

Being Fish: Sounding the Depths  
in the Reflecting Pools of Lifelong Learning

by


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We accept this thesis as conforming  
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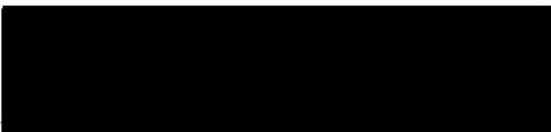
ABSTRACT

This autobiographical research reflects an adult learner exploring the meaning of (her) life experiences to deepen (her) understanding. The writer's exploration began with a call to "Be Fish." The metaphor of fish helped her to shift perspective, and helped her to see what was hidden from view beneath the surface of her everyday life. She explored literature that refers to fish, including the story of Parsival and his encounters with the Fisher King, the story of Merlyn changing Wart (the future King Arthur) into a fish, as well as references to fish by Virginia Woolf, A.S. Byatt, and a Tlingit legend. Through transposing these stories into and onto her life, she comes to see how the theme of separation has played out in (her) life, and she re-cognizes relationship with other as a way of (re)connecting.

In the work, notions of adult learning are re-cognized: transformation(al learning), adult development, experiential learning, professional development and self-directed learning. In review-ing the literature on adult education, the importance of considering context is noted.

The process of learning that is demonstrated and the insights in the thesis are provocative for adult learners and educators. Autobiographical writing and research may be seen as a form of ongoing professional development.

Examiners:




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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	ii
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	v
<b>Dedication</b> .....	vi
<b>Frontispiece</b> .....	vii
<b>Reading/Engaging with the text</b> .....	p. 2
<b>OPENING (UP)</b>	
<i>Dis-sonant Dis-c(h)ord</i> .....	p. 4
<b>(GOING) FORWARD</b>	
<b>Beginning (at the End)</b> .....	p. 5
<b>Stitching the Quilted Text</b> .....	p. 10
<b>In Relationship</b> .....	p. 15
<b>CHAPTER ONE: ENTERING THE STREAM (OF CONSCIOUSNESS)</b> ....	p. 16
<b>Muddy Waters</b> .....	p. 16
<b>Searching for a QUEST(ion)</b> .....	p. 16
<b>A Moving Method</b> .....	p. 19
<b>Looking Back: The Rearview Mirror</b> .....	p. 20
<b>Room to Work In: Shifting Perspectives</b> .....	p. 22
<b>Reflecting (on) Mirrors and Autobiography</b> .....	p. 24
<b>Being in the Brilliance--A Re-reading of the Text</b> .....	p. 26
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE HATCHING OF "BEING FISH"</b> .....	p. 30
<b>Reflecting Mirrors</b> .....	p. 31
<b>A Gift of Fish: Presence</b> .....	p. 33
<b>Slipping Through the Mirror-- Becoming Fish: The</b>	
<b>Transformation Begins</b> .....	p. 38
<b>CHAPTER THREE: IMMERSION TO THE DEPTHS</b> .....	p. 40

<b>The Fisher King and the Healing of the Wasteland .....</b>	p. 42
<b>Parsival's Entrance into the Story.....</b>	p. 50
<b>The Gully.....</b>	p. 51
<b>Grandpa .....</b>	p. 53
<b>Parsival and the Grail.....</b>	p. 58
<b>What Ails Thee? Sur-Facing the Dark.....</b>	p. 60
<b>Living Non-Attachment.....</b>	p. 64
<b>Filled to the Gills .....</b>	p. 72
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE CALL TO THE SALMON TO RETURN.....</b>	p. 74
<b>Listening and Seeing.....</b>	p. 75
<b>The Healing of the Fisher King.....</b>	p. 77
<b>In Flow -- Being There.....</b>	p. 81
<b>Coming Home to One's Self.....</b>	p. 83
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: THE STRUGGLE UPSTREAM.....</b>	p. 88
<b>Life and the Academy.....</b>	p. 89
<b>Ripples Outward: Writing as a Form of Professional Development...</b>	p. 93
<b>Re-viewing the Swiftly Moving Current of Adult Education Literature.....</b>	p. 95
<b>Struggling with the Academic Form.....</b>	p. 100
<b>CHAPTER SIX: SPAWNING: PASSING ON.....</b>	p. 105
<b>Collaboration: Enhancing Reflection.....</b>	p. 112
<b>Teaching: Drawing from Within.....</b>	p. 115
<b>The story of JACK WISE TEACHING IN SILENCE as told by Daphne.....</b>	p. 116
<b>Being Fish.....</b>	p. 122
<b>CLOSING: FULL CIRCLE.....</b>	p. 125
<b>Re-cording Resonance.....</b>	p. 125
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	p. 128

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Larry Devlin has ignited a passion for adult education.

Antoinette Oberg has always given space for self-directed learning.

John Cossom has listened openly.

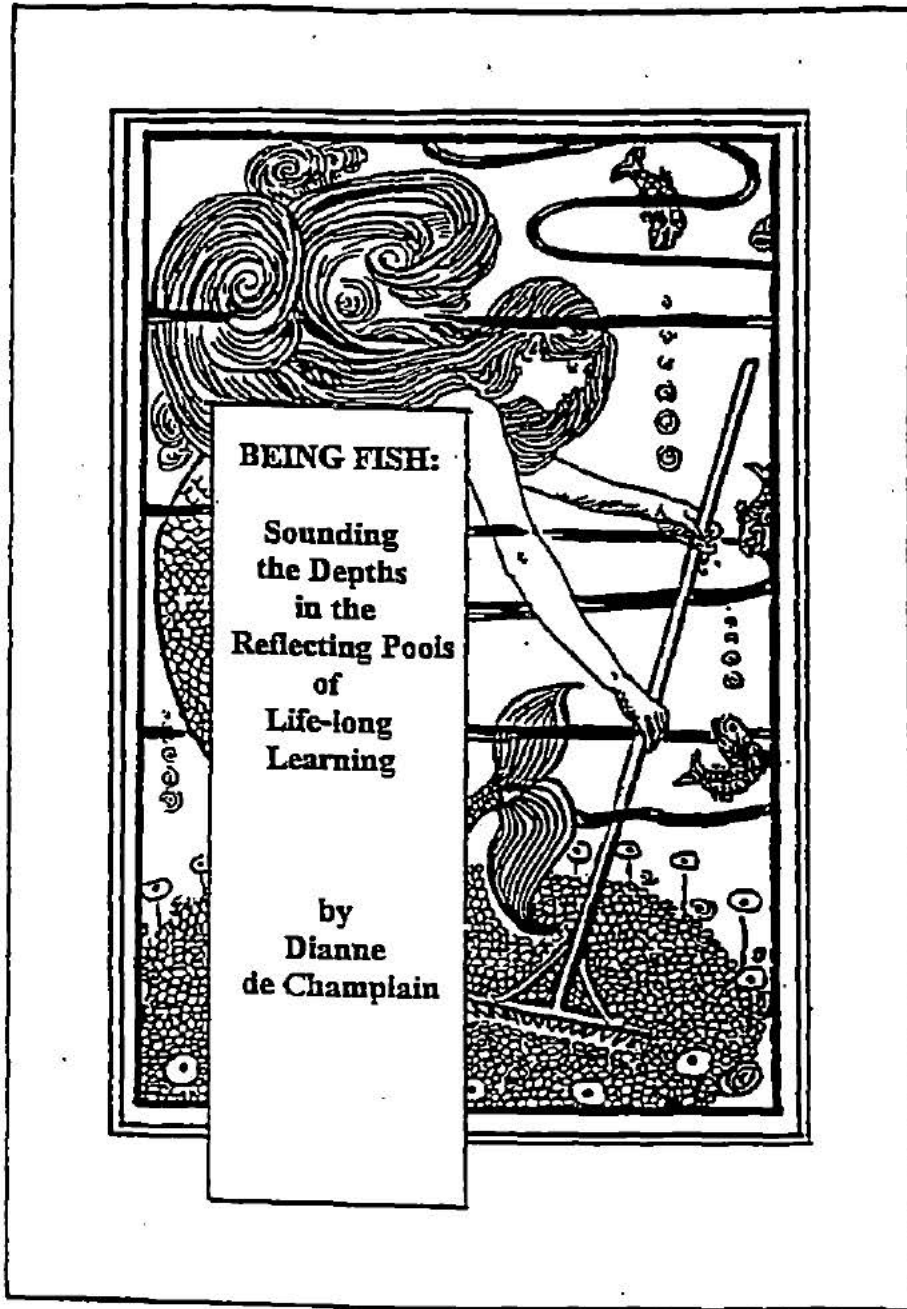
Paul, Jenny, Katie, and my patient family: thank you for celebrating a woman giving voice to her experiences.

Dedication:



**This work is dedicated to those whose voices were silenced in the burning times.**

Frontispiece:



**...Two roads diverged in a wood, and I  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.**

(Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken, in Sohn, 1967, p.70)

**Reading/engaging with the text:**

*There are many ways that you can engage with this work. I have found that re-reading the work and being attentive to the notion of self and relationship with other a strong theme, and gave an interesting re-reading of the work. But there are many other ways that the text can be read. Possibilities:*

- *you might enjoy tripping through the metaphors and images*
- *if you are an adult educator, you will appreciate the examples of an adult educator and student; you will also be interested in the exploration of the theme of self-directed learning. In fact, much of the work represents a learner working in a self-directed manner.*
- *if you are interested in adult development and learning, you will find the story of Parsival and the Fisher King an intriguing metaphor*
- *you might follow (untangle or get tangled in) the process and consider its relationship to creativity*
- *there is rich humus in the story of Merlyn and in the method of currere regarding experiential learning*
- *the work is an example of autobiographical research, and might be read to explore this method*
- *the work is written by and about a woman, and might be explored in this way--  
Is this feminist research?*
- *it might be read as an exploration of the art of education*
- *if you are intrigued by story and literature, you will see many examples and interpretations and thoughts on these topics*
- *if you like to consider the spiritual aspects of life, you will find nourishment for the spirit*
- *if you have wondered about Jungian analysis, there are examples embedded in the writing*

- *if you are interested in teaching and teachers, you will find examples of profound teachers sprinkled throughout the text (Note: not all are certified professionals)*
- *Women's Ways of Knowing identifies separate and connected knowing. What does the writing reveal about the writer's ways of knowing?*
- *there are themes of interest to social work*
- *you might read this work to explore how the notion of power is revealed*
- *you might explore the work for evidence of modernism/postmodernism*
- *if you are a scientist, you might look for parallels in this work with chaos theory. Do you see any black holes? What can be learned from "being fish"?*
- *A person with an interest in psychology will have fun doing analysis!*
- *historians might note that the past and future are present*
- *if you wonder about how humans think, there is food for thought here*
- *you might critique and notice what is not said, not seen!*

*There are many lenses with which to view this work. Some might prefer to wear their bifocals and read the work for more than one theme, or on more than one level. And some of you are as wild as I am and will wear crystal glasses and try to see it all!!*

**OPENING (UP)****Dis-sonant Dis-c(h)ord**

}

*Standing in a blanket of fog. A small girl of three or four in a grey flannel coat and hat with a black velvet band, the grey ties in a bow under her chin. Pale blue eyes, freckles, always looking, not really seeing, but always open and absorbing. Playing on the curb. Jumping up and down. A hand, mother in her maroon coat with fur collar, reaches down and guides her back onto the sidewalk. Quietly standing by her mother, waiting for the bus to come. Staring blankly at the curb. Hearing the sounds of traffic. Looking up. Becoming aware for a moment. Aware of being alone in the world of big cars and buses, alone in the noise. Being aware of being alone. All alone in the world. Not being attached. Alone and separate. It is but a flash of time--a few moments perhaps. But the sensation lives on in her. Scares her. Wakens her in the night and causes her to seek refuge with her parents. It frightens her. Make it go away . . . Somewhat curious about it though--sometimes playing with the memory of it, trying to remember what it felt like. Remembering and playing it a moment, but then moving quickly away. Forgetting it. Getting immersed in play, a place where she can forget the sensation of being all alone. That cold sensation. That lonely, eery feeling. She forgets and plays on.*

## **(GOING) FORWARD**

### **Beginning (at the End)**

Separate. Alone in a crowded city. In a flashing moment, like a sword cutting deep into her, this child senses herself as a separate(d) being; an individual is conceived. Up until that moment she had been a part of everything around her and now she senses that she is apart from everything. This awareness, this shift in perspective, is dissonant and uncomfortable, and she pushes it beneath the surface and plays on in her (dis)illusion. It is too uncomfortable to explore the sensation more fully, she is not ready. Yet, paradoxically, it is in this moment when she senses her separateness that the seed for conscious (re)connection is sown.

This thesis re-searches the experience(s) of separation and connection. It traces an adult learner's struggles to (re)connect aspects of (her) life. There are many ways that we separate from ourselves and (each) other. In this thesis, the theme of separation, in various forms, is exposed. It seeks to make our separation(s) explicit, to (sur)face it, so that we can begin to heal the laceration, to make connections and move on. The work involves a re-conception of the notion of separation and connection, of self and other. I make this explicit for the reader so that you may detect what is constantly implicit in this work.

The work represents an adult learner exploring significant life experiences in an attempt to deepen understanding. The process of learning that is demonstrated and the insights in this thesis are provocative for adult learners and educators. Important themes of adult learning are re-cognized. The story of Parsival and his unification with the Fisher King is representative of the outer (hu)man uniting with the inner (hu)man. Adult education must be attentive to the development of both the outer and inner aspects of human life and be aware that the maturing adult may be seeking integration of aspects of being that may have become separated. The notion of self-directed learning is re-viewed, and attentiveness to the impact of milieu or context is considered. Our "inner" and "outer" selves are connected.

We appear to move forward through life. But that may be an illusion. Much of our lives we live in a fog of unconsciousness, a heavy opaque gauze that enshrouds us. Like the little girl, the perception(s) of our separation(s) disturb us, create a schism deep inside us, but we play on. We are lulled by the movement of our actions, hiding deep the buried pain. But it is there in us, haunting us, and it affects us. “The past hangs over the present as fog veils a highway. Because it is omnipresent, because we could not bear to live through it, it hangs as if invisible” (Pinar, 1994, p. 57). We are hidden from ourselves.

*We separate out that which is uncomfortable in our lives, but we are also uncomfortable with the separation.*

*What do we not notice? What is it that is there, that we keep hidden from view? What is it that is right in front of us, but unseen? All around us, but unheard?*

Often it is only in retrospect that we begin to pierce the veil. It is often not until much later that we are ready to perforate the protective shell and peek out (in) and see beyond. We begin to see how the past infiltrates the present (and the future). The fog begins to lift, and a clear view vibrates through us. Autobiographical research helped me lift the veil. This work is revealing of (my)self, an unveiling. It becomes a hearing of that which has been silent (silenced). Now that I have completed this phase of my work, I step back and sense it as a whole. I begin to see a continuous theme: separation (in various forms) and (re)connection. What is interesting is that this exploration was not the conscious and deliberate intention of the work, but its presence in the work is pervasive. The conscious focus of the work was to explore “Being Fish”. This title became like a koan that needed to be cracked or a riddle that needed to be solved. But often in the solving of these puzzles, a greater kingdom or understanding is the reward. As I explored ways to decode “fish”, I was also revealing many ways that separation is experienced, and re-cording the struggle to (re)connect. Autobiographical research brought this struggle

into conscious awareness.

Separations are often viewed as difficult, uncomfortable and painful. Dewey writes of (t)his pain: “the sense of divisions and separations that were, I suppose, borne upon me as a consequence of a heritage of New England culture, divisions by way of isolation of self from the world, of soul from the body, of nature from God, brought a painful oppression--or rather, they were an inward laceration” (Dewey, 1960, p. 10). The story of Adam and Eve being ousted from the garden is a story full of the pain of separation.

