candid conversations have positively altered my perception of my mothering and shaken my belief in the fragility of children. Quite frankly, I am astonished that a mother's love could provide such a soothing balm for maternal shortcomings. Our talks have indeed lifted a weight off my shoulders and I think that together we have drawn a solid blueprint

for our continued relationship. Furthermore, I look forward to the opportunity to talk with Dustin and Djuna about what I have previously referred to as their primal need for me. Given that mothering is not performed in isolation but rather in relationship I imagine that my understanding of their letting go of me will enhance my letting go of them. Similarly, as I gain assurance that they are growing in their ability to meet life's challenges and in their sense of themselves as independent, capable people I will take yet another step into the background of their lives.

Home Again

If home is where the heart is then I am far from home. My heart is with Dustin and Djuna. I arrived in town today. A social worker called as soon as I entered the house, wanting information about one of our past foster children. I could barely talk to him. A neighbor dropped by to invite us to a 90th birthday celebration. I did not want to answer the door. I did not want to talk on the phone. I wanted to wash the car outside in the warm sunshine and slowly integrate all that has happened over the last 11 days.

I had no idea that I would feel this vulnerable and emotional. The trip was not difficult. I did not have to confront demons of motherhood, so why the tears? Why the restlessness? Before the journey I assumed the difficult emotions would surface while we were away. Instead they have waited until my return. Perhaps this is a letdown response. I spent 22 years imagining the impact of my mothering and 1 year emotionally preparing for this journey, and now it is all over. I feel in awe of this experience. The first time I made the journey to Nelson I had no idea what to expect and I had to be either brave or stupid to have attempted it. Some people suggested the same thing about this second

pilgrimage. But it is done and it was wonderful and I am so grateful to and for Djuna and Dustin.

Layers

I would love to announce that upon our return from Nelson I was free from maternal guilt. I wish I could also proclaim that I felt complete with the rite of passage to mothering adults. If I said this, however, it would be a lie. What I can say is that I have not ceased learning and growing since the conception of this thesis idea until now, 3 years later. I believe that I will undoubtedly remain on this journey without ever reaching a specific destination.

Once my feet hit the ground and my emotional responses subsided I took the time to contemplate what had transpired. I had expected that after what could have been a somewhat emotional 11 days that Djuna and Dustin might need to debrief. To this end I had offered each of them alone time with me as well as time for the three of us to regroup and reflect. Instead it was me who needed to debrief with them. Part of my need was due to academic demands and part of it was due to the intensely personal nature of the topic. Djuna and Dustin, on the other hand, felt complete with the journey in and of itself and felt no need to revisit it.

Since our return a series of events have occurred that have threatened to erode my ego, served to disturb my thinking, and ultimately enriched my understanding of motherhood. The image that comes to mind when I think back over these events is one of layers. As strong as the image is for me I was almost dissuaded from using it because of the overworked metaphor of the onion that was so prevalent in the modern therapeutic world of the 1980s. The layers of the onion were viewed as parts of ourselves that we needed to peel away in order to get to our essential core self. My experience over the last years has not been about shedding inauthentic selves or finding a core or truth, but it has

been about immersion, depth, and discovery. Thus I was moved by the layers image and yet stymied as to how I could describe my experience of it until a chance conversation with a colleague led to a delightful postmodern reframe of the onion. The onion, he declared, begins and ends with itself. It does not have a core it simply has a multitude of translucent layers, each a story unto itself, and each one providing a path to the next.

I have no desire to belabor this metaphor but only to put into words my prevailing sense of moving through levels and layers, and of reconstructing personal stories. The first significant event that precipitated this experience occurred when I reviewed the audiotapes of our thesis conversations. As I listened waves of self-judgment and guilt washed over me. Not only did I revisit the guilt I felt in Nelson regarding the possible negative impact of this inquiry on Djuna and Dustin, but this time the guilt was exacerbated by judgments of my interview skills. I had the child-like impulse, at times, to stick my fingers in my ears and yell, 'la-la-la-la' so that I couldn't hear myself speak. Had I not already covered this territory with my gipsas? Had they not clearly stated that our talks had in no way negatively impacted their sense of themselves or their memories of their childhood? Once again I marvel at how deep the roots of guilt can burrow into the maternal heart. I did not discuss this with Djuna and Dustin as I felt at the time that these feelings were mine to deal with.