How we deal with this pain and discomfort is significant. The little girl does not explore the experience fully in that moment, yet it lingers on in her. *We try to separate out that which is uncomfortable in our lives, but we are also uncomfortable with the separation.* Sometimes she re-calls the experience into consciousness and plays with it, wonders about, explores it, tries to understand it. Later the sensation will begin to frighten her and the more she tries to push it beneath the surface and resist it, the more monstrous it becomes. It rears its ugly head unexpectedly and leaves the girl in agonizing fear and panic. *It is interesting how a sensation has been (re)interpreted from an awareness into the personification of a “monster,” something to be feared, rather than curious about.* The novelist John Fowles calls the emptiness or gap, the sense of wholeness that somehow got lost, the “nemo” which he describes as an anti-ego, a state of being nobody.

**The nemo is an evolutionary force, as necessary as the ego. The ego is certainty, what I am; the nemo is potentiality, what I am not. But instead of utilizing the nemo as we would any other force, we allow ourselves to be terrified by it, as primitive man was frightened by lightning. We run screaming from this mysterious shape in the middle of our town, even though the real terror is not in itself, but in our terror of it. (Fowles, 1968, pp. 59-60).**

The girl recalls another experience that demonstrates the terror of the nemo which occurred when she was fifteen:

*I was downtown, shopping with two of my friends. It was 9 o'clock at night and the stores closed. We went out and joined the crowd and noisy traffic to wait for our bus. As one bus pulled away, I suddenly had the most horrible feeling or sensation. It is hard to describe, but it was as if I wasn't me. It was very frightening, and I had to get away, be alone so that I could work this through. I left my friends and caught another bus that took me home. I spent the night alone in my room, in absolute terror and agony.*

*This experience repeated itself a number of times in the next year, and I began to fear the feeling, and became very nervous about being out in public places and closed rooms. No one knew about the private hell I was going through, except my mother. We did go to a doctor, who prescribed tranquilizers. But my classmates in university probably had no idea of the inner agony that was tormenting me as they sat beside me. I intuitively sensed that it was best to remain silent about these experiences and work them through on my own.*

These short narratives illustrate very different responses to the nemo. In the first story it is reckoned as a force, but one that can be called on and played with and explored at will; the second narrative illustrates the nemo as a force to be feared and repressed, and there is an attempt to avoid it, void it. These individual responses are very significant and representative of ways that humans deal with existential dilemmas. These narratives have much to teach us about “liberatory curriculum.” As educators, we may recognize that provocative (learning) experiences can be met with reservation, with interest or with resistance, and we can come to understand that resistance. Although there may be tremendous liberatory potential in altering one’s view, there may be considerable discomfort and disorientation as the learner makes a transformation in their thinking patterns to incorporate the new awareness.

We may attempt to shield ourselves in denial to protect ourselves from having to work through these uncomfortable existential dilemmas, but as the second narrative

illustrates, these unresolved issues will surface in insidious ways. One of the ways that humans have explored their unresolved dilemmas and fears is through story. When one examines the history (and evolution) of story, we see the struggle with the human's inner fears and "demons," our nemos, and our efforts to reckon with them. In many stories the fears and "evil" elements of being human are personified into monsters, dragons, giants, witches, vampires, cyclops, wolves, which the hero encounters and usually overcomes. It is often when (he) leaves the safety of home and is "on (his) own" that these encounters take place. There seems to be a conception that individuals must face their own "monsters" for themselves. In other stories, the monster was not something outside of man, but some aspect of man's psyche that took on monstrous proportions and had to be reckoned with. The stories of *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Faust* and the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with the angel in the night are examples of humans facing an inner counter-force. In more current stories, we are seeing the taming of the monster, such as in the movie *E.T.*, and the monsters or beasts in many of the Disney versions of stories. Here the monster is re-viewed as in need of befriending, understanding, and compassion. The hero in these current versions is not the destroyer of the monster, but the one that frees it, to let it "be", and interestingly it is often a sensitive child or child-like character who is the hero(ine). All of these stories are human ways of working with the nemo in an effort to reckon with it--either to overcome it, control it or to appreciate it. The history of story might be viewed as a history of the human psyche, as a mirror of the (r)evolution of human thought and awareness. In much the same way, our personal story, with its experiences and narratives may be seen as the evolution of our own psyche. The nemo might be seen as representing the unexplored aspects of the inner hu(man), including our sense of being separated. Fowles suggests that the nemo is an evolutionary force, and that it can be utilized, that we can learn from the experiences that call us into question. This thesis seeks to learn from these experiences.

### Stitching the Quilted Text

Quilting has been a creative, social, and functional activity that women have engaged in for hundreds of years. I draw on the process of quilting as a metaphor to explain the construction of this thesis.

The free-form journal writing that I have engaged in over the past few years became pools that I could dive into and explore. This pool of journal writings became the fabric one cuts into and pieces together to design a quilt. What is included in this document represents a small sampling of what amounted to several binders full of writings. The reader will recognize the free-form writing as that which is *written in italics*. It has not been edited, except to clarify meaning. I have left it in the form in which it revealed itself as a celebration of the (un)conscious.

Stories about fish that were dis-covered in literature became the patterned background of the quilt. I used these stories to help me re-search the pools of journal writings. I swam beneath the surface of the writing by utilizing segments of literature that made references to fish: the story of Parsival and his encounters with the Fisher King; a reference to fish in a frozen pond in *The Possession* by A.S. Byatt; an interpretation of the symbolism of “fishing” by Virginia Woolf; the story of Merlyn changing Wart (the future King Arthur) into a fish; and a legend from the Tlingit.

I have used multi-coloured threads--my own explanations and the words of others--to stitch the individual journal entries and stories into into a meaningful whole. I have also drawn on academic sources in adult education and experiential learning to note the relationship of this inquiry to adult education. I have selected quotations from a variety of sources that reflected or refracted my message. The reader will recognize that these stand out in **bold font**, to illustrate that the words stood out for me. These references, including a Jungian interpretation of Parsival’s story, were inter-woven with my free-form writing, allowing me to see new meaning and significance in the original experience and writing.

Literature, in its various forms, became an integral part of this thesis. I have transposed mythological stories into and onto my personal stories. This has helped me

shift my focus, and I begin to see that which was hidden from view. Literature has helped me sense the significance of my idiosyncratic experiences. I had not previously appreciated how story (literature) was an integral part of exploring the meaning of (my) life. Bloom suggests the importance of literature:

**Our culture is doomed to remain a literary one in the absence of any ideology that has not been discredited. Religion, science, philosophy, politics, social movements: are these birds in our hands or dead, stuffed birds on the shelf? When our conceptual modes abandon us, we return to literature, where cognition, perception, and sensation cannot be wholly disentangled (Bloom, 1994, p. 410).**

We hold images evoked by stories and transpose them into and onto our lives. They provide us with alternate ways of seeing, alternate ways of being; they raise our awareness. Some stories provide a sustaining vision, others serve to provoke us. Through the regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic work (play) of writing research, I became aware of how deeply some literature has affected and shaped me. I have carried some stories with me, perhaps unconsciously. I had not realized how deeply the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table had impacted me until I began to recognize how I embodied it in my teaching, which is shared later in this thesis.

Metaphor and story are a suitable medium for my work. It seems more congruent with the way that I think--in pictures, images and impressions, rather than only in words. Finding words to match intuitive and embodied understanding(s) in order to communicate is an important part of the process for clarification and communication. Utilizing the language of the outer world and metaphorical imagery in exploratory writing has been one of the ways that I have bridged inner and outer worlds. Thus, writing, both exploratory and explanatory, is an important part of the method used in this work.

Several metaphors are used, but the predominant ones are “fish” which became a means to explore the depths and look beneath the surface and become aware, so that we begin to see what was previously hidden or unnoticed; “mirrors” which reflect images back to us and help us to see what might not be apparent otherwise; and listening and “sounding the depths”--hearing (the words of) others as they reverberate and resonate and shed meaning on experience(s) and provoke us to hear what is silent (silenced). The process of constructing, deconstructing and re-constructing a metaphor is engaging and revealing. The metaphor of fish swimming in streams, pools, and oceans seems appealing because I think of living life as “entering the stream”, a metaphor used in eastern writing. I enjoy the fluidity of this medium.

This thesis is full of story. Story layered on story, so that the fabric of the stories is sewn together, stitched with the greatest care and attention into a multi-coloured, richly textured tapestry, creating a fabric of a soul. The stories are about healing, and they heal.

**Storytelling, you know has a real function. The process of the storytelling is itself a healing process, partly because you have someone there who is taking the time to tell you a story that has great meaning to them. They're taking the time to do this because your life could use a little help, but they don't want to come over and just give you advice. They want to give it to you in a form that becomes inseparable from your whole self. That's what stories do. Stories differ from advice in that, once you get them, they become a fabric of your soul. That is why they heal you (Alice Walker, 1990).**

I remember when I would teach children, one of the most magical experiences was in the telling or reading of a story. The sounds of the language weaving its meaning seemed to cast a spell and mesmerize them. Suddenly even the most vivacious, active children would still, as if frozen, enchanted. There is power in story. Many of the spiritual writings that have survived over the centuries have used story to convey a message. Why was this indirect way of conveying a message used? Stories are rich and open to interpretation. They can apply in many situations and can be applied in many ways. Jean

Shinoda Bolen suggests that artists and writers whose work touches us deeply, instinctively access collective symbols.

**They ‘dream’ for us: they bring images and stories from their own depths that could be our own. If we are conscious, we recognize ourselves in them. Otherwise we only know that we are moved. Seen from this perspective, artists or authors are our contemporary versions of shaman who have visions for their tribes. They tap into a deeper stratum and express it (Bolen, 1994, p. 36).**

The Swampy Cree say that stories live in the world and may choose to inhabit people, who have the option of telling them back out into the world again. This all can form a symbiotic relationship: if people nourish a story properly, it can tell them things about life.

I have invited aboriginal people into my class to share their personal stories. I have witnessed the power of these stories. When these individuals share their painful memories, the listener is touched in a way that a reading of the history of oppression can never touch them. I have seen these stories move people. The hearing of the personal story can catalyse a shift in perspective, so that we begin to hear that which was hidden from our view. Stories arouse our awareness, they help us to see, help us to understand rather than judge. We begin to see how we are implicated in others’ stories, and this helps to heal the rifts that separate us. I tell my stories to heal the rift within myself, and between myself and others.

Reader, you are invited into this text, to share experience, reflection, theory and action. The words are representative of vivid and rich experiences. You are invited to lift the flat words off the page and breathe life into them once again. The following may help orient you in your reading:

**Stories move in circles.**

**They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles. There are stories inside stories and stories between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home.**

**And part of the finding is the getting lost.**

**And when you're lost, you start to look around and listen.**

(Fischer, Greenberg, & Newman, 1979, as cited in Metzger, 1992, p. 49)

**IN RELATIONSHIP**

the telling of a story and the listening  
 the writing of a piece and the reading  
 the knot of a relationship  
 between teller and listener  
 writer and reader  
 hearing

travelling back into experience  
 to re-visit  
 to re-search.

A great alchemical conjuring  
 personal insights and experiences mixed  
 with those of other  
 a catalyzing potion  
 ideas and understandings re-formed  
 writer and reader conjugate  
 flat words once filled with life  
 re-breathed

Potent chemical reactions  
 ignite in the mind  
 flashes of insight,  
 forming pools of possibility  
 written word, the story told  
 inform  
 transform.

(November 1995)

## CHAPTER ONE

### ENTERING THE STREAM (OF CONSCIOUSNESS)

#### Muddy Waters

Most traditional theses are written in a linear fashion, giving the impression that that is how the work evolved. We edit and separate out (apparently) irrelevant passages. When we always tidy things up for the reader, what do we exclude? What do we hide from view?

**So long as teachers hide the imperfect processes of their thinking, allowing their students to glimpse only their polished products, students will remain convinced that only Einstein--or a professor--could come up with a theory (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986, p. 215).**

I interject my struggles in my work to reveal that the process is not as linear and tidy as we might (otherwise) be led to believe. It seems important to share that the exploration of “fish” has been a messy process--sometimes the water was muddy and unclear--and it has taken time to allow the mud to settle. It was really not until the end that I saw the deeper meaning of this exploration of being fish. My early efforts at working with this were as skitterish as the small salmon fry that emerge in the stream and dart about in a haphazard way. The process was very convoluted and there were many struggles. The following entry illustrates my struggle with institutional constraints and finding a way of working that did not dis-connect me (separate me) from my way of being.

#### Searching for a QUEST(ion)

**Journal entry: February 2, 1995**

What is the focus of this research? It was so clear before, but now when the question is posed, I’m at a loss. The question interferes. I think that if there is a question, there must be an answer. And that stiffens me, confines me. I don’t want to address a

question. I have resisted the form of the traditional thesis and its demands for coming to a question. Huxley, in *The Flame Trees of Thicka*, makes the following observation:

**The best way to find things out is not to ask questions at all. If you fire off a question, it is like firing off a gun--bang it goes, and everything takes flight and runs for shelter. But if you sit quite still and pretend not to be looking, all the little facts will come and peck round your feet, situations will venture forth from the thickets, and intentions will creep out and sun themselves on a stone; and if you are very patient, you will see and understand a great deal more than a man with a gun does (Huxley, 1959, p. 272).**

*What my work has done over the past three years is open many quest(ion)s and many possibilities. I value this. It is reflective of the multiple channels that I am connected to--science, art, writing, social issues, adult education, education, creativity, experiential learning, spirituality, thinking, business and so on. My mind works in deconstructing these and synthesizing, interconnecting them.*

*I want to immerse myself in a process of exploration, not to find answers to questions, but to notice and be aware and see things as if for the first time. I remember an art class at university. We were asked to focus in on our hand and draw. I had worn that hand for years, used it in many ways; it was an appendage that was an integral part of my life. I would have noticed if it wasn't there. But because it was, I never noticed it, I took it for granted. But when I went to draw it, I noticed it--I saw lines, shapes, textures, patterns. Drawing it was an intensely satisfying experience. The drawing that was produced was of little consequence--it was the process of noticing, being fully engaged, it was an intensely joyous experience, seeing, noticing my hand for the first time. Even remembering this brings me joy.*

*I have a piece of art in my study. It attracted me when I saw it. It's a richly textured piece--full of patterns and designs and colours--bowls of juicy fruit, bouquets of*

*flowers, comfort, richness-- it pleases me every time I pause in my work and look up. It reflects the wild patterns of my study. Collections of books that form the patterns of my inquiries--a section on thinking, another on adult education, another group on writing, an art group, a section on business and management, a new feminist section, shelves of novels are tucked away in a cupboard, books on personal development, psychology, social work, several on learning style, Persig's Lila left half done, a big bunch of unread ones on research methods, that seemed important when I purchased them, books on group process, binders of notes, lots of titles that are poking at traditional education (much of which I'd like to grind with my heel--the horrors of being a student, a powerless student--memories surface of abusive classrooms, memories that I want to push down, but that resurface in my daughters' lives). A reading of a colleague's thesis had resurfaced many painful memories of school (Reardon, 1995).*

*This is who I am--a celebration of the rich textures of life. Not a neat, tidy minimalistic picture. But a collage of bits and pieces collected from everywhere. Little bits and pieces of life--pieces of being a mother, bits of being a teacher, a glimpse of my student experience, a reluctant rag from my learning groups and, god forbid, even a bit from my personal life, something I've read and some insight that connects them, threads them together, creates an interconnecting pattern. Something that makes them as meaningful as the experience of drawing my hand. Something that makes me see those experiences in a new way and feel intensely alive.*

*I must research in a way that is true to who I am. I am not a linear thinker. I don't pose a question and find an answer. It's not questions or answers that I am about. It's experience--it's being fully alive in every experience; it's noticing the connections and interrelationships, thinking holistically. It's not only about studying what is, but exploring what could be. It's not about confinement, but about multiplicity. A teacher suggested that the methodology used should be in congruence with the topic. In turn, I think, the research process must be in congruence with (true to) the researcher.*

Perhaps the “quest”(ion) should be one that invites us to look deeper than what is immediately apparent:

*What do we not notice? What is it that is there, that we keep hidden from our view? What is it that is right in front of us, but unseen? All around us, but unheard?*

### **A Moving Method**

In this thesis I reflect what I have learned by examining experiences through writing. The kind of writing that I have engaged in over the past three years has been exploratory and free-form, in which a person simply sits down and writes (re-cords) what comes to consciousness (Goldberg, 1986, 1990). The value of this kind of writing is that it allows one to become aware of one’s experiences, thoughts, feelings and attitudes and puts these into a form that can be examined. But, more importantly, as I write, insights occur. The writing experience is a catalyst for connections, a great alchemical conjuring of experiences swirling with readings and discussions. Often these connections are recorded, not only on paper, but in one’s consciousness and these insights affect one’s vision and come to play out in actions. Thus, the very act of writing can be in-formative and trans-formative. (It moves your thinking and your actions.) Often I am surprised at what comes out. I often sit down with the intention of writing about a specific topic and end up addressing something seemingly unrelated, only to end up back at the original topic in the end with a more informed view. It seems that some past experience or understanding or some insight gained from reading is helpful in informing the specific topic, and that by allowing the mind to work in its own way, connections are made. In turn, the experience that began the writing sometimes throws new light on past experience, so that the past is understood in a new way. There seems to be an integration of past experience and learning with current experience and learning. On the surface, it may seem an illogical process, yet in the end it is very logical. A journal entry that utilizes the metaphor of a rear-view mirror plays with understanding these juxtapositions of time and experience and conceptualization.

### Looking Back: The Rear View Mirror

**Journal entry: February, 1995**

*Driving down the valley road, into the future. Stationary objects come toward me, I move toward moving objects, sometimes passing them by, sometimes just moving with them or sometimes closer to them. Everything is relative. To what?*

*I glance in my rear view mirror and note that which was in front of me is now behind me, that a car is moving toward me, passing that which was in front of me, but now behind me. I move into the future while looking backward through the mirror. But the future changes and even the present changes as it moves into the past and the past changes as others move into it. Everything is relative, I remind myself. I also note that in the mirror I see the other side of things I was moving toward. I had to see the one side while moving toward the object and flip to the mirror to see the other side, to get a "whole" image in my mind. I could never see the "whole" at one time. I had to move around to the other side to see the other half. Is that our nature, to only see halves, dualities? Our physical makeup only allows us to see portions, pieces, parts. And like a puzzle, we connect the portions and pieces to see a whole, a complete picture. But the picture is always changing and we have to hold several images in our mind and connect the images within the images. Fractals come to mind. What does the fractal image tell us about the larger image. What about holograms?*

*How does looking at the image in a mirror help us grasp the whole? We can never grasp the whole, but it gives us another image that we can use to piece together. Why is it important for me to see "the whole," both sides of the sphere? We live in this world with partial images, collecting them, piecing them together, trying to get a "sense" of how the pieces fit together. We use our senses to make sense. The collaborative input is pulled together and we begin to create a coherent image that unites the disparate images. We cling to the image we create. It is sens-ible. We make sense of the world through it and a counter image throws us into chaos.*

**Journal entry: undated**

*How is this exploratory writing like looking in a rear-view mirror? How does looking into what has happened in the past affect my movement into the future? I know that the writing I did last year shaped my current practice. The past is “alive” and transformative as is the vision in the mirror. As we change, our perception of the past changes. Different objects move into our vision, like a moving car coming toward us. We can transcend time and pull the past into the present and into the future, by focussing on it, examining it. The past is in the present and the future is in the present. The writing becomes a tool, like the mirror, that we can use to notice the past and allow it to transform the future. A car that passes us would have come into our present and future, but we wouldn't have noticed it as part of our past unless we looked in the mirror. We use the mirror to assist us in negotiating the present and the future.*

*You have to be alert and aware of what is all around you, glancing behind you, looking far ahead to predict what might happen, but also being fully present and able to react to unforeseen events. At the same time, noticing the landscape that you pass brings tremendous pleasure and perhaps useful information (tacit knowledge) that can be tucked away. There are also stops where one can take a break and notice more. You are directing your path, but the road and its structures also direct you. You are able to make decisions about your route and follow various paths to achieve a destination. Or you might not have a destination, you might be along for the ride and not know where you will end up. You make the choices as you go along, and although the choices may make a difference, you might never appreciate that.*

There are parallels in this (trans)temporal and (trans)conceptual view of writing/experience with those that Pinar (1975) suggests in the method of currere: regression, progression, analysis and synthesis. The identification of such a method is helpful in that it gives the researcher specific ways of working, and exploring the (lived) text. Regression involves re-collecting the past; progression involves anticipating the future. One begins to recognize that the past and the future are present. Analysis exposes the connections (between past, present and future) and exposes what might have been invisible while immersed in an experience. Synthesis is a gestalt-like experience, an

illumination of insight, a coming together of (seemingly) disparate elements, an inner knowing. Pinar notes that “This process [synthesis] seems to occur “below” states of consciousness and articulation, and words may be sparse. The lived sense of synthesis can be unmistakable, however” (Pinar, p. 60).

**There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing, even about ourselves. We’re only just beginning, she thought, to understand, here and there. She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding”** (Woolf, 1938, pp. 427-428).

The writing that I have engaged in allows this kind of amplification of experience, so that its meaning and significance grows deeper and deeper. It incorporates each of the aspects of the method of currere, although it is not done in a segmented, orderly manner. [Pinar suggests that there may be idiosyncrasies in the method (1994, p. 60)]. I have difficulty segmenting the (writing) experience in this way--it would seem artificial and fragmented. Rather, the process is dynamic, complex and holistic, and one thought flows into another, so that the margins between them are not always clearly distinguishable:

**I am a part of all that I have met  
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro’  
Gleams that untravell’d world, whose margin fades  
For ever and for ever when I move...**

(Tennyson, *Ulysses*)

### **Room to Work in: Shifting Perspectives**

**Journal Entry, March 1996**

*I have a reflecting room--a room where I do my reading and journal writing in the winter months. The room is full of windows and at times I am able to gaze out to the trees and wildlife for visionary inspiration. At other times, the light is refracted through*

*the prism of bevelled glass doors translating into rainbows that play in the room. Other times, the sunlight blinds me so that I cannot see anything but shadows. But, depending on the lighting, the windows lose their transparency and sometimes reflect images from other windows; images become superimposed on other images-- image layered on image. I can focus on the window and be engaged with a mirror image, or I can focus beyond the window and see the outdoors, or I can focus on the juxtaposed images. Playful imagery to work in, as I reflect on my life. Image superimposed on image, image against image. Regression--progression. What I see depends on my focal point. What I don't see depends on my focal point. As Pinar points out, Virginia Woolf beautifully illustrates this in a discussion of different authors' interpretations of character in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*:*

**...an English version of Mrs. Brown would focus on her personality and its peculiarities. A French writer would blur the fine edges in order to give a more abstract, general view of human nature. 'The Russian,' she continues, 'would pierce through the flesh; would reveal the soul--the soul alone, wandering out into the Waterloo Road, asking of life some tremendous questions which would sound on and on in our ears after the book was finished.' Mr. Bennet has insisted that the novel be expressive of character, and of character that is real but which version, Mrs. Woolf asks, of reality is real? (Pinar, 1994, pp. 13-14).**

Each perspective provides different information about Mrs. Brown. Each is seeing through a lens that allows them to see particular aspects of Mrs. Brown, but at the same time, their perspective appears to blind them to other possible interpretations. Each carries their own biases and assumptions that frame the way they see the world of Mrs. Brown. What are they not seeing? How do we really get to know Mrs. Brown? Is it enough to describe her outward characteristics and how she acts? Or do we need to "get inside her skin", to know what she feels and thinks? Do we need to know about her past experiences and her hopes and dreams? Do we need to see her in the context of her life so that we can recognize how the environment presses on her? Is Mrs. Brown a metaphor for ourselves? How do we get to know ourselves by studying her? How do we begin to move to see her

from other perspectives? Writing research utilizing regression--progression--analysis--synthesis is one way of achieving a shift(s) in perspective, which may allow us to see what was invisible before. Transposing our personal narratives into/onto stories and selection from literature is another way to shift perspective.

**So if we are to fully enjoy the show we must keep changing our seat. We must look underneath things, look closely at things, look very slowly, gobble up lots of things, stay with one thing all day, try impossible things. Sometimes we have to squint, at other times we need to stop speaking for a day. We have to close our eyes and listen to the world. If we don't change the angle of our vision, we won't see the whole show.”** (London, 1989, p. 34)

### **Reflecting (on) Mirrors and Autobiography**

Mirrors, mirror images, and refracted images frequent my writing. The journal writing that I have included is like a mirror reflecting the images of my experiences.

**But in her web she still delights  
To weave the mirror's magic sights  
(Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott*)**

And all the while, like the Lady of Shalott, I weave the images in the mirror into my work. Until finally, like the Lady of Shallot, I tire of shadows, and speak from deep within. I try to break the illusions that the mirror sends in its reflected image, to break through the mirror, to reach a deeper level of self that cannot be detected in the surface image.

**Out flew the web and floated wide;  
The mirror cracked from side to side;  
'The curse is come upon me,' cried  
The Lady of Shalott.  
(Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott*)**

The metaphor of mirrors seems appropriate for an autobiographical research.

**In the Japanese Shinto, the mirror is a sacred symbol. A good mirror is said to tell the truth about oneself and through its illuminating power gives wisdom, wisdom that comes through self-awareness and knowledge (Brock, p. 235-236).**

Pinar (1994) advocates the legitimacy of autobiography and the method of currere as an educational research method, formulated to “engender development of the researcher...It is a strategy whose aspiration is not only contribution to a ‘body of knowledge’ but a contribution to the biographic-intellectual and thus political emancipation of those who employ it”(Pinar, 1994, p. 61). “Cultivated self-awareness can function to dissolve intellectual blocks (or arrest) and initiate intellectual movement” (Pinar, 1994, p. 50) .

**Success in this work is felt as movement, as awareness of issues and the biographic function of intellectual work that were before veiled, and transformation of both issues and work. One experiences intellectual and biographic movement.**

**In a certain sense this work often feels like a voyage out, from the habitual, the customary, the taken-for-granted, toward the unfamiliar, the more spontaneous, the more questionable. The experimental posture in its most profound meaning suggests this openness to what is not known, a willingness to attempt action the consequences of which cannot be predicted fully. Such a capacity to risk--intellectually, biographically--can be cultivated...It is a capacity those of us interested in education are obligated to develop (Pinar, 1994, p. 149).**

What drew me to this form of research is the recognition that self-awareness is essential for those engaged in the helping professions and also those engaged in research that intrudes in the lives of others. Pinar draws on Jung:

**I quite agree with you that those people in our world who have insight and good will enough, should concern themselves with their own ‘souls’ more than with preaching to the masses or trying to find out the best way for them. They only do that because they don’t know themselves. But alas, it is a sad truth that usually those who know nothing for themselves take to teaching others, in spite of the fact that they know the best method of education is the good example (Pinar, 1994, p. 53).**

### **Being in the Brilliance--A Re-reading of the text**

This piece illustrates the kind of engagement that I have had with the writings of others. Others’ words are integral to my experience. The expressions of others (such as writing, speaking, drawings, photographs, dramas, films) have informed me, challenged me, and enriched my understanding and affirmed my own readings of experience.

*A few weeks ago I visited a local beach. It seemed an appropriate place to reflect on fish. At one point I found a secluded spot and sat on the rocks and spent time looking out, absorbing, noticing. I had brought along Frankel’s book “The Zen of Seeing/Drawing.” I had been drawn to revisit the art world as a way of healing my confusion. Drawing had been a way for me to connect with the world. I had worked with a wonderful artist, Carol Bondaroffe, in Calgary years ago. It was the most enchanting work. She taught us to see. I began to notice things that I had overlooked, such as drawing my hand and coming to know the lines and patterns and shapes for the first time. When you become engaged in this kind of work, you lose all sense of time; you become fully immersed in the process, deeply connected to that which you are drawing. You lose your self. In retrospect I remember those moments as very special, of feeling fully alive. Fully at life, alive in life.*

*I've been reading about nuances. A nuance is a "shade of meaning, a complex of feeling, or subtlety of perception for which the mind has no words or mental categories." (Briggs, Peat, p. 194). It's moments of nuance that make me feel alive. The moments when I make a connection, which I may not yet be able to articulate, but these are moments when everything comes together. Like the experience of drawing. (Or writing.)*

**But our wondering, uncertainty, and questioning are full of nuance. In experiencing nuance we enter the borderline between order and chaos, and in nuance lies our sense of the wholeness and inseparability of experience.**

**One sculptor described her childhood experience of nuance: 'A small puddle, iridescent with spilt oil and reflecting a patch of midwestern sky would suddenly expand for a split-second to encompass my entire universe.' While most of us pass by such perceptions, or even suppress them because they threaten our customary way of thinking, creators focus and amplify on them. Creators cultivate the ability to live in what Keats called the 'doubts and uncertainties' created by a nuance long enough to permit something to bloom there (Briggs & Peat, 1989, p. 195)**

*Apparently Henry James experienced this momentary flash of insight. His story, "The Spoils of Poyntom," was triggered in his mind when a woman he was sitting next to at a dinner party dropped an idle comment about a mother and son fighting over an estate. At that moment, James experienced a vivid if amorphous sense of what he called the "whole" of the story that he would soon sit down to write. A momentary "knowing all." (Briggs & Peat, 1989, p. 195).*

*I walked on the beach, looking down at the texture of the sand. In a moment, I looked up and was captured by a magical moment of brilliance. A million stars shone up from the water, luminous, dappling diamonds. I held my breath, not wanting the moment to stop. That momentary flash of brilliance has stayed with me. As I work on being fish I*

*have a sensation of being in brilliance. Illuminated. The moment being fish emerged in my writing I knew it was significant. In a split second everything crystallized. A momentary sensation of clarity that it would all come together. Not something that is easily explained, but a deep knowing.*

*Finding the writing on nuances in The Turbulent Mirror was helpful. As I read, I became engaged. I understood --I have had proximate experiences that I could associate with the examples and that helped me to understand. I contrast this with reading about Mandelbrot's equation and fractals, where I have no experiences to associate. Trying to read about something that you have no experience with is a very different reading experience than reading about something you can make experiential connections with. The reading was also a validation of my experiences. Not only had others described the experience and tried to articulate in words what I understood on a visceral level, but here was someone validating the legitimacy, and the value, of sensitivity to nuances. It was something I had sensed was significant, but could not explain. But here was someone attaching language to the experience. Here was someone who shared the experience--they valued it too. I read for moments like this. I read to find someone else's words that help me connect meaning to my own experiences. Their words and descriptions give me in-sight, they help me understand my experience. They expand my vision, help me look at an experience through their lens. Sometimes they help me see things I hadn't noticed. Literature helps me frame my experience. I read for the same reason I draw--to notice, to connect, to understand, to come to know. It's also the same reason I write.*

*The meaning of fish is elusive, hard to capture in words. As I work with this metaphor, I often sense an elusive nuance. There are flashing moments when I see deeper and deeper meaning in the imagery--it works on many levels--and recognize its rich gifts and for a moment I can connect it to my writing. The fish becomes a form that will help*

*me explore and discover hidden meaning. I can use it as a lens, the “known” to explore the “unknown.”*

*Like fishing, it (finding the meaning) requires patience. Unexpectedly, the meaning is hooked and the fisherman must be careful not to lose his catch. There is only a brief moment when the fish is netted to celebrate the being of the fish before a choice must be made to let it return to the water and let it be or to take the fish’s life.*

*Metaphor also gives a way to form my work. The fish gives shape to my work. I am trying to communicate the contents of a nuance. Since a nuance isn’t described by or contained by ordinary forms of thought, it isn’t easy to share with other people. Metaphor becomes a way to explore and explain the unspeakable.*

*Because I have become fish and see my work through fish eye lens, I am able to instantly see the whole in a moment. How do I share this with other? The journey of the fish’s life gives me a form that allows me to convey my insight. At the same moment it forms my insight. BEING fish. Being writer. I cannot write about writing without being a writer. I cannot research about researching without being a researcher. It is an ACTIVE, living, dynamic process in which I am engaged.*

The writing of this work was indeed a dynamic process. I came to see that these nuances would amplify. At one moment an awareness would emerge, and later, another insight on a deeper level would emerge, ever-broadening my understanding. Also, there were shifts between these periods of clarity when a new or deeper insight would emerge, with other periods where the water was muddy and my mind would churn chaotically, overwhelmed by the turbulence of cross-currents. Moments of nuance clashed with moments of nemo. I came to recognize that this turbulent mirror of counter-forces and its ebb and flow was the learning process.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE HATCHING OF “BEING FISH”

The title of my work “Being Fish” has been like a Zen koan, a riddle or a mystery for me to solve. It has intrigued me for many months, as I follow where it leads. The following entries reveal how “fish” entered my research.