The first time I formally met with Dustin and Djuna after the thesis journey was with the intention of addressing the pressing questions that had come to me on our last day in Nelson. This proved to be an enlightening and inspiring conversation. What they had to say helped bolster my confidence in their strength and maturity. Both of them acknowledged that they would always want me by their side if they were terribly ill or

injured. However, the degree of illness or injury that would warrant the comfort of their mother has broadened. So too has their ability to accept the fact that I will not always be available to them. What this means to me is that what was once a need for maternal nurturing has matured into a desire. I was also encouraged to know that Dustin and Djuna have a predominantly positive attitude towards life and they both feel confident in their ability to deal with life's challenges. Djuna loves life, feels lucky to live the life she does, and seldom feels depressed. When something happens that is painful or hard she views it as just one of lives curves. Dustin says that difficult situations seldom get him down and when they do he can see his way out of it even in the midst of it. He has a number of friends that he discuss his problems with and he uses writing as a way of working through life's difficulties. Both of my gipsas are strong, confidant, and capable young adults. Knowing this increases my confidence in them, frees me from the compulsion to protect and rescue them, and encourages me to reinforce their strengths.

Two years after this first follow-up meeting with Djuna and Dustin I felt compelled to organize another meeting. The writing of this thesis, save for the history section, was on hold for almost 2 years while I threw myself into the fray of child protection work. A 2-month educational leave finally provided me the freedom to re-engage with my writing and I began by listening to the tapes. I was not prepared for my response. I thought that my newfound awareness of the culturally contrived constructs of motherhood coupled with the faith I had gained in Dustin and Djuna's capabilities had provided me with enough awareness to ward off the evil demons of guilt. Not so. Once more the tapes grabbed me by my heartstrings and rendered me helpless against self-judgment. I worried that I was too negative towards Djuna and that I painted too dark a

picture of my experience of motherhood. As I listened to the tapes I wrote a list of questions and concerns and by the end of the last tape I felt compelled to meet with Dustin and Djuna as soon as possible. They were both willing to meet with me and within 2 days we were together again in a hotel in Vancouver.

I am almost embarrassed by my reaction to these tapes. I can hear an invisible audience urging me to get over it already. This audience speaks to me in exasperation. "Enough guilt," they say. "Let it go." "You would feel the same way," I reply. "I dare each and every one of you to have such intimate and vulnerable discussions with your gipsas about your entire life together and see if you don't feel remorse, regret, or guilt about some aspect of your talks." I had placed my mothering under a microscope and no matter the positive diagnosis I reverted to generations of maternal indoctrination. Mother guilt runs deep.

The talks with Dustin and Djuna once more confirmed what they have been saying all along. Although we traveled many a segue during our time in Vancouver the distilled version of their response to my concerns was that I should lighten up and not take so much responsibility for them. They enjoyed the research journey, our talks did not deter them from their positive view of their childhood, they valued being invited into the story of my motherhood experience, Djuna's self-esteem was not effected by the tales of her challenging behavior, and they felt and continue to feel loved by me. I had moved from exhilaration at the completion of the journey, to guilt, to confidence in myself and my gipsas, back again to guilt, and once more to confidence. I have come to the realization, only just recently, that my process is a normal part of letting go. Deeply entrenched ideologies do not go quietly. I may find a few more layers of doubt and

disbelief before I am free to embrace Djuna and Dustin's story of their childhood and my mothering. I am fighting history in order to lay claim to ourstory.

A year has passed since that second meeting in Vancouver. I am close to finishing and now need their approval regarding any material that divulges information about either of them. This time Dustin made the trek to Victoria and we decided to meet at Djuna's apartment. I began by providing an synopsis of each chapter and then I read *Mystory* even though I did not need their approval for this chapter. I read it because I believed it to be a pertinent precursor to *Ourstory*. Another layer of emotion and sentimentality arose out of my reading. This time is was soft and almost melancholic. Tears came to my eyes as I read the list of my perceived motherhood transgressions and again as I read the apology to Djuna. Although it had all been said during the thesis journey and again when we last met in Vancouver I did not feel that I had verbally expressed how I felt as clearly as the words I had written.

We are almost complete with this leg of our family journey. Both Djuna and Dustin will attend my defense, we will celebrate when it is over, and I will do some small ritual with them to commemorate this rite of passage. I feel vaguely sad as we near the end. This thesis has been somewhat like another child to me. I have been as painfully honest in my writing as I have been in my conversations with Djuna and Dustin. Once done I will no longer have the same venue for discussions with my gipsas. It is not that we cannot or will not have future conversations about my mothering and their childhood but we will no longer share a joint project in which these intimate discussions are the core. In letting go of the thesis I enter yet another phase of my mothering.

What Now?