**Journal entry: at the end of a term, early January 1995**

*The writing I’ve done lately is almost a desperate struggle, more frustrating than pleasurable. I know there’s something in it, but I can’t see for looking. I feel like I’m looking at a pool of water and focusing on the surface reflection, when what I need to do is shift my focus beneath the surface and I’ll see what I am searching for.*

*In mid-January, while in the bookstore, I found a book--The Turbulent Mirror. The title captured me. (In more ways than one). I was feeling the turbulence of not teaching, of the need to get on with my writing, yet being discontent. Knowing that my writing wasn’t taking me deep enough. And this book took me away to the mathematical universe and into infinity. Fractals and holograms suggest that each part represents a microcosm of the whole. It unravelled my linear thinking and led me into territory where I felt lost (and found) once again. I shut the book covers in confusion. It left me with a sense of dissatisfaction with the ordinary. This mathematical logic could iterate one into untravelled dimensions, into fractals, into ordered chaos. And I couldn’t follow it. I was frustrated with the limitations of my mind. How could a computer follow the Mandelbrot equation into infinity and map it, when my own mind couldn’t? “What a piece of work is man.”(Shakespeare) Huh.*

*To have to rely on technology to achieve this depth seemed a slap in the face. Our own limitations mirrored back at us. (And the computer, man made and manned, has its limitations).*

*At this same point, when I was dissatisfied with everything else, was it surprising that I became dissatisfied with my writing--the work that had given me so much pleasure for the past three years? It didn't seem to go deep enough, far enough. I lost the sense of its significance and became disillusioned with its potency. Stream of consciousness--those were the words used to describe this work by a respected teacher; the line hooked me and I struggled to release and be free from their bite. What was the significance of my work and writing? I stayed in this dark place, in these dark and muddy waters for a time.*

*I revealed my "lostness" in class one day. How could I explain to my colleagues the infinite depths of my despair? But people spoke to it. Told me to write about being caught and stuck. The conviction of their words moved me to open up. And I wrote.*

### **Reflecting Mirrors**

The imagery of mirrors has haunted my work, and I know it is significant. One of the first pieces that I wrote using this imagery startled me with its peculiarity:

**Journal entry: undated, 1990**

*I feel like I am rubbing against a mirror that reflects me back--that won't let me through--I feel resistance by some other force. Like there's something on the other side that I want, but a mirror is in my way and I keep running and bumping into it and being bounced back. I need to shatter it to get through to the other side. I scratch it to see through and know that there is a big void on the other side--a lot of space--it looks scary, but I feel compelled to keep trying to go through. I keep trying and feel better for trying, but I don't really want to go through it--it's easier to keep on this side and keep trying. I've got to break through it if I am to go forward. Maybe I've been trying to break through by running and crashing against it--maybe it resists me because I run against it. Maybe I can just walk through--slip through sideways.*

**Journal entry: January 20, 1995**

*I'm on the edge of a new phase in my work. I've worked consistently throughout the past three years and I believe my writing shows a reflective practitioner --a person who looks at her work and "notices". The work shows an insightful person. There is honesty in the work, a willingness to question, to examine assumptions. I have become the person I am when I write in my everyday work. I bring a thoughtfulness and awareness to my teaching. In the moment of teaching, I do not just do/perform. I think reflectively as I teach. As I interact with students, I am aware of what is happening at a deeper level than before.*

*But I am no longer content with that. I am aware that I am just touching the surface, I've just broken the surface of the water. I've been content to sit at the surface and watch the fish swim in the clear pools. As if I could learn about fish and life just by watching it. Looking in the mirror and seeing the reflection bounce back. I like sitting on the cool bank and observing the action, a passive participant, with a superficial, surface only, understanding of what it is to be a fish. As if noticing the actions and patterns was sufficient. But right now I'm eager to know fish like I've never known them before. I want to get into the water, feel what it would be like to be a fish, become as a fish, look at them in ways I've never looked before--see them, really see them--notice what I've never noticed before--dissect them--get to know their bone structure, the parts that compose the whole--BUT THAT'S ONLY ONE WAY OF GETTING TO KNOW FISH. I need to become a fish--see the world through fish eyes--see the world as they see it--become a fish but at the same time be--no--I was going to write still be myself, but no, I must become the fish, lose self.*

I see a connection between these two pieces. Standing on the bank and reflecting on the images in the water is a strikingly similar image to that of bouncing an image off a mirror. In both pieces I am reluctant to break through the "mirror," and move to "the other

side,” although I seem to know that it is vital to move into another place; another way of being.

The album jacket of Loreena McKennitt’s *the mask and the mirror* contains the following statement:

**“For some medieval minds the mirror ‘was the door through which the soul frees itself by passing’...for others the pursuit of personal refinement was likened to ‘polishing the mirror of the soul.’”**

The second piece brought forth the image of being fish; when I wrote the words, I was aware that they were important. They jarred me. And I knew they were words to listen to. The fish had been hatched. But I was interrupted--it was time to meet my student and receive her gift of fish.

### **The Gift of Fish: Presence**

Hannah Merker shares the wisdom of her father, a physician. He has a framed drawing of a bemused-looking man, leaning back in his chair comfortably. A cartoon cloud floats above his head with the caption “Are you listening?” He once told her “When I let my patients talk, I learn more about them, than any crisp telling of medical history....so I listen.” (Merker, 1992, p. 100). In the following entry I learned that listening was a gift, for both the speaker and the listener.

#### **Journal entry: January 20, 1995**

*The metaphor of fish was a gift. It came into my writing. Jumped out of the stream (of consciousness) into my exploratory writing and startled me. At first I was repulsed with the notion--my immediate associations with “fish” are of a slippery, hard to catch creature; their dead carcasses laid out by the hundreds on a smelly boat. Could this slippery metaphor possibly bear any meaning for me? And yet it was evoked in my*

*writing, there for the taking. Somehow the way it had come up made me “notice”-- metaphors percolate through my writing, and I immediately sensed that this one was very profound.*

*I had been working with a woman who had been a student and was helping her to write her application to a professional school. She was a very insightful, thoughtful young woman, but she had difficulty trans-posing herself onto paper, extracting the essence of her self. I had been listening to her as she struggled to analyse herself and reduce her life experiences and learning into the condensed form of 12 pages. Initially I had met to proofread her draft, but it became much more than that. Hours and weeks went by and still she struggled, determined. I watched, listened, supported and learned -- honouring the process that she was going through. It is interesting how events inter-connect. Little did I know that I would be mirroring that struggle myself, in order to write my lifework and learning in thesis form. To condense the complex, rich and varied experiences of a life-long learner and teacher into few words. To convey the rich essence of what contributes to her relentless learning. I didn't want to let any of the contributing pieces go--everything seemed important--all the tangled bits and pieces that were threaded into a rich and colourful tapestry--all the disparate pieces were a part of it and to leave out any piece would leave a gaping hole. It was important that it all be there--each segment became an important part of the whole picture. But how to stitch the pieces together to form the picture.*

*(My student) gave me a gift. Actually she gave me so much, when I think back. She gave me her story, she gave me her struggle to find words to convey how her life experiences had contributed to making her who she was now. She had given me the gift of honesty--she hid no part of herself. She gave me the gift of her spirituality that had been nurtured in her native upbringing so that it became part of everything that she did. She gave the gift of openness--openness to exposing her whole self, openness to learn about herself and her world, openness to exploring two worlds--two cultures. Openness to*

*understanding, not judging. She also gave the gift of joy--her deep delight in learning, the freshness of a new marriage, the struggle of a sensitive and insightful young woman. She also gave me the gift of fish. A picture of a fish. I assume it was an appreciation of the time that I had given her, the listening ear, the support. She told me that I had become an elder to her--someone who shared knowledge and experience (wisdom). That was a very special gift.*

*When (this student) wanted to give this gift--a picture of a fish by a native artist--I was startled. What a coincidence. Only two hours earlier I had written the piece with the fish imagery. Was there some grand scheme of things after all? Was it a sign from some guiding force? It wasn't the first time that serendipitous events fit together like pieces of a puzzle--interconnectedness of seemingly unconnected events. The picture sits on my desk as I write--a condensed form of the many gifts (this student) gave, a mirror of inspiration.*

*I asked (the student) what fish meant in her culture. She became very animated and the talk flowed from her--very different than the struggle for the correct words to include in her application. She was of the salmon people. Her brother and she had been twins and were seen by her people as having special powers. They became part of a ritual where the fishermen would come to hold them and perform a dance to imbue them with good luck, so that their catch would be great. She had brought good luck to her father in the year of her birth. Salmon were the life sustenance of her people and were to be honoured. They were seen to have supernatural powers and transcend themselves because they gave up their life so that new life could emerge. An interesting metaphor for the learning process.*

**Journal entry: January 21, 1995**

*What does this fish metaphor mean? I don't even like fish particularly--they're smelly, slippery, kind of boring. But it keeps coming up in my work. They seem to be an important symbol in religious life, but I don't know their meaning...fish... shiny, reflective... schools of fish--although it is only one fish that I am focussing on in this metaphor; fishing when I was YOUNG with my dad--taking the fishes' lives in such a brutal way, smashing their heads on the ground to kill them. Fish. What do they mean to me? Nothing. Is that the point? Is this about coming to appreciate fish--that which I have taken for granted, never really given much thought to? This is about going deeper, looking beneath the surface. Establishing a spiritual connection--no longer taking life for granted. About really appreciating it in a way I never have before. It's about reconnecting and seeing the spirit in all living things. About living in reverence, about honouring, about being deeply connected to every living thing. About engaging, becoming intimate, about knowing with deepness, about being, about becoming. About being. I will re-emerge from the water with new understanding, having been fish. I will know fish, I will know water and I will live in air differently than before. I sense a reverence, a clear-headed peacefulness, a sadness too, but an acceptance.*

*I don't know what all this means. It seems connected to the mirror metaphor. About bumping against the mirror and being bounced back. About seeing the mirror and knowing that there was something there--aware of the fish in the reflected pond. About breaking through the surface, slipping underneath and looking out from a different perspective--becoming the fish. There is a message in here for myself and I keep avoiding it, so the image keeps returning in other forms until I "get it" and do it, until I slip behind the mirror. The ascent up the mountain and view from the top wasn't it [a metaphor that permeated my writing last year]--it was more reflecting back of the surface. I got the big picture there, but it was superficial. I did not become intimate with anything. I did not know any one thing in any depth. Nor did I know myself in depth. I just keep*

*looking at the surface, bouncing the image back. I've stayed on the shore, passively watching, poking my fingers and toes in the water to occasionally break the surface, but not really wanting to get wet, to go underneath it all. I've stayed on the surface. I never really got intimate with anything. I taught social work quite successfully using this methodology, this way of being. I taught it deeply to others, I pushed them beneath the surface and made them become fish and they struggled and swam and grew to know the water. But I stayed at the surface, watching, never joining them.*

I had found the title for my work: Being Fish. I wasn't sure what it meant, or how its meaning would be revealed, nor was I sure how this would result in a thesis. Because I had been engaged in exploratory writing for almost three years, and had found that each writing event was an exploration that led to deeper understanding, I was convinced that in being open to the call to explore "fish," I might dis-cover something. I wanted to probe the deeper waters, the deeper meaning of being a teacher, being an adult learner, being a researcher, being a human being. "Being fish" became a way to do this. This poem conveys the intuitive sense that I felt about the research I was to become engaged in.

**This story is about a bowl.**

**A bowl--waiting to be filled.**

**If what I have just written makes no sense to you,  
I am not surprised.**

**If I had known in the beginning what I was looking for,  
I would not have written this story.**

**I had to trust that there was a reason I had to write,  
and I didn't have to have it all figured out in order to begin.**

**I would find what I was looking for  
along the way.**

(Bender, 1995, viii)

### Slipping Through The Mirror--Becoming Fish: The Transformation Begins

**Journal entry: February, 1994**

*The image that is haunting me now is lying on the bed of a still, quiet lake looking up through the water. It is very still. I took that image to bed with me last night, thinking I would work on it during my dreaming. But I'm awake now and have no recall of any dreams. Why is the memory of my dreams evading me when I am eager to explore them?*

*Sometimes I have looked down into the water, into a clear pool. The image of pebbles, a fall coloured leaf, a fish emerge with clarity that holds and mesmerizes me. I've often wondered if I could recapture the image in a painting, or more likely in a photograph--only a photo would capture the clarity. A pool of water is like a mirror--but it reflects what's under the mirror as well as the surface--it captures both worlds simultaneously.*

*By lying quietly beneath the surface of the water, I become the rocks. The water encases me and the leaf settles in the crevices of my body, the tiny fish floats past me, undulating, rocking its tail back and forth, opening and shutting its mouth, in perpetual motion as it moves out of sight.*

*I can poke my arm and hand through the surface of the water. It seems separate from my body. I can watch my hand open and shut, as if I were watching the rocks when I looked down into the pool. It doesn't seem this hand is part of my body--it moves of its own accord. My body feels a heaviness and yet has a freedom of movement not possible when not in this flowing, fluid, liquid medium.*

*The water slows everything down. There is a gentle, soothing rocking as the movement on the surface agitates.*

*I see the movement of ripples and feel the gentle rocking.*

*I STAY HERE IN A STATE OF MEDITATION, ENJOYING THE WATER, FEELING  
ITS COOLNESS, BEING ONE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT.*

*SUDDENLY SOME NOISE STARTLES ME AND I SKITTER OFF TO NEW  
TERRITORY. I TAKE A DIVE INTO A QUIET, DEEP, DARK POOL.*

### CHAPTER THREE

#### IMMERSION TO THE DEPTHS

The metaphor of fish is evident in the story of Parsival and his encounter with the Fisher King and the Holy Grail, a spiritual piece, full of symbol and meaning. There are many versions of the story, and like any story, they can be interpreted in many ways. In Wolfram von Eschenbach's version, according to Joseph Campbell, the wounding of the Grail King was symbolic "of the dissociation within Christendom of spirit from nature: the denial of nature as corrupt..." (Campbell, 1972, p. 168). Norma Goodrich reviewed the history of the many versions of the stories of the Holy Grail and suggests "The wounded Christ must be the sadly suffering Fisher King fishing for souls, which is Christ's name in Greek, and too it recalls his fishermen who became apostles at their lake in Israel--to Lancelot's lake in Britain" (Goodrich, 1992, p. 330).

The exact identity of the "grail" has been obscured over time. Bolen notes that "the image of a sacred vessel existed in pre-Christian and Druidic myths as the Cauldron of the Goddess, through which rebirth, inspiration and plenty would come" (Bolen, 1994, p. 40). Another supposition is that it is the communion cup used by Christ at the Last Supper and that it is a symbol of Christ or the Self. "Christ and Self both describe something beyond human or ego, something that is divine, spiritual, reconciling, and gives meaning. If the ruler of the country, the ego, could be touched by the Grail and experience the spirituality of the Self or inner Christ, it would have the power to heal him" (Bolen, 1994, p. 41). In many of the interpretations, it seems to be a story of schism, disassociation, separation and loss, and eventual (re)unification.

The story of Parsival and his encounter with the Fisher King and the Holy Grail could be interpreted as a symbolic or metaphorical representation of the transformation experienced in the life development of humans. Parsival might be seen to represent the outer man, the aspect of (hu)man life that seeks outside of oneself, and the Fisher King could be representative of the inner man. In the story these two character(istic)s become

inter-related and eventually unified. The story could be interpreted as representative of the integration of these separate(d) elements in a (hu)man.

The characters in this story and their experiences embody many of the themes that permeate the current adult education literature: transformation(al learning), self-directedness (in learning), and adult development. These themes are implicit in the story, and may be of interest to adult learners and educators.

In this passage, I give my re-vision of the story of Parsival and the Fisher King. I have read various versions of the story over time, and this re-telling is my idiosyncratic synthesis of the versions. I have also synthesized the Jungian (psycho)analyses of the stories provided by Jean Shinodo Bolen (1994) and Robert A. Johnson (1993). I have integrated these with my own journal writings to help me understand the meaning of my own transformative journey.

As the reader will discover in the following chapter, while studying the story and the analyses, I began to see parallels between my own life and that of Parsival and the Fisher King. I began to see, that like these two characters, I too had (been) separated into two parts: the outer manifestation of myself that conformed to my view of what my culture had expected of me in my various roles, particularly in my professional teaching role; and those aspects of myself that did not conform to these (perceived) expectations became suppressed. I did not nurture and give full expression to the inner self-- the creative, feeling, intuitive parts of myself, because I did not believe that the cultural environment that I worked in valued these aspects of being. I recognize that I was complicit in suppressing this, trying to be the image that I thought I should be. And yet, despite the outer appearance of success, I felt an emptiness reminiscent of the wasteland the Fisher King inhabits. In reading this story, I began to re-member a way of being in the world that was full of wonder and awe, with deep and significant learning. This was the world of youth, with its powerful experiences that were both joyous and painful, the world I had long ago lost touch with as a "mature" adult. It re-awakened me to an important "inner" aspect of life that I had put aside in my professional and adult pursuits. The story

had a powerful impact on me, as I came to recognize that an important aspect of my self has been silent (silenced) for a long time. And the fog began to lift.

**And moving through a mirror clear  
That hangs before her all the year,  
Shadows of the world appear.  
There she sees the highway near  
    Winding down to Camelot;  
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue  
The Knights come riding two and two.  
She hath no loyal Knight and true,  
    THE LADY OF SHALOTT.**

**But in her web she still delights  
To weave the mirror's magic sights...  
    Tennyson, The Lady of Shalott**

### **The Fisher King and the Healing of the Wasteland**

One of the stories that has had enormous appeal to me in my mid-life has been the story of Parsival and the Fisher King. I feel personal identity with the character(s) in the story. The Fisher King has been wounded in the thigh and as a result has remained unproductive. He has been in a despondent state and his whole kingdom has been affected and lies in a state of barrenness. Every day, his only pleasure is to go down to the river and fish. Why? Perhaps it is an attempt to recapture a past experience. At one time in his youth, as a knight errant, he had been travelling the countryside and came upon a camp, apparently abandoned. A campfire was still smouldering and on it a salmon was smoking. Being hungry, the Fisher King greedily grabbed a chunk. But it was hot and scorched his fingers. He dropped the salmon and sucked on his fingers to soothe the burning. The delicious taste of the salmon lingered in his mouth. Within moments, the campers returned to find a thief invading their camp, drew their swords and attacked the king, wounding him in his vitality.

The wounded king spent most of his days fishing, trying to catch the elusive salmon that had left such a marvellous taste in his mouth. He wanted so much to recapture that experience, that ecstatic moment. Yet nothing, nothing, had satisfied him since; only fishing gives him some reprieve.

Here he was, a king, surrounded by richness and lushness. Every evening a procession of the finest foods, the most exotic dishes, steaming and sparkling silver passed his way. Amongst the sumptuous treasures that are part of the evening procession is the holy grail, the chalice said by some to be the one that Christ shared in the last supper; others say the chalice is the cup of the goddess. It glistens brilliantly, almost blinding in its reflection as the young woman who bears it walks past. But all this splendour was mere ritual, meaningless to the king. An emptiness had filled his heart and spirit so that not even the finest of dishes could entice him. He remained deeply sad and untouched. Nothing could spark the vitality that had once filled his being. And the sadness passed outward; everyone in the king's presence was affected until the whole countryside became a barren wasteland, nothing grew in that dry and dusty land.

So why do I identify with this story? What is reflected back at me so that I recognize my image in this mirror? What echoes do I hear in this story that resound in my life? What deep truth did this story touch?

I, too, know the taste of the salmon. A brief encounter with a marvellous experience that has haunted me for the past twenty years:

**Excerpt from a journal entry: December, 1992**

*... It was a moment when I felt totally connected, when I realized I was part of the whole ( I put these words to it now, it was just a feeling, a "knowing," until I began to read Eastern philosophy and have used those words to explain it).*

*It took place in a lodge in the wilderness on a chilly, grey day. We'd been outdoors and came in to warm up with hot drinks and we were sitting in a circle, probably twelve or thirteen people and we were discussing something. Suddenly I had this incredible feeling, very filling, a moment of awe, a moment of "knowing," of completeness, fullness--I'm grasping at words trying to describe it--but it was a spectacular feeling. I felt like I wanted to feel it forever, but it left. I kept trying to feel it again, but it was only momentary. It left and couldn't be captured or recaptured. This same feeling visited me on other occasions, particularly while outdoors, being in nature. One particular day stands out. I was cross-country skiing in Banff. I was with others, but I skied ahead and stopped to wait. It was incredibly quiet, a penetrating silence. I looked up and saw ribbons of light cutting through the trees. The snow sparkled and glistened. It was breath-taking. I was suspended in time and it was glorious. I was alone, but I felt a part of everything. Not only was I a part of everything, but I was aware of everything. What was special about that experience was that it wasn't momentary. It was a magical experience that stayed with me the whole day, an awareness that stayed on and heightened the rest of the day. Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed so crystal clear. Little snowflakes sifting down, I could see their individual structures.*

*We stopped for lunch by some hot pools. Here we were in -25 below weather in a frozen world, ice, snow, everything crystallized but these hot, bubbling springs steaming. That was the most magical day of my life.*

And as suddenly and unexpectedly as the moment happened, it was gone. And like the Fisher King, every experience pales in comparison. Ironic that one of the richest and fullest moments of a life would leave such emptiness in its wake. So, like the fisher king, I, too, go fishing every day, waiting to catch a moment like that again, to savour its rich flavour and capture it and live in it forever. Like the Fisher King, I, too, have lived in a wasteland with riches at my fingertips, lying unnoticed.

Robert A. Johnson explains the wounding of the Fisher King:

**The term *fisher king* is appropriate since the young prince is so much associated with fish; first he is wounded by [the taking of] a fish (the unlawful taking of consciousness, which is called the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Adam and Eve story), then he is partly relieved of his suffering while fishing. To fish in this sense is to do one's inner work--work on dreams, drawing, music or poetry--any form of inner work that is rich to one. Even such mundane things as gardening and getting a 'runner's high' are fishing in this sense since they put one in contact with the inner world. Fishing is the fisher king's only balm to his aching wound....To translate this into more immediate terms, eating the salmon is taking on consciousness before one is mature enough to support it (Johnson, 1993, p. 27).**

Virginia Woolf also uses "fishing" as a metaphor for dipping into one's subconscious, imaginative realm, the realm that she explores.

**I figure her really in an attitude of contemplation, like a fisher woman, sitting on the bank of a lake with her fishing rod held over its water. Yes that is how I see her. She was not thinking; she was not reasoning; she was not constructing a plot; she was letting her imagination down into the depths of her consciousness while she sat above holding on by a thin but quite necessary thread of reason.**

**... suddenly there is a violent jerk: she feels the line race through her fingers. The imagination has rushed away; it has taken to the depths; it has sunk heaven knows where-- into the dark pool of extraordinary experience. The reason has to cry "Stop!" The novelist has to pull on the line and haul**

**the imagination to the surface. The imagination comes to the top in a state of fury.**

**Good heavens she cries--how dare you interfere with me--how dare you pull me out with your wretched little fishing line? And I--that is, the reason--have to reply, "My dear you were going altogether too far. Men would be shocked." Calm yourself I say, as she sits panting on the bank--panting with rage and disappointment. We have only to wait fifty years or so. In fifty years we shall be able to use all this very queer knowledge that you are ready to bring me. But not now. You see I go on trying to calm her, I cannot make use of what you tell me--about women's bodies for instance--their passions--and so on, because the conventions are still very strong. If I were to overcome the conventions I should need the courage of a hero, and I am not a hero. (Woolf, 1938)**

This last line strikes me. It has been over fifty years since Virginia Woolf wrote that, and it seems it still takes courage to write about rich and personal experience in academic writing. Although I knew that the experience I had was significant, I did not have an understanding of its meaning. I was not able to talk about such experiences to others. I would get a blank stare in response. It was difficult to find words to express these experiences, and it became easier to remain silent about it, not talk about it. Still, I looked to others to explain and verify these experiences. I have read hungrily over the past few years, trying to find evidence that others may have shared similar experiences. There seemed a silence around such "mystical" events. The closest connection I could find was Maslow who spoke about "peak" experiences. Thus the sword that wounded my spirit was the lack of response in our world to such experiences and the view of them as scientifically unverifiable, subjective experiences. Later I was to find some scientific verification that such states were acknowledged as the "runner's high" and were explained by connection with the body's hormonal system. But the reduction of such a rich

experience to such a technical explanation left an empty taste. (*Note: since writing this, I have found many references to such experiences*).

Like the Fisher King and Virginia Woolf's writer, I too have found some relief in "fishing," creative activities that put me in touch with the inner world--drawing, teaching, writing. These activities recapture the "magical moment" while I am immersed in them, as the following journal entry illustrates:

**Journal entry: December, 1994**

*... In these states, I'm not conscious of myself, really. I just am. Ideas just flow, I make connections in an easy, natural way. I feel alert and alive. I particularly felt that yesterday after working with two students as we worked together to assess a student's writing. At the time I was fully engaged in our collaborative efforts and it truly was collaborative--we all contributed to the discussion--and I know I learned from them and about them. It wasn't until afterward that I became aware of feeling really good inside--I had been feeling very ill, yet forgot about it--it was so engaging. Some experiences are very exhausting--after a workshop, I feel drained; but each time I have worked with a small group of students on a focussed activity, I get that same feeling afterward--I feel alive and fulfilled--it's a very intense feeling--almost a wholeness like the day I felt on the mountain--a "peak" experience. And I'm really feeling that about the whole term, too--although there's been a bit of tension about not having time to address everything. But almost every single class was really good--a concept was addressed deeply, personally. Students were involved, they learned --thought about something in a new way. One student said "I always learn something in this class, every day I leave thinking about something." And I feel that I too learn in them. This is, I think, one of the most fulfilling long-term teaching assignments that I have ever undertaken. I didn't have to be the "expert"--all I had to do was co-ordinate the learning experience--design the initial stages and facilitate the progress. It involved a lot of preparation and thought. But once I*

*engaged the class, it involved letting go--letting them take the initiative--and some fruitful, insightful discussions evolved.*

But there is a jerk from the fishing pole and I am pulled back into another realm, the realm of the “wasteland” in other experiences:

*“So what’s interesting to me is that when I went to class last night [a class in which I am a student], for the first 3/4 hour (until small group time) is how DISCONNECTED I felt. When we did our initial sharing in the large group I felt disengaged fairly quickly. Whether it’s the size of the group; no, it even happened in small group--it’s particular colleagues that bring this on. They seem so much more evolved in the academic realm than I am. But at the same time I recognize them for their theoretical understanding. They are operating in a realm that I am not connected with. They speak very abstractly. My thinking is connected to the concrete. When I hear a quote from the literature, I want to connect it to an experience and allow it to shed light on an experience. I have a different orientation to life than most academics. Can I ever be an academic? Can I dwell in the world of ideas? I want to take the ideas and apply them to my experiences. I’m not interested in formulating academic/I meant to write abstract (abstract=academic?) theories. I don’t mind playing about in it for a bit, but then I’d like to get back to PRACTICE (re-doing). I’m a practitioner--a thoughtful practitioner--the interest in academic work is to help me in my practice.*

*I feel shut out of the academic world. Perhaps I don’t think abstractly enough. I have a practical twist--I want to engage in critical analysis for a purpose--to improve practice.*

*Now as I move into the next phase of my work--the research of the literature I feel more unsure. How can I walk the wavy water without being pulled beneath the surface?*

*The academic talk with no reference to the concrete makes me shut down, shut out, feel frozen. I stop feeling. I go blank. I lose my sense of confidence. I become self-aware. I no longer flow. It happens in arguments too—I become disconnected.*

**Journal December 11, 1992** *provides some explanation: In argument there is a resistance to listening; there is confrontation, no openness. With my women friends there is a gentle listening and discussion. It is a giving, a taking; we confront ideas, but never in an attack of the person. Our conversations are rich and deep and exploratory. We are always tentative and open and wondering and testing ideas rather than advocating a final edict. Argument is more of a patriarchal method. It is a holding of power and maintaining that position. I am not so much interested in the answer, as I am in answers, in possibilities. I want to unearth multiple truths rather than THE truth.)*

Thus, when I move into the inner world, a state of “flow,” a sense of wholeness is achieved. When I work in more conscious and rational ways, I experience difficulty. I feel “cut off.” Like the fish when it is hauled from the water gasps for air (inspiration) until its life is expired (expiration), I too lose my sense of vitality. *A part of me has been pushed down, less valued and acknowledged in the world I inhabit. I’ve had to hide a part of my being in order to be “credible” in the world, in order to be professional. But as I push it aside, I lose touch with my childlike sense of wonder and awe and feel that I have lost something vital, that I am becoming old before it is time, stale, mechanical, dried up.* Like the Fisher King, a sword has plunged into my being, creating a wound, a schism in my spirit, my vitality, and I reside in a dry and barren wasteland.

The Fisher King lives in his state of sorrow for many years, waiting the arrival of an “innocent fool,” a wandering knight who will chance upon the castle and upon seeing the Fisher King and the grail will break the spell by asking a simple, but vital question. In some interpretations of the story, the question is: What ails thee? And in others it is: Whom does the grail serve? If he fails to ask, the castle will vanish and the knight will have to set out once more upon the search.