As I walk this rich and fertile path of motherhood I am cognizant of the fact that my maternal awareness is heightened by the very nature of my research project. It has provided me with a remarkable venue for increasing my understanding of the rite of passage to mothering adults and deepening my relationship with my gipsas. The journey itself, the events that surfaced over the last 3 years, the consequent conversations with Dustin and Djuna, and typical mother of adult issues have stimulated my thinking in ways that would not otherwise be possible. I could write a book, but as I am limited by the confines of a thesis I will curtail my ruminations to two reoccurring ideas that have gone through a number of incarnations since beginning this thesis journey.

Rethinking the Fragility of Children

I have gone to great lengths to illuminate the implications on my mothering of the idea that children are delicate and fragile beings at the effect of their environment. This idea lost some of its hold over me before the thesis journey as a result of my study of postmodern therapies, but until recently I could not make the shift in regards to my own children. I feel differently now. The healing journey, as I have called it, began as an opportunity to clear up the past. Imbedded in that thinking was the belief that there must be some damage, hurt, anger, or confusion to remedy. By the completion of the journey I understood that this was *my* construct of the maternal impact on children but not theirs. However, it has taken 3 years and many moments of slipping in and out of guilt, despite Djuna and Dustin's feedback, to shift my thinking out of the cause-and-effect mentality.

Although my belief in the fragility of children has been swayed by a number of therapeutic and philosophical ideas the one that I feel most important to discuss here is

premised on the notion of response. I feel compelled to include this idea in my thesis because I am committed to disrupting the confining, finger-pointing, cause-and-effect thinking that has informed motherhood for far too long. The language of response first came to my attention through the writings and therapeutic work of Allan Wade. Although Wade's practice is focused on people who have "been subjected to interpersonal violence" it brings to light the strength of the human spirit and the propensity for all human beings to resist being treated badly (1999, p. ii). Wade uses Bateson's renown comparison of the billiard balls striking one another and a person kicking a dog to differentiate effect from response. When one billiard ball strikes another the one struck is passive and effected in that its velocity and direction is determined by that of the first ball. The dog, on the other hand, is responsive. His actions are determined by what Bateson terms his own metabolism. Consequently he may bite, whine, or run away, to name a few possibilities. This is true of human beings of any age. They respond to their environment.

According to Wade (1999) responses "originate in the victim, evince dignity, will, and emotion, and in their precise form are mediated by judgment and inspired by imagination" (p. 323). Effects are seen as out of the individual's control, passive, and "caused by the perpetrator" (p. 324). In his dissertation Wade (1999) describes a hypothetical example of a 10-year-old girl he calls Gloria. In this example Gloria is sexually abused by her uncle on an ongoing basis. She tells he uncle *no,* avoids him, stays awake when he babysits, and refuses to smile at him or call him uncle even in the company of her family. In other words, she performs acts of resistance. Yet if Gloria is only asked about how she is effected by the abuse and not how she responds to it she

would have no reason to mention these acts of bravery. Along with these responses Gloria also appears sad, spends time crying alone in her room, and does not seem to be "herself" at school. Once the adults in her life learn of the abuse they would most likely attribute her sad behavior to the effects of the abuse rather than seeing her sadness as a form of "silent (though visible) protest" (p. 328). In other words, "Gloria's sadness can be understood as a flagrant symptom of mental health: We would expect any normal, healthy human being to become deeply distressed when subjected to such abuse" (p. 329).

Wade further clarifies his perspective by quoting Erving Goffman who maintains that the self is "a stance-taking entity . . . it is thus against something that the self can emerge" (p.178). This idea of the self being "a stance-taking entity" is reminiscent of the writings of Polly Young-Eisendrath (1996) who in her discussion of the legacy of abuse cites a story of a young woman who sees her career as a nurse having begun at the age of 7. She and her 5-year-old brother had been taken into protective custody due to an incident of domestic abuse. She recalls how important it was to her to act mature and not cry in order that her brother not be afraid. What remained in this woman's memory into adulthood was not that she was denied her own expression but that it was an important assignment. Throughout the rest of her childhood she experienced sexual abuse perpetrated by her mother's boyfriend but purposely protected her siblings from him. What saved her was that she connected her ordeal to the idea of helping others which allowed her "to continue to believe in the power of love" (p. 76).

Gina O'Connell Higgins (1994) in her study of resiliency found that "virtually every subject in this study reported making ongoing decisions to live in contradiction to what they endured as children" (p. 185). She cites examples of children who at very

young ages where able to access internal resources and strengths and accurately assess the unhealthy behavior of their family members. Some felt that they were stronger people because of their childhood responses to their painful experiences.

It is not my intention to condone abuse. Nor am I advocating a less than loving, caring, and conscientious approach to mothering. I am simply using examples of abuse in order to highlight that even in the most extreme situations children respond and resist. They are not merely fragile, delicate beings. They are active cocreators of their childhood experience. Dorothy Lee, an anthropologist who has studied the Wintun Indians says that they emphasize reciprocity in the mother-and-child relationship. So much so that they do not have a concept of the idea of "having a child" but rather "the children refer to their mother and 'She-whom-I-made-into-a-mother'"(Nemiroff, 1994, p. 199). When I view my children as having made me into a mother it implies agency on their part. When I accept that they respond to their environment it dispels the notion that they are delicate, fragile, and therefore, weak.

What's Love Got to do With It?

This exploration of love is motivated by Djuna and Dustin's adamant declaration that above all else they felt loved by me. At the time I was taken off guard by how much this feeling of being loved soothed what I had assumed were my gross maternal weaknesses. I was so dumbfounded by their feedback that at first I dismissed it. Now I see that the kind of critique I expected was superficial compared to their experience of feeling deeply loved. Mother Teresa once said that "there is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world then there is for bread" (quoted in Buscaglia, 1992, p. 135). Maternal love and romantic love have captured the attention of artists, poets,

philosophers, scientists, and researchers for centuries. According to Vacek "love is so central, so primordial in human life that it has taxed the descriptive powers of the finest minds of the West and East" (1990, p. 2). Both forms of love are idealized yet there exists a certain sensibility about romantic love that does not exist in regards to maternal love. Romantic love is seen as something that has to be worked at in order for it to endure, whereas maternal love is considered to be steadfast, unwavering, and unquestioned. In other words, taken for granted.

I could not begin to recount the number of first-time mothers who have looked at me through dark-rimmed, sleepy eyes and mumbled, "I had no idea it would be like this." The intensely visceral and passionately consuming experience of motherhood defies description. It must be experienced to be understood. Often times a new mother is overwhelmed by a sense of wonderment at the total dependency of this tiny being. What an awesome responsibility. So much so that some women have gone so far as to say that had they been able to fully comprehend beforehand the immensity of the task they might not have chosen to have children. On the other hand, despite the challenges, some would not trade motherhood for the world. Children can evoke a tremendous range of gut rendering emotions from even the calmest of women but from my perspective the most misunderstood emotion is love.

Women have babies for all sorts of reasons. Some dream of having a child from the time they are children themselves. For some the desire is born out of a loving relationship. Still others slip into motherhood because it is expected, because they want to save a relationship, please a partner, or fulfill a need for love. And then there are the unplanned pregnancies due to failed birth control, the failure to use birth control, and

more tragically, rape. We do not always have babies because we want them and we do not always have babies whose personalities or natures we would choose to live with. Yet no matter how or why a baby is conceived or how challenging his or her nature is, we mothers are expected to know how to love our children unconditionally. What is the source of this so-called deep, limitless well of love that is presumed to dwell within us? Where are we supposed to learn how to raise our children in a way that they feel basked in this love? Who teaches us the lessons of love?

In all the years I have worked with families I have seldom come across a mother who did not claim to love her children. I am not going to wade into the waters of the maternal instinct debate but I do believe that all but the most wounded of women would walk over hot coals to rescue their children from mortal danger. That does not mean that I believe women to necessarily be more nurturing or any more equipped to parent then fathers. It does mean that when a mother is connected to her children she will most certainly experience an unconstrained impulse to protect them no matter what their age. In my role as child protection worker I have witnessed the complete devastation of mothers when their children were apprehended even if they have neglected, abused, or failed to protect them from harm. I have also known mothers who have outlived a child and 20 years later feel the loss as if it happened yesterday. I do not question this passionate maternal connection but I am intrigued by the fact that it does not always translate into loving behavior.

When we choose a partner we have the opportunity to get to know that person before we attempt a life commitment. Despite the fact that we choose our beloved it still remains challenging to sustain an intimate relationship for the rest of our lives. So

difficult that a large number of unions end in separation. We in the North American culture consume incalculable books on how to find, attract, and maintain a romantic relationship and we seek the support of counselors and therapists in order to keep the love alive. Many of us have made a point to teach our children that living happily ever after is indeed a fairy tale. We realize that once the intensity and excitement of falling in love diminishes it takes commitment and work to keep it vital. Still we seek the ultimate romantic love but perhaps with enough caution, or for some cynicism, to keep our feet on the ground. Not so with mothering. We continue, often with unrealistic expectations, to have babies without the knowledge of what it takes to maintain a lifelong, loving relationship with our children.