### Parsival's Entrance into the Story

Parsival is a young man who has been enchanted. His father and brothers had all been valiant knights in Arthur's court and had been killed by the sword before his birth. It is said that his mother moved into a cottage in the forest, away from the castle, to raise her son in safety and innocence, far away from the influence of the court and chivalry. As a young boy, Parsival was playing in the forest one day, when a group of knights passed by. The gleaming glare of their shining armour struck him, and held him spellbound. His mother has told him about angels, and he assumes that is what they are. It is said that he left his mother's skirts to follow this vision. He was trained by the finest of leaders and was knighted. After a time, Parsival remembers his mother and sets out to find her.

Bolen (1994) suggests that Parsival's actions of refuting his mother mirror those of contemporary men and women who have aspirations and goals of achievement. The hero(*ine*) leaves the mother world, in an effort to deny dependency and may exhibit a corresponding intolerance for vulnerability, which becomes equated with weakness. She suggests that many modern women wear an intellectual armour and focus their attention on professional ambitions, often in denial or unaware of their feelings, vulnerabilities, physical yearnings or emotional needs.

The metaphorical return to mother may have many interpretations: it may signify an insightful appreciation for the mother and the return home may initiate a deeper level of relationship with her. It might mean awareness of the mother archetype within, which may lead a woman into motherhood; it may be a return to the motherworld (Bolen, 1994, 139).

Bolen's words had a significance for me:

**To remember mother and seek to find her again refers also to that sudden recollection of a world and an identity we left behind in childhood. For we each have a personal 'prehistoric time,' before we could write or tell time, before we knew about the calendar. If we experienced...the mother figure as a positive force, we were in the mother realm of imagination, unconditional**

**love, timelessness and closeness to benevolent nature and instinct...This is the world the hero(ine)(as the ego in all of us) has to leave behind when we go to school and then to work in a patriarchal culture that requires and rewards us for objectivity and rational thinking, goal focus and productivity (Bolen, 1994, p. 140).**

Bolen also suggests that the magical child archetype appears in the dreams of people who are getting in touch with meaning or creativity in their lives. Sometimes it takes the form of a newborn infant who talks. With me, it was a return to childhood in my writings, to a time and a way of being that seems very distant from me now. In my adult life, with all its responsibilities, I had lost the spontaneity, wonder and awe that I had experienced so naturally in my youth. What ailed me was directly related to what could heal me. I needed to touch the child within myself, to truly feel my own feelings, be as unself-conscious as a trusting child and respond with a child's capacity for awe and wonder.

When I research what it means to be fish, many pieces converge. The immediate connection to my childhood and fishing with my father was the first image to become associated. It seemed fitting that I should return to my spawning grounds--both to the rivers we fished and to being a child (a child being). The rivers were an important homing ground--a place where I came to know the world of nature, where I became aware of my separateness and connectedness. I came to know this by being in the world in a child's way: through play, through exploring, through sensing--looking, listening, touching, breathing my environment.

### **The Gully**

#### **Journal entry, 1992**

*By my children's standards, I guess I had a deprived childhood. I didn't have 20 stuffies (I had one leopard that sat on my bed and the only reason I got that was that Great Aunt Myrt moved to Australia to live with her daughter who'd married an "Aussie" during the war--she left on the Canberra and I got the stuffed leopard). I didn't grow up*

*with VCRs, video cameras, 2 coloured TVs--we had a fuzzy black and white TV with rabbit ears and one channel, we didn't have hours of kids programs, cartoons--just the Howdy Doody show once a week. So I got bored. There wasn't much to do. Watch mom bake, listen to grown ups talk, poke round our tiny two bedroom bungalow. The only thing to do was to go outside. Play in the gully--throw stones in the water that collected there in the spring, step on the frozen ice and listen to the crackle, count the crocuses and watch as their ugly buds unfolded into soft, delicate purple flowers, collect buffalo beans, maybe get brave and go up to the culvert and call our names into it and listen to the echo. Really get brave and walk through the tunnel--though most of the time we'd get half way and get scared and run back. (If you were smart aleck enough to go to the other side, you had to go through it again to get back). We were so scared of it. We'd gather there like it was a magnet and taunt each other to go in. We'd dash in and out and giggle.*

*Sometimes someone who wasn't from our block would come along and use a swear word. We'd stand in quiet awe, horrified, yet fascinated. Someone's mom would call someone in and we'd disband and I'd be alone again--lifting up a rock to see if there were bugs under it, rolling down the hill gathering bits of dried grass, picking burrs out of my socks, feeling the wind whipping my hair around, staring across the gully at the quietness of the house across the gully, wondering why we never saw anyone in the yard, wondering if there really was a witch lady who lived there. Sometimes I'd watch the family of kids who lived next to her play together in their backyard--they had a swing and they'd holler and yell and laugh. They never noticed me watching, wanting to be invited, but too shy to intrude. After a while I'd go in--put those ugly brown boots with the buckle by the milkshoot. (Why couldn't I have some nice white boots like some of the girls had? I had to have my brother's brown hand-me-downs. Sometimes I'd hide them in the garbage box on the way to school and go on free of their heaviness--it was hard to skip along in brown boots--it must have been cold and slippery on the ice, but all I remember is how*

*free I felt without them. All the things my mom didn't know about --all the freedom I had to do what I needed to do--for this I am forever grateful).*

*That gully was my education--the content of my curriculum--that's where I learned. Learned to look and see, to watch, to listen, to feel, to be alone, to enjoy the cycles of nature, to test my social skills when a gang of kids gathered, to like the emptiness and quietness.*

*I visited my neighbourhood when I grew up. The first thing that struck me was how small the gully actually was. They'd had a city improvement project and had converted the gullies into a series of parks--with walkways, paths, trees planted... they'd buried the culverts and established a drainage system so that no creek could splurge through, carving its way down in spring; there were no rocky places left for buffalo seeds to catch and grow, no vacant spot for crocuses to hide. The city planners had created what they thought was a perfect environment--the perfect place for little kids who lived in the community to play in. It was sterile. It looked "nice," but I noticed nobody used it. There were no pockets of kids playing, hollering into the culvert; no little girls standing and watching. A tidy, but barren wasteland, robbed of its former vitality.*

When I recall the events of my childhood, I recognize them as very intense experiences. Is there a boundary, a separation between outer and inner self? The inner work of the child is clearly connected to the outer world experiences that s(he) is engaged in. It strikes me that the work (play) of childhood is profound. And we tend to trivialize childhood as something trite, when in actuality it is a time of deep experience and learning:

### **Grandpa**

**Journal entry, 1992**

*This story has been sitting in my mind and must be released.*

*I grew up in a stable home. I don't mean that there aren't layers of life to uncover, but there was a predicability, a level of security that has grounded me, rooted me and given me a foundation so that I could spread my branches and grow gloriously, celebrating in the sun and imbibing in the rain. My parents, I think just seem like ordinary, everyday people, but I'm coming to think that being "ordinary" is extraordinary. I can see their lives as a whole now, and although there were episodes of turbulence, there was an underlying stability, a deep commitment that seemed to carry everything along and move it to a better place.*

*I was lucky, I think, to have that stability. My grandparents were the ones that lived colourful lives. I could sit by at a distance and watch their drama unfold. They weren't "healthy" people. They both had a lot of problems that they had to work through. And to be a child in that environment would have been tough—it would have affected, harmed a child. My mom, aunt and uncle are remarkably grounded despite the instability of their home life. But that was because my grandma's parents had the children live with them when things were rough (which was a lot of the time). My mom and aunt talk about their grandmother in affectionate ways and respect her capable management.*

*Individually, my grandparents were remarkable, capable, accomplished people. But the combination of these two people was volatile. They loved each other deeply, passionately, but hated each other just as passionately. Couldn't wait to see each other, but within a short time tempers would flare, a commotion arise and someone was off in a huff. I could watch the dynamics, see grandma looking out the window, craning to see if grandpa was coming. She'd bustle about getting a meal ready. Sometimes, he wouldn't even show up. But most of the time, we'd have a great time together. But they couldn't be together too long or they'd erupt. Two strong-willed people, grandma wanting to control, grandpa not willing. The tighter she tried to rule, the more rebellious grandpa got and off he'd go, retreat to his own place, or hide in an alcoholic blur. I spent many, many*

*happy hours with my grandparents individually. Grandma's house was sparkling, smelled of soap, baking, everything carefully tended, tastefully decorated. I see her now in her red polka dot dress, beautifully groomed, with a sparkle in her eye and quick wit. Even when she was 90 and seemed totally out of it, when I'd visit her in her nursing home she wouldn't know who I was, but she always had a wisecrack. My brother didn't get along too well with her. She'd try to control him--insist he'd finish eating something he didn't like--and the war of wills would be on. I hated fighting and begged one of them to give in. "It doesn't matter grandma, he's eaten everything else." "Just this one time Larry, please, just eat it." Such iron wills!*

*Grandpa had his own place--he had a room in Great Aunt Myrt's cellar. Very simple, basic, orderly, meticulously clean. He'd always start the day looking sparkling, but by supper he'd be rumpled and wrinkled. Everyone liked him--he had a charismatic way--"Mooch" they called him. He had friends everywhere I went with him. I too, loved to be with him. He'd talk to me like I was a grown up, but treat me like I was a kid, taking me to look at the toys, the playground, buy treats. He taught me to notice the sunset, to stop and admire a mighty tree. Every day he would phone and talk to me, and I was always eager to talk to him.*

*I loved him deeply and could never understand my aunt and uncle's reservation about him. They'd seen another side of him. One day I did too. Larry and I were on the bus home from the dentist. Grandpa got on. We were horrified--he was filthy, dirty, swearing and very drunk. I wanted that moment to go away, as I watched him reel and lurch as the bus pulled off. Larry and I hid behind the seat, hoping he wouldn't see us. He got off at our stop and we waited to get off at the next one. I felt like I was numb inside. I didn't want things to be like this.*

*When we got home he was sitting on the steps. Mom wouldn't let him in. We went around the street and went in through the back door. It seemed like we waited forever until he left.*

*That was one of several incidents. My father was so good to him. When grandpa finally hit rock bottom and decided to sober up, he would make a place for him in the basement, clean him up. I remember dad being very stern with him: "You're not to go upstairs." I stood at the top, listening, but not going down. That wasn't the grandpa that I loved to be near.*

*Then he'd sober up and be his old self again--sometimes for months, even years, before his next toot. And it wasn't long before the bond would rebuild. But it taught me many lessons--I learned to imagine how my mom, her sister and brother must have felt growing up. It helped me understand my mom and bear with her tenderness. (I'd always been gentle with my mom, but frustrated with her for not standing up for herself.) And I grew to respect my dad's caring and nurturing (even if it was strict--it was with the intent of protecting the rest of us). I have also learned to recognize that behind each drunk on the street is a person--perhaps a special one to some little girl.*

*...That moment on the bus. I remember it from time to time. It was a difficult moment--a loss of innocence. Like water from a cold shower slapped on hot skin. A rude awakening. I remember it was kind of a special day--Larry and I went on a trip to the dentist on our own, a bit of an adventure. But our pleasure was shattered by the recognition that the commotion at the front of the bus was caused by someone I recognized. I could feel the shock shoot through my body like an electric current. I sucked in my breath, my eyes widened for a moment, everything was frozen, silent. "That's grandpa" I said softly. We watch as he lurches and reels to find a spot. "Don't let him see us" Larry says. We bow our heads low, hoping he won't recognize us. For a long, horrible moment we wait, holding our breath. I glance up quickly and dart my eyes about until I see the back of his head, by the door. It seems like forever until we finally pass the gully and service station and it's our stop. He rings the cord to get off. Again our fear rises. I don't know what to do if he sees us. We wait until the next stop to get off.*

*I don't know whether to run home and hope we get there before he does, or linger long enough to hope he has left before we get there.*

*This was my beautiful, gentle, passionate grandfather. This is the man who loves me and who I love. This is the man I'm always eager to talk to and be around.*

*Grandpa gave me a doll one Christmas. I was never quite sure if it was something he bought, or something my mom bought because she knew he wouldn't be there that Christmas. She was beautiful--a cloth doll, with silky blond hair in braids and wearing an ethnic costume--white blouse and blue polka dotted skirt. From her shoulders hung a colourful band of ribbons. I brought her everywhere with me. I showed her all my favourite places in the gully. I'd take her up to the bus stop and wait, hoping that grandpa might come and surprise us with a visit. I still have that doll and she sits on my bureau. She's very worn and dirty. When I pick her up, a little sawdust spills out. But it doesn't matter. She'll always be special to me--just like grandpa.*

Why has this story revisited me? Why is the past present? What is in it that can be heard if we listen? What does it teach us about "child"? How have these experiences affected her as an adult?

**You have to be still and quiet for these things to happen; you have to release your expectations; you have to stop thinking you already know things, or know how to categorize them, or that the world has already been explained and you know these explanations. You know nothing. You understand nothing. You have only what your body tells you and only your own experience from which to make judgments. You may have misunderstood, you may be wrong. Teach me, is what you should say, and, I am listening. Approach the world as a child seeing it for the first time. Remember**

wonder. **In a word: humility. Then things will come to you as they did not when you thought you knew**" (Butala, 1994, p. 129).

### Parsival and the Grail

It is while on the quest to find his mother, that Parsival comes upon the Grail Castle. In Chretien de Troyes' version, Parsival follows the road to its end and comes to a deep river and assumes that his mother's home is on the far bank. He is in a quandary about how to get to the other side, when he sights a fisherman floating downstream in a boat. He calls and asks if there is a lodging available for the (k)night. **Bolen suggests that it is the very act of seeking that sets something in motion to meet us; something in the universe or in the unconscious responds as if to an invitation.** Although the fisherman knows of no lodging or how to cross the river, he gives instructions to lodge at his home: "Just down the road a little way, turn left, cross the drawbridge, and you shall be my guest for the night."

Robert A. Johnson interprets this: "First the fisher king says there is no dwelling within thirty miles, a way of saying mythologically that there is nothing in the three dimensional world which will help one....The specific instructions are to go down the road--whatever road one is involved with at the moment--turn left, which is to say toward the unconscious world of imagination and fantasy, cross the drawbridge--the division between our conscious world and the inner world of imagination--and one will be at the Grail Castle, the miraculous place of healing (pp. 40-41).

Parsival follows the instructions, arrives at the castle and is greeted by the wounded man who was fishing, who now appears as the king. He is treated to a sumptuous feast that evening and during the evening the magnificent grail procession passes by with every course. (Johnson offers the interpretation that the healing vision occurs every night in our interior grail castle.) Despite being in the midst of a numinous experience, Parsival makes no mention of what he is witnessing. Parsival had been well instructed by his mentor to be courteous and not make probing inquiries, nor to reveal his

ignorance by asking inappropriate questions and thus remains silent, failing to ask the crucial question. Instead, he fills the night with friendly, inconsequential chatter and feasting before retiring for the night.

**There are moments of great mystery that seem to pass by like the Grail procession in the lives of many people. Liminal experiences at the threshold between two worlds are not that uncommon; they are archetypal, mystical moments when we see through or beyond ordinary reality....I am convinced that most people have had "Grail experiences" sometime in their lives; they have had epiphanies, sacred moments, numinous or revelatory experiences, and have felt momentarily whole and healed, loved, touched by, or part of divinity or some part of the universe. (Bolen, 1994, p. 144)**

And like Parsival, we may not ask about it or even mention it. We too have been trained by our mentors not to speak of such imaginings, not to reveal our "ignorance." Johnson suggests that this is the psychological history of virtually every modern (hu)man. The vision is offered in one's youth but one cannot find the strength of consciousness to accept it.