Maternal love is viewed as essential to healthy child development and the childhood experience of love is presumed to provide the blueprint for loving relations in adulthood. hooks (2000), for example, refers to families as "the original school of love" (p. 17). At the same time love is perceived to merely be the backdrop for the more important aspects of child-rearing. Mothers receive a great deal of pressure to mold their children into their adult selves. As far back as 1762 Jacques Rousseau stated that "they are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man" (Crain, 1980, p. 10). More recently Dr. James McKenna echoed Rousseau with the words, we "have a tendency to treat babies as what we want them to become as opposed to who they actually are" (quoted in Karr-Morse & Wiley, 1997, p. 291). It is a difficult task to maintain a loving nurturing environment focused on the unique needs of a child when there is such great societal pressure to teach our children manners, morals, and social graces; let alone make sure they stay in school, do their

homework, cooperate over chores, learn responsibility, and stay away from drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. Just to complicate matters, add to this the demands of a provocative, high-needs child or a child who rejects school and has no interest in conforming to the expectations of his peer group. How can we lavish loving attention on our children and at the same time attempt to mold them, sometimes against their will, into the adults we think they need to become?

Although M. Scott Peck (1979) believes that falling in love is reserved only for the "sex-linked erotic experience" of couples I beg to differ (p. 84). Giving birth, nursing, and holding an intensely vulnerable being in ones arms can be an acutely sensual experience and certainly can evoke all the feelings of falling in love. Barbara Schapiro (1994) describes caring for a newborn as "that enthralling, fiercely 'in-love' experience" (p. 183). Regrettably, no matter how exhilarating falling in love may be we eventually have to land. What happens then? Lovers sometimes leave each other and seek someone else to fall head over heels for. Some observe the crash and ignore the call to action, likely committing themselves to a loveless relationship. Still others roll up their sleeves and begin the work of keeping this wonderful love alive and vibrant. We do not usually save a relationship by attempting to mold our partners into the person we want them to be, although some yielding to each other's needs is usually necessary. Love according to Erich Fromm (1956) is "the active concern for the life and growth of that which we love" (p. 24) not the complete reformation of his or her character. On the other hand, after the first blush of maternal bliss mothers are expected to get down to the task of shaping their children into the adults they anticipate them becoming. The external pressures and demands inherent in raising a child are so great that it makes it difficult to place nurturing

the loving relationship between mother and child in the forefront. However, that is precisely what I suggest we do.

In the section of this thesis entitled *How We Got Here From There* I addressed the patriarchal, societal, and socioeconomic influences on the construct of mother and I stated that "expectations of mothers have consistently changed from century to century and from country to country, and they are still in flux." There is no perfect, fail proof, or consistent method or set of strategies for raising children. There is only an ever demanding and endless array of expert advice and opinions. Women do not need to actively seek advice because it walks in the front door via the local newspaper. Full page spreads go so far as to advise us to clean our houses because "a clean house could affect a child's chances at success later in life" (Zdeb, 2001, p. D1) or admonish "the self-indulged baby boomer generation" for not saying no to their consumer crazed children (Dedyna, 2001, p. B1). And yet the results of recent research suggests using bribery as to tool "whet an enduring appetite for learning" (Smyth, 2001, p. A1). Most certainly research is helpful and these ever changing ideas serve as useful guidelines and interesting topics of debate but they can also induce an overwhelming amount of maternal guilt in an already overburden mother.

Despite the fickle nature of the maternal construct the universal need for love endures, as does the basic tenets of what constitutes a loving relationship. In response to these considerations, as well as Djuna and Dustin's declaration that my love for them was enough, I offer an invitation to mothers and to the rest of society. I invite them to take maternal love off of its pedestal, place it in the forefront of the mother-and-child relationship, and give it the realistic and earnest attention it deserves. At the same time I

invite mothers to extricate themselves from what Molly Collins Layton (1994) calls the "siren call of the mother," which is *"Never Enough,"* as in I can never be enough or do enough. (p. 306). In addition, I encourage mothers to turn their backs on the guilt which "keeps mothers narrowly focused on the question 'What is wrong with me?' and keeps us from becoming effective agents of personal and social change" (Lerner, 1998, p.75). We simply cannot do everything demanded of us and nor should we expect it of ourselves. Dare I suggest that love just may be enough?