The story continues, and when Parsival wakes the next morning, all the doors he walks past are locked and no one is about, and when he knocks or calls out, no one answers. The palace appears deserted and finally he locates his horse, which has been saddled for him and he leaves. It is said that Parsival spent the next twenty years of his life in pursuit of knightly deeds. But after a time, this work that has held such challenge and inspiration begins to lose its zest and no longer offers the charm and attraction it once held. Parsival becomes worn out, dried out, and he begins to inhabit a "wasteland," reminiscent of the fisher king. He has become (like) the Fisher King. He grows aware of an emptiness, a deep ache in his being. It is (a) feeling that he becomes aware of. Some

distant memory in him draws him and he begins wandering and searching in the forest, the archetypal landscape that is without roads or marked signs. We find ourselves in the metaphorical forest when we lose our bearings and question our choices (path) or when the meaning of what we are doing is clouded.

**The forest, the labyrinth, the other world, the underworld, the sea, and the depths of the sea are all poetic and symbolic descriptions of how we perceive the unconscious as a realm. It is where we go when we are lost, and where we need to go to find ourselves. Individuation, the need to live from our own depths in an authentic and growing way, is a journey that takes the ego into the forest (Bolen, 1994, p. 148).**

The wandering in the forest is a time of soul searching and a time to “meet what we have kept in the shadows and what we have been kept from knowing or acknowledging about ourselves, or the personal and patriarchal world we inhabit. Here it is possible to find what we have been cut off from, to ‘re-member’ a once vital aspect of ourselves” (Bolen, 1994, p. 149) .

I too have wandered the labyrinth through libraries and bookstores in my quest to recapture meaning, to re-member something that has been dis-membered.

### **What Ails Thee? Sur-Facing the Dark**

What happens to our inner world, our imagination, our inner being when we assume roles?

**And in the pool two fishes play  
Argent and gules they shine away  
Against the green against the grey  
They flash upon a summer’s day**

**And in the depth of wintry night  
They slumber open-eyed and bright  
Silver and red, a shadowed light  
Ice-veiled and steadily upright**

**A paradox of chilly fire  
Of life and death, of quenched desire  
That has no force, e'en to respire  
Suspended until frost retire.**

**Were there fish? Maud crouched on the rim of the pool, her briefcase standing in the snow beside her, and scraped with an elegant gloved hand at the snow on the ice. The ice was ridged and bubbly and impure. Whatever was beneath it could not be seen. She moved her hand in little circles, polishing, and saw, ghostly and pale in the metal-dark surface a woman's face, her own, barred like the moon under mackerel clouds, waving up at her. Were there fish? (Byatt, 1990, pp. 141-142).**

What this passage signifies to me is that we often suspect that something lies beneath the (our) surface. We may recognize that there is something hidden in the deep, which we get fleeting glimpses of, but we have created a barrier of thick ice, that is difficult to penetrate. We may strain to see, but what we usually get is the surface reflection. We “freeze” what is difficult deep below the surface. Pinar (1994) uses the term “arrested” to describe this suspended state that we exist in. But it is not frozen; like the fish beneath the ice, it is alive and it impacts on us. The past is present. Its ghostly image haunts our being.

It takes tremendous courage to dig beneath the surface and face what has been pushed below. Margaret Atwood (1992) writes about this struggle in *Surfacing*. It is the story of a woman's struggle to face her “dark side”, the part of herself that she has submerged, the part of her past that is painful to (sur)face. Her redemption comes from facing (her) truth and accepting the pain and guilt entailed.

**We haven't yet told the truth about our lives. Until we tell the truth outloud, no matter how humiliating or painful or at variance with society's version, we will not come to know what we are, what is truly our world of experience, and through that, what our roles should be, what they can be (Butala, 1994, p. 165).**

*I feel the need to include a chapter titled The Greening of Self ( the re-growth of self; we associate green with lushness, in contrast to the barren wasteland). I have been affected already by this creature(the fish). I read about the depletion of fish through our mechanistic, self-ish way of being. I want to push this awareness away. Ignore it. Not make it a part of my work and study. In much the same way as I have taught about social issues. Ironically, I try to distance myself from what I teach and witness the transformation of others as they experience the curriculum that I set out. They engage in it in a way that I as teacher do not. My role as teacher allows me this privilege of standing separate. I can design events and assignments that force students to face these issues in a deeply personal way. But I can a-VOID it. Stand in a void, in a vacuum and not feel these painful issues. But I also sense the void that I am in when I avoid. I hear the students as they are moved. Deeply affected by the curriculum of real life. I ask them to engage in life and those who do are moved. They have learned deep lessons. They have come face to face with hard issues--racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism. Through their inquiries, through their listening to life stories, they are moved. They see in new ways. Their experience of life shifts. When they speak of how they have changed, I am affected. It warms me to know how this curriculum has affected them so deeply. It becomes hard for me to stand separate. As I witness them shifting, I am forced to shift. How can I stand separate and watch them experience the pain and joy of their growth. When I hear a woman speak of her growing awareness of her racism, awareness of her white privilege, I am moved by the power of the curriculum. It is not the curriculum that moves me. It is this woman's story. Her story of her shifting in her new awareness, the new eyes she sees through that gives her a new vision.*

*It is easy to stand as teacher, separate from the curriculum I teach. I can offer experiences that help us face our racism, our sexism. I can teach about these mighty things. I can assign readings that enlighten. And I, as teacher, can disengage from this process, I don't have to DO the curriculum that I plan. I think I can remain separate from it. Unaffected by it.*

*But because I am in relationship with students, their movement affects me. They tell their stories of awareness, of transformation and they move me. I cannot remain aloof and separate. Because they are affected and speak of this, I, as listener, enter into their story and it affects me. I cannot remain separate from them. I am implicated in their story and their story becomes a part of me. I am no longer separate from, I am involved; their involvement affects me and I become a part of their story. Sometimes I try to pretend I can remain separate from the curriculum; it is easier to remain un-involved. I try to ignore the homelessness, the violence, the abuse, the hatred. But it doesn't go away. Its existence implicates me. I am involved. It involves me. I can try, but I cannot remain separate. It exists. Trying to carry on and ignore it doesn't make it go away. It will surface again sometime, like a dead fish, that floats up to assault me. I am a part of the world. I cannot separate from it. The garbage I try to ignore will surface.*

*There is no separateness. We may try to create boundaries that give us the impression of separateness. But even these actions have an effect. Frost's poem about walls (The Mending Wall) surfaces again:*

***"Before I built a wall I'd ask to know***

***What I was walling in or out."***

(Robert Frost, Mending Wall in Sohn, 1969, p. 105)

*I try to create a wall when I identify myself as teacher and other as student. I try to keep myself separate from. I may try to make the walls thick and impermeable. But the real walls are only skin-thick and a semi-permeable membrane. The wall ruptures. A tiny hole gets poked through at first and the pressure is relieved as the protective fluid is released. And I am left with a gaping wound. I am vulnerable. A weak point. The barrier I created is broken down. By their honesty. Truth. Their freshness, their willingness to open themselves up, share their deepest thoughts. There is no longer a wall. I become absorbed by their work, affected by it.*

*Their stories become part of me. I come to know life from hearing their stories. When I hear their stories and experiences of racism, sexism, heterosexism, dis-ability, their stories become a part of me. I try to silence them. But they keep calling out at me. I know their pain because they have given me their pain in the telling of their stories. I cannot remain separate from these. I have heard the sounds of their stories. These people have become part of me. I carry them with me.*

*I can make a feeble effort to erect walls. Try to remain separate. But the walls are only artificial boundaries. Fences to make me feel safe and secure. But it is a false sense of security.*

*As a child I stood under the canopy of the stars--no separateness. I was part of the whole. No boundaries. When did I learn to put up fences? Who taught me this? When did I become separate from?*

#### **Journal entry: Mirror image**

*I've been working with a group of learners who have been working to teach what we have learned to others. When we did our work, it became clear that we, as teachers, had also been learners. We had internalized that which we were teaching others. That which we were teaching had become part of us. We embodied that which we taught. It became a part of our being. Through teaching, we learned as much as the "learner"!*

*These walls of labels that we put on our work: teachers, students, learners. These are artificial boundaries. In truth, there is no separation. We try to fool ourselves that we can attach the labels and be separate. But the separateness becomes part of us and our work is affected. The separateness comes to exist because we create its existence. And it has an effect on the whole, reinforcing that all is connected.*

#### **Living Non-Attachment**

*Writing about this dark side with such honesty, this exposure of self, reveals that which is a strong undercurrent in one's being. We often choose not to become conscious of these parts of our self. We try to submerge them, fence them off from our reality, try to*

*carry on as if they didn't matter. But when we do this, we lose a piece of self. We fragment our self into discrete packages: that which is palatable is kept above water, that which we choose to ignore we keep under water, out of public view, thinking that if we ignore something in ourselves, no one else will notice either.*

*One of the values that I have chosen to guide my life is to live with integrity. It is a wholesome value, one that is easy to talk, but very difficult to walk. It means facing my dark side. Sur-facing it. Exposing it. Seeing a part of my self I try to hide, push under the water. When I become fish and live in the water, I see the underside, that which is beneath the surface, and how it is connected to that which is aired.*

*A student in an evaluation said that I walked my talk. I deeply appreciated the comment because it spoke about the work I had done to teach with integrity. I was teaching an analysis of power and oppression and was seeking to teach it with integrity. I was aware of my use of power, conscious of my role as teacher and the power that it held. Integrity had been an important part of my writing last spring. And so I began to integrate the writing into my life. To live the writing. Walk the talk. Integrity had affected my practice. I was conscious of my power, its potential for oppression and I tried to share the power. I could not teach about structural social work practice without demonstrating the essence of the practice in my own work. How could I teach and advocate toward structural practice without demonstrating it?*

*I did many things to share the power. On the first meeting, I walked into a classroom that was already set up in rows facing the front. Students had arrived early and were already in position. I had intended to arrive early and set up the classroom in a circle. In an instant I decided to use the structure as a "teachable moment." We talked about the hidden assumptions in this set-up. Who held the power? How the learner felt in this situation. What it did to them as learners. What it did to their interaction. How I felt with 40 faces looking at me. The implicit power in a classroom set up. We changed it so that we all sat in a circle.*

Over the years I have read many stories of Arthur. Something about the story caught my attention. The concept of the Round Table captured something for me and it has become an image that I have used almost subconsciously as I work to create “circles” of learners in my teaching--the concept of equality and each person sharing even in the presence of a designated leader. See how the image haunts my thinking and my work:

*It was impossible to create a circle in a rectangular room. The structure of the building/room imposed limitations on our efforts. The architects held power as they created this more permanent structure. We had to work within the confines of the system.*

*I didn't initiate a room change--it is difficult to do so in a bureaucratic system and besides, I thought, our numbers will decrease because students might drop out. What an assumption! And it implicitly affects my practice. This kind of assumption holds a structure that is just as confining as the physical structure of the classroom. It is just as rectangular as the classroom and its fit with a circular, shared power classroom is just as incongruent. Just as the building structure forced us into an epsiloid rather than a circle, so does the kind of thinking one brings to one's teaching. It shapes the practice and can distort the perfect circle just as powerfully as the physical structures.*

*This is very congruent with Carniol [Carniol is one of the writers whose work is used in the course I teach]. Carniol talks about primary and secondary structures. The secondary structures are the systems that we create--the bureaucracies, the buildings, the systems. These affect the primary structures: our relations (and vice versa). Their implicit structure shapes our relationships in a powerful way. It is easy to analyse these structures and recognize their effect. But there are more insidious structures at work. These are the internalized and hidden walls we have subconsciously erected. These barriers are powerful because they often remain invisible. We do not see them. They form structures that are hidden from view, submerged, not talked about, not even recognized. They permeate into the secondary structures where we institutionalize the structures. They are our dark side and in our denial of our dark side, we feed its power and give it more power. The invisible walls. The assumptions that we hold beneath the surface. We don't see their implicit power and how they in-form and form us. We don't recognize and*

*cognise their power. Carniol is speaking about the “isms”--the biases that we hold--that lie unquestioned in our inner being. By prodding and poking around in these walls we begin to break through and these walls lose their holding power. We may try to plug them, but the internal pressure built up is released. A tiny crack fissures, splits and begins to gape. Slowly the wall sags and then crumbles, forcing us to re-cognize.*

*It was interesting when we changed our classroom structure on that first day. We talked about how it felt to change the physical structure, whether the power changed. One wonderful and honest man, big and imposing in his own body structure, suggested he felt a little uneasy. Before, he could hide in the back of the room and doze. Here in the circle he felt visible, he couldn't hide, he felt compelled to be a participant. He couldn't separate, he felt a part of. He recognized that it forced him to be alert, alive and aware. And a part of. And he felt a bit uneasy with this. It was easier to hide in the corner and sleep. Be half alive. Be a zombie. Be fed. It is so much harder to be there. Be alive. Be a full participant. It is easier to be a student than to be a learner. Easier to reflect on than reflect in.*

I see my own a-voidance echoed in this student's remark. I too tried to doze off, by hiding behind my role as teacher.

I recall a piece I wrote in my early work:

*“What we fear is life. To be who we are, to acknowledge our personal purpose and place in the world, to live from our own truth is more fearsome than exposing ourselves to the dark. It is easier to slide into death and limbo than face the challenge of being fully alive. Living fully is challenging--it requires discipline, commitment, hard work. It is easier NOT to do than to do. But “not doing” is painful, abysmal--the limbo feels empty. As we A-VOID life, the void fills us--it is an empty, bottomless black hole that we sink into, it consumes us.”*

*It becomes easy to be "student." [Or teacher]. Give someone else the power over us. Let them fill us. But it is never ful-filling--we never feel full. It is only when we begin to direct our own learning, when we take power over the learning and immerse ourselves that we begin to come alive. We come into our being. We feel full. Fully alive. In flow.*

*We fear honesty. We avoid it. Void it, somehow anticipating that it is too painful to be honest. Once we become honest and state the truth, there is no turning back. Not if one wants to live with integrity. When we speak the truth we must act from it. We are forced to change. The in-form-ation trans-forms. What in-folds, enfolds. Folding in/en-folding. Our way of being in the world is affected. It affects our being. And it is difficult to alter the momentum, once the pendulum begins to swing, once it is set in motion, it has its own energy. It is like a transformer that converts energy into another form, a usable form, a meaningful form. Take the inert, making it organic, live. Being in life is not a painful state. It is ex-citing--seeing in and out. In-citing, ex-citing at the same moment. Whole. Integrated.*

*When we live separating our self, it is a painful state. Empty. Void. When we come face to face with our dark side, it is a difficult experience. We try to a-void it. VOID it. Erase it. Not see it. And that is where the pain is. The energy that goes into resisting it is wasted energy. The void grows with the energy that we feed into resisting it. The moment of honesty, of realization is pivotal. As we put energy into moving the pendulum, the power is transformed. The VOID no longer has power over us. We move into life. Into action. Into being.*

The writing that I did last year on relationship was pivotal:

**Journal entry, March 1994**

*I had listened to the sounds of a student's voice. She had given me several commendations which were warming. When asked what I could do to improve, she said that she found that I was a bit intimidating, I was a professional first, and then a person, which made me less approachable. It was given with such honesty and sincerity and I*