Rilke (1975) suggests that love is "the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation" (p. 31). Although Rilke was referring to romantic love when he penned these words the same difficulty holds true for maternal love. Indeed maternal love may pose even more challenges than romantic love for a number of reasons. As I have previously discussed, women do not always have babies from a place of conscious and conscientious choice, which can cause the reality of raising a child to be quite staggering. As well, they do not have the option of selecting the temperaments and personalities of their children who may or may not be harmonious with each other's or their own. In addition, maternal love is encumbered with the burden of fashioning children into adults. But there is another difference that can render maternal love even more complicated than romantic love. As Fromm (1956) describes it, in a couple relationship "two people who were separate become one" and in a maternal relationship "two people who were one become separate" (p. 47). It is not easy to love another person even when we anticipate our union to be monogamous and lifelong. It is harder still to love when separation from the loved one is not only inevitable but is supposed to be encouraged.

Women enter motherhood with an accumulation of stories they have gathered and given substance to over the course of their lives. These life stores are what informs their mothering and guides their responses to their children. Should love be an impoverished chapter in their life narratives they may not have the resources to love well or may not recognize the resources they do have. Like a talented musician born into a tone-deaf family, however, some women intrinsically know how to love despite the shortcomings of their home environment. They seek exposure to what nurtures this gift and find ways to validate their natural abilities. Others are not so fortunate. Some women are not born with an aptitude for loving behavior and have had limited exposure to love in their lives. Without the experience of a long term, through thick and thin, loving relationship some do not gain the understanding or knowledge of what it takes to communicate love to others.

There are people who would honestly state that they never felt loved by their mother and that they continue to seek maternal love and approval well into adulthood. That is not to say that their mother does not love them but often the expression of love is not congruent with the feelings of love. Love is complex. It has been both my professional and personal experience that mothers seldom intentionally harm their children, either emotionally or physically. Most harm is caused through a lack of knowledge, skills, understanding, or ability. I have worked with families in which a mother will tell her adolescent daughter she looks like a slut or a hooker as she walks out the door to meet her friends. As much as the comment may sting like the pierce of an arrow it is often intended to effect a change in behavior and to keep the teen safe from danger. It is a misguided loving gesture. Even with the best of intentions mothers have

been known to speak to their children in ways they would never speak to another human being. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish (1982) begin their popular book, *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by saying "I was a wonderful parent before I had children" (p. 1). I expect that a great number of mothers can relate to this comment.

It is not my intention to imply that mothers are doing yet another thing wrong or that they should take on another task to add to that *not enough* siren call. My goal, frankly, is just the opposite. Simply put, I would relish the opportunity to observe the repercussions of mothers doing less and loving more. What if we taught courses on love in high school? What if we talked about the specific challenges, stresses, and joys of maternal love along with birth control and sex education? What if we made it permissible to talk about the times we felt our love wither and threaten to die out of sheer exhaustion or frustration? What if we could sincerely pat ourselves on the back just for doing a great job of loving our children and not for being a supermom? What if our society paid as much attention to the importance and the realities of maternal love as it did to romantic love?

A number of well-known psychologists, psychoanalysts, and academics have written books on love that have infiltrated popular literature and influenced our societal understanding of love. Erich Fromm, Abraham Maslow, F. Scott Peck, Thomas Moore, Leo Buscaglia, and bell hooks, to name a few, have attempted to define love and isolate the characteristics that constitute loving behavior. Their books and those of child specialists have done a great deal to bring about a loving approach to parenting. If a mother were to embrace the ideology and emulate the prescribed strategies advocated in books such as, *Smart Love* (Pieper & Pieper, 1999), *20 Communication Tips for*

Families: A 30-Minute Guide To A Better Family Relationship (Miasel, 2000), or *Do I Have to Give Up Me To Be Loved By My Kids* (Paul & Paul, 1995) she would be doing the best she could to ensure that her children felt acknowledged, respected, and loved. Women who take the time to read such books, I hazard to guess, have experienced love in their lives, are already cognizant of the need to love better, or simply want to improve on what they are already doing well. Since I have come to trust in the significance of motherly love I have given serious thought to the subtle and obvious expressions of it. Consequently, I have formulated a strong belief, which I do not claim to be an indisputable fact. I merely present it as a possibility for others to ponder.

As much as the people of the Western world find it challenging to sustain a long term loving relationship, I think that the criterion for feeling loved is exquisitely simple. So simple, in fact, that it can be expressed by a single line taken from a popular British movie. Bridget, the heroine of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is an imperfect woman with an imperfect body who passionately seeks ways to remedy her self-defined shortcomings in order to find true love. The crux of the movie occurs when a suitor she had all but rejected becomes a compelling love interest when he sincerely declares "I like you just as you are" (Bevan, Fellner, Cavendish & Maquire, 2001). Needless to say the remote possibility that someone could like her with all her imperfections and idiosyncrasies was almost more than Bridget could fathom. The concept was so startling that even her close group of friends had trouble digesting the magnitude of these words when they gathered in the pub to discuss her love life. I am of the belief that these simple words communicate the very essence of what it means to be loved.

I do not think there is anything of more value that we can offer our children then

genuinely liking and appreciating their unique individuality. Though the concept is simple, this is where the simplicity ends and the complexities begin. Communicating genuine esteem requires congruency. It also requires that we stretch ourselves outside of our comfort zone and beyond our expectations of our children so that we can allow them to unfold for their own sake and not for ours. Learning to like our children, each one for his or her own uniqueness and communicating that feeling is at times a difficult task. Fromm (1956) calls this respect and sees it as a core component of love but he is cautious to delineate between the common usage of the word, which connotes fear and awe and his own interpretation. He refers instead to its root "(*respicere = to look at*) the ability to see a person as he is" (p. 26). Simply put, our challenge is to get to know our children better so we can learn to love them more (Maisel, 2001).

If we make the choice to respect our children in the manner that Fromm and Maisel advocate it necessitates us getting to know our children in the way we would a stranger. Affording them the open-minded curiosity we might a stranger may result in learning to value our children in their own right and not just because they are our children. This is not a passive act. It requires us to examine our judgments, broaden our values, stretch our faith, and defy societal pressure. It obliges us to change and grow as our children change and grow (Peck, 1979). It does not mean that we cannot show them disapproval, disappointment, anger, or frustration. It does mean that we do not attack, insult, or assault their character no matter how much disparity there is between their views and ours. What it may look like to our children is that we listen to what they have to say and that we care about their opinions. If we make a mistake at times and say things

that wound I am of the belief that our children have a wide margin of forgiveness as long as they feel confident that we believe in them.

It is our parental responsibility to guide our children but it is also our responsibility to love them. My contention is that if we prioritize love our children will be more likely to accept our direction. They will trust that we have their best interest at heart. Perhaps then we can relax and allow ourselves to guide our children into adulthood rather than feel compelled to mold and shape them. Dr. Thomas Gordon, the author of *Parent Effectiveness Training* (1975), makes the point that "when a person feels that he is truly accepted by another, as he is, then he is freed to move from there and begin to think about how he wants to change . . . how he might become more of what he is capable of being" (p. 31).

The most worthwhile advice I ever received as a young mother was from a minister in a Unity church. She said that demonstrating love was an easy thing to do when children were well-behaved and not when they are at their worst. It is when they are at their worst she advised, that a hug or a kind word is most important. At first I thought that following this advice would encourage undesirable behavior but I came to see that it instead communicated congruency and established a strong sense of love within my children. I fondly recall overhearing a conversation between my children and a couple of their neighborhood friends when Djuna was approximately 5 years old and Dustin was 3 years old. One of their friends said, "Dustin, your Mum's going to hate your for doing that." Djuna responded with, "She's not going to hate you Dustin, she's just not going to like what you did." This was decidedly a pivotal motherhood moment in which I felt I had reaped the fruits of my labor.

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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation and Consent

This rather formal looking letter is an invitation to you to join me in my research project for my master's degree at the University of Victoria. I have previously run the idea past both of you so that I would know whether it was seriously worth pursuing. I did not want to go through the procedure of having this project approved only to find that you were not interested. So you have an idea as to what this project is about. I feel that this is a very formal way to invite you to join me in this research project. It seems a little stiff and serious. However, research for a master's degree is a serious matter, especially when family members are requested to participate. It is absolutely imperative that the research be conducted with your needs as a priority so that it is a comfortable and perhaps even a useful and at times fun experience for both of you. For your information my supervisor's name is Dr. Antoinette Oberg. Dr. Oberg can be reached at 721-7807. Of course you know where I can be reached.

The name of my project is, *A mother's rite of passage from parenting children to parenting adults.* As you may have noticed, the role of mother changes drastically when children become adults. At the same time those years of mothering children continue to have an influence on the way a mother relates to her newly adult children. Both the mother's and the children's pre-adults years are filled with assumptions, perceptions and the resulting meanings each person has made of their experiences. The objective of this study is to find out if an open and thorough discussion between a mother and her adult children about their childhood memories could provide both a sense of completion of the mother/child role and a rite of passage to a new, family defined role of a mother. What I want to do in order to find out about this rite of passage is to engage in this type of open and thorough conversation with both of you.