*think it was very insightful. What she said was true and touched something inside me that I know, but have never acknowledged. It's a missing piece that I have been searching for. I knew I was doing all the right "teacher" things: setting agendas, consulting with students, planning, listening, drawing on students' experience, trying to make the theory alive and relevant, creating and communicating criteria for marking assignments, all the right stuff. I had interviews with students and offered support to them in their assignments. But through it all, I kept a distance. I was somewhat aware that I was playing a role and that there were implicit ways of being that went with the role. That I could be helpful, but had to remain separate, that emotional distance was required. And so I held back, I didn't tell them how I was feeling, I set that side apart. And this sensitive and aware student caught me in the act. It is an act; it is a repression of feeling so that I could act out my image of "teacher" that is buried in my mind. It's a subtle image that was part of my teaching education. It was never said "repress your feelings," but neither was it ever said, "express yourself, be yourself, say what you feel." I've heard: Be professional. It sounded good--yes, better not to get into mucky territory...Part of being professional is not to appear vulnerable....I felt that it was my role, my responsibility to be a cool observer, to remain objective. And as I write, I think it is important for a teacher to be objective. It may have been the way I did that that wasn't right. I appeared aloof, as if I didn't care, when I was really feeling great passion inside myself. I was honouring what was going on, but didn't express it. Listening to the voice of this student, not arguing, not trying to defend myself, not resisting, but listening and examining my practice had been a significant learning experience, one that transformed my practice and allowed me to open to a closer relationship with students. The following teaching term, in which I listened to students in such a deep way was one of the most fulfilling teaching experiences of my life. I had first started master's studies twelve years ago and the focus of my study was listening. This time I wasn't studying listening. I WAS listening.*

**We are called into question by our listening; we are tested by what we hear; we can be accused by what we do not hear (Levin, 1989, p. 137).**

*If I had voided/avoided this difficult moment, the momentum to push the pendulum into action would never have begun. I would have stayed stuck. Inert. Instead, I was transformed into an organic, live, whole being. Seeing the dark side of the mirror is a powerful experience. Being honest, truthful, exposing the raw “ugly” side, the side we try to submerge, allows us to emerge from the waters transformed. It opened me to learning new ways of being and I was seeking ways to change:*

**Journal entry (undated)**

*My colleagues have modelled responding to students’ personal sharing so beautifully for me. It was so simple--responding from within--saying thank you for sharing that; echoing back their feelings--“so you really feel that...”, sharing what is evoked, sometimes a silent gesture is sufficient. It was the expression of feelings that I didn’t know how to respond to. I heard them and honoured them, but didn’t convey that in any way...I was somewhat conscious of being uncomfortable, but couldn’t register it; perhaps I didn’t want to admit a flaw in the professional image. But the irony is that by seeing and acknowledging the flaw, I was no longer powerless to it. I am now clear about it and can speak to my colleagues about it and seek information about how to change this and I can begin to incorporate that knowledge into my practice.*

*Having experienced the life that came from facing my dark side last year was powerful. I am now able to expose other hidden aspects. I do not need to hide my dark side from myself or others. As I expose it, it loses its power over me. I can see it and recognize how it operates in my being. And I can work with it rather than against it. It informs me and the in-form-ation allows me to transform.*

*When I try to deny that I am implicated in homelessness, abuse, violence, racism, sexism, ageism, they become powerful. Insidious. My silence gives them power. But when I speak them, make the invisible visible, when I see them, I gain in-sight. When I hear them re-sound, they resonate, and the silence is broken. I begin to see, hear, feel--come alive. I come to know how I am implicated. How remaining senseless to them renders us*

*senseless. How being sensitive to them, aware of them, can transform our experience of them. We re-cognise them.*

*This writing is a form that helps me re-cognize. It helps me notice. Become aware. Re-think. Re-form. It's hard to see the boundaries between my writing and my living. The living immerses into the writing and the writing emerges into the living.*

*Thus, again this year, I hear a student's voice and it rocks me once again. "She walks her talk." This student's comment is not a criticism, but a praise. And in a sense, I am pleased to hear that the inner work that I have done and the outer work (the manifestation of the inner work) is recognized, noticed by other. But the comment makes me ask: "DQ I walk the talk?" Certainly I have worked to surface some of what has been submerged, but still more lies beneath --is this just the tip of the iceberg? How extensive is the submerged portion? This is the inner work that must go on to bring that which is submerged to the surface.*

*The honest, innocent student's voice sounds again. Resonates in my inner being. Calls me in to question.*

*Why is it hard to face the truth in a "negative" evaluation? If we view evaluation objectively, is it truly "negative"? Or is it just our perception? If it is truthful, if it is truth, why do we interpret that it reflects badly on us? Doesn't it just reflect our true self? Why can't we face our true self without judgement--just hold it there for our understanding?*

*What I'm working on seems elusive--self/no self--but I sense that it is connected in some way to the riddle of objectivity/subjectivity and its relationship to truth. I seem to be pulled into readings on Zen and Taoism, which Ray Grigg (1994) argues are rooted together. Grigg traces their historical evolvement and notes the later interjection of formalities into Buddhism. Although these spiritual writings may seem distant from the*

work of research, the tenet of non-attachment seems to have some relevance. When one can look at something fully, free from judgement and pre-conceptions, without attachment, then one is open to hearing varying interpretations.

“Fish” symbolizes this in Eastern writing. The works of Lao Tze are laced with inspiration from noticing the fish in the stream.

### **Filled to the Gills**

I include this piece as a way of recognizing the blockages that dam the flow of the water. They are the whorls and eddies that we get caught in. They swell in you, creating enormous tension. But they are part of the river and must be accepted and even honoured: *I seem to have got myself in over my head. I've immersed myself into a world in which I can't breathe. I resist consciously working through these difficult concepts--Being, truth, fish, self/not-self, relationship, metaphor and language, rational thought. These concepts swirl around in confusion when I try to "catch" them. They are implicit in my writing--the writing that flowed from my being. Explicating, explaining how these concepts are embodied in the writing is the hard part--fishing for nebulous ideas, ideas that are hard to catch without robbing them of their life. Theorizing is the hard part of my work. I read work such as Barrett's and am amazed at the connection between my simple writings and the work of an esteemed fisherman such as Heidegger.*

*While I wrote most of this work, I felt that I was in such clear water. But now the water is muddy and I can no longer see ahead of me. What trap have I fallen into? The same old trap of trying to make everything fit instead of seeing how everything fits. I am trying to tie in pieces of the literature that I feel to be relevant to my work. Trying to rush the flow to fit into the course deadline. And all I've done is create a pressure that interferes with the flow. I've dammed up the stream and am flooding the land. I've boxed myself into a pool that keeps getting bigger instead of flowing in the stream. I feel the same sense of confusion that I feel when I try to follow the linear order of science. Its tidiness confuses me. I try to make my work finish into some form so that I can hand in a "complete" work. I struggle to go upstream before I am ready. I know that at some point I will have to go upstream--struggle back through the stream of literature on adult learning, my homing*

*ground, but I am still needing to let the stream direct me, push me along in its natural current. I am trying to explain something before I have worked it through. If I let this work unfold in a natural way, it will form itself.*

*I was interrupted by a call from a friend. I shared some of the difficulty that I am experiencing with her. She has studied gestalt therapy and seems to “know” what I am struggling to find explanation for. She suggested that this literature might be helpful and shared her favourite book on the theme: “Don’t Push the River--It Will Flow by Itself” (Stevens, 1970). That seems to be the message I am needing to hear. My work seems to move most swiftly when I get out of its way and let it form itself.*

*Once again, I notice that it is the messages from others that I hear that opens me up--hearing the voices of my students, hearing my teachers’ suggestions, hearing my friend’s words. And I hear the idea presented in our last class when I presented my title. Someone suggested “Sounding the depth” was evoked in hearing me speak of my work. It echoes of my earlier inquiry many years ago into “listening” as the subject of my intended thesis. An important theme in my work is integrity: SOUNDNESS. Echoes and mirrors haunt me. They are an important part of my work. I had wanted to include the words “reflecting in” in my title to convey these mirrors that seem important, and to convey the reflection in and on action (experience) that is integral in my work. These are sensory experiences of the world. Sensing--making sense; listening, seeing, touching, speaking/resonating, reflecting/insight, connecting/relating/in touch. Relating past and current. Going back. Experiencing fully. It’s not enough to have experienced it--it is important to reinvestigate the experience to gain a sense of its meaning. Re-living, re-collecting. To glance in the rear-view mirror for perspective, to heighten our awareness. AWARENESS. Is that the word I am looking for? But is awareness enough? We can have awareness, but not act on it. What am I seeking in the deep pools? WISDOM. Informed action.*

*“Oxford definition of WISDOM: experience and knowledge together with the power of applying them critically or practically.”*

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE CALL TO THE SALMON TO RETURN**

**It is magical not because it tricks us or changes unexpectedly into something else, but because it can *be* so vividly and brilliantly.”**

Chogyam Trungpa

I've just come back from a walk in the rain. At first it was gentle, but grew heavier and the determined drumming made me feel peaceful. The beauty of the morning filled me. The hill that was solid green with foliage in the summer. now had splashes of brilliant colour--orange, yellow, red. The path was carpeted with a dense fall of pine needles and littered with golden and brown leaves. I walked along the edge of a brook, passed a dammed area, and noticed the ripples from raindrops as they fell gently from the overhanging trees. Yellow leaves floated on the surface. Clouds were reflected in the water. As I changed my focus and looked into the depths of the water I could see the small stones on the bottom.

As I walked I reflected on my writing. It struck me that (my student) wasn't "Parsival." All this time I thought she was Parsival, the young and innocent, and I was the wounded Fisher King. She was a mirror; she was mirroring to me what I was in my youth. I am Parsival. Interestingly, the name Parsival means innocent fool. The deepest part of ourselves, the Fisher King, can be healed only by a youthful, inventive, capricious quality. I must recover a way of being that was spontaneously alive in me many years ago, an unconditional acceptance of life in all its shades. Parsival and the Fisher King are one man, who has been split into separate parts (by his culture). The Fisher King lays dormant while the questing Parsival goes out into the world to do his knightly deeds. It is only later that he begins to sense an emptiness in these pursuits, and begins to quest(ion) deeper meaning. It is then that he pursues the grail castle, re-unites, integrates with the part(s) of himself that he has denied, those parts represented by the Fisher King.

As I return home from my walk, the light rain begins to drum harder, pelting its way to earth, filling the creek, so that it rushes faster. The heavy fall rains are a signal to the salmon that it is time to begin their journey back to their homing ground where they will struggle upstream, spawn and die.

### Listening and Seeing

**Journal entry: October 29, 1994**

*Last night's admission to myself about my fear of dying was very important. In the past, I've superficially thought I wasn't afraid but now I realize I am aware of how this impacts on my daily life. I use coping mechanisms that help me skirt around this fear rather than exploring it directly. I admire one of my friends who at the ripe age of forty-eight is facing her fear of dying by volunteering at Hospice. Interesting that we are evolving creatures, never quite ripe for the plucking until late in life--like an apple on a tree--fleshing out slowly, crisp and firm and tart and green, gradually mellowing --maybe not gradually--a frost sharpens a transformation--the biting cold changes the chemical structure and transforms the acidity into a sweetness. At this point we are plucked from the tree and eaten or remain to rot and fall to the ground and fertilize the soil or the seeds disperse to grant new life.*

*Life is full of mystery. We are left to unravel the meaning--or is it that we are left to create the meaning? There seems to be such incredible pattern to life and at the same time, so much spontaneity. I have an inherent drive to look to nature and its patterns and spontaneity to help me discern meaning to life. It becomes a metaphor that helps me both unravel and create meaning. It seems apparent that there is both a pattern and structure when I study the microcosm, but when I address the macrocosm, there is no apparent pattern--it is full of spontaneous combustion, destructive forces, constant change (which is also true of the microcosm too--although on a less apparent level). I dwell in the world in between these forces and can watch and participate in both of these worlds--I am an integral part of both--both have some effect on me.*

*When I was a child, I used to lie on the ground and look out into the sky, looking farther and farther, until I became frightened with the depth of space. I lost my significance--I realized how small and alone I was and how overwhelming it was. I'd descend back into my immediate surroundings a little scarred and scared from the experience--a little quieter, a little frightened--I'd pushed the boundaries beyond my mind's comprehension. And I'd become immersed in my activities and enjoyed the microcosm--running the hills, studying the flowers, rolling in the grass, wading through the mud that sucked my boots, going barefoot through the streams--experiencing the microcosm with the exuberant joy of a child. But at times I'd stop and play my game of trying to see how far out in space I could take my mind and imagination. It was a little person trying to find her place in the universe. It was a re-enactment of the moment I was aware that I was separate(d) from my mother. It was the same sense of fear and wonder that was created--the same feeling of being overwhelmed by the greatness of the outside world, of wanting to stay in that space and notice it; but being numbed by the fear of it and caught in the fear. It was easier to go back to my mother and resume the activities that consumed a little girl--jumping about, looking out, taking quick glimpses of the big world, but being sure mother was only an arm length away--ready to return to the security of her skirts if the world around me should ever become too alarmingly real and overwhelming.*

*I've played out that same game many times in my life. The awareness of separateness and the urge to belong. It too has been my life theme. It is the story of my anxiety attacks and it is my mountain/space story metaphor [that was used in journal writing last year]. The mountain is the security of my mother's skirts. Last year in my writing about ascending the mountain, I became my mother--my own source of security. And now my frightened daughter seeks my presence for her security and sense of safety in the vast universe.*

*My ascent to the top of the mountain was symbolic. It was indeed a place where I dwelt in the world between. There was a sense of security there--I could at the same*

*moment sense the depths of the earth and quickly glance up and sense the depth of the universe and somehow that vantage point felt powerful--not overwhelming, but fulfilling--where I sensed overwhelmingly the meaning of life. I did not become lost in the microcosm or the macrocosm. I was in a powerful place between--a place of wisdom, clarity, awe and wonder and a place of fulfilment.*

*When I write I usually revisit my starting place with a renewed insight. I started writing about my fear of death. Also implicit in that is a fear of life. When I stand numbed by the fear of death, I also stand numbed by the fear of life. Frantic activity is the response to this fear. I always seem to return to Aoki's conception of the world between and the creation of meaning that lies there (Aoki, 1991)--where one is not numbed by either and/or sliced powerless and cut-off.*

*I return to the child who experienced the fear of the macrocosm. It was becoming aware of the larger world that enriched me and at the same time, overwhelmed me. Once I had jumped off the world as I knew it and explored that larger universe, I could never return back to the same place. It was a transformative experience that coloured my perceptions ever after. I moved into the world between. My awareness of one world informed the other, and as I stood between, negotiating the two, I moved to a new level of awareness.*

*It's the same place that I must stand if I am to live life fully--not numbed, but aware and fully engaged.*

### **The Healing of the Fisher King**

The healing of the Fisher King seems quite miraculous. Parsival had failed to ask the vital questions on his first entry into the Grail Castle, leaving the Fisher King to endure his painful condition forever after. Parsival was quite innocent of his omission. He had not realized that he had held this healing power. It was many years later, in his wandering that he encountered a group of pilgrims who challenged him about why he was wearing a full suit of armour on Good Friday, the day of the death of the Lord. (The medieval stories

are laden with symbolic meaning and it is not without coincidence that this day is the remembrance of Christ's death). Parsival had been oblivious to time and this took him by surprise. He went to a nearby hermit for confession. Some interpretations of the story suggest the hermit was a wizened woman, who chastises and berates Parsival for his failure to ask the burning question and redeem the Fisher King. Because of his own despondence, he now knows the suffering that the Fisher King has endured. Although he can no longer fill the requirement of one who asks the questions in innocence, Parsival is determined. He regains entry to the grail castle and asks the vital question(s). As Johnson (1994) points out, he needed only to ask the question(s); he is not required to answer. This seems significant. As was pointed out earlier, it is the act of seeking that sets something in motion to meet us, reminding us of the Zen statement that when the student is ready, the teacher will come. The Fisher King rises from his litter of suffering and is restored to health and strength, and all the wasteland around him is returned to life.

I had almost expected that the "Grail Experience" in both the story and my life would be some culminating grand finale, some awesome moment, reminiscent of the experience I had in the snow silenced forest. I was surprised how quiet and peaceful and unassuming it was. Life went on. Everything was the same, but not the same. I saw the "ordinary" quite differently. There had been a shift in perspective. I