I will write the thesis from a strictly autobiographical perspective. Although my writing will be focused on my reactions to and reflections on our conversations it will be impossible to protect your anonymity completely. The only time that I will write any personal information about either of you is when it seems important to the integrity of the thesis. If this situation should arise I will let you know and you can make the decision as

to whether you want that information to be part of the thesis. All of my raw data, including audio tapes, will be kept in a safety deposit box in a bank when I have completed my thesis. It will be kept exclusively for your use. The same will happen if for some reason one of you withdraws from the project. You and I will be the only ones who will have access to this data. A precaution that I will take to protect your anonymity will be to use pseudonyms for both of you as well as for your birth father and step-father. Anything else that may identify you will be changed, such as town names and school names.

Because this project will not have set hours but will mainly unfold as we travel together, it will be important that you know that you can temporarily put an end to discussion because you need a break. It is also important for you to know that you can end the whole project at anytime if you feel that you need to do so. From my perspective your need to end the project would be a reflection on the project and not on you. It would be more beneficial to my research for you to stop if you needed to rather than go on when you didn't want to. As a matter of fact, if you should choose to not participate at all I would still be able to complete my thesis requirements. I would simply take a different approach to studying this rite of passage of motherhood. Your participation is entirely voluntary and it is important that you understand this right from the beginning.

If you should decide to take part in this study there is a possibility that memories may surface that are uncomfortable. It is unpredictable what may or may not come to the surface as we talk together. As a precaution I will provide you with the names of counselors that you can choose from should you feel that counseling is necessary. I will make sure that there is someone that either of you could speak to alone, as well as someone that we could meet with as a family if we feel the need to. I will cover any counseling costs.

This project will demand a great deal of your time. We will take a week to travel to Nelson following the route from White Rock that we took when we first moved there. We will stay in Nelson for at least three days and then we will make our way back to Victoria. The costs for this travel, including hotel and food, will be covered by me. When we have completed this trip to Nelson I will want to spend time with you individually which will take the form of spending a night in a hotel together somewhere out of the Victoria area. Again, I will pay for the hotel and food. I would also like to have a meeting with the three of us when all of this is complete in order to debrief.

Before beginning this venture together I would like to talk with both of you either on the phone or in person to answer any questions that you may need to ask. If you agree to do this with me after you receive all of this information and after careful consideration I will ask that you acknowledge your consent by signing your name in the space provided below.

SIGNATURE _____ DATE_____

Appendix B

Letter of Consent for Use of Actual Names

It is hard to believe that three years have passed since we completed the research journey to Nelson. I am pleased to say that after a lengthy break I have again focused on writing the thesis and I may even finish it soon. So far you have been privy to everything I have written that contains personal information about either of you. I have done this out of the desire to share my thoughts and also to make sure that you approve of anything I write that is pertinent to you. Nothing will be included in my thesis that involves either of you that you do not approve of. It may mean that I will have to reword something, or perhaps eliminate it altogether. That decision will be made by all of us.

Recently we discussed our mutual discomfort with the use of fictitious names for both of you and for the city of Nelson. As a result of our discussion I put forth a request to the university ethics committee to amend their directive to use pseudonyms and allow me to refer to you by your birth names and refer to Nelson by name.

The committee chair responded to my request with tentative approval providing I submit a consent form signed by each of you. I have no need to divulge your last name, as it is not relevant to the thesis. Shannon, I would like to use Djuna, your birth name, rather than the name you most often use at this time. If all of this meets your approval please acknowledge your consent by signing your name in the space provided below.

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

Vita

Surname: Godine Given Names: Sarala

Place of Birth: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

Selkirk College	1984 to 1985
University of Victoria	1995 to 2002

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.	University of Victoria	1997

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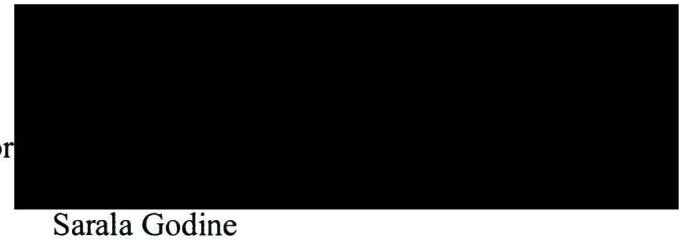
A Mother's Rite of Passage from Parenting Children to Parenting Adult Children

Author 

Sarala Godine

December 13, 2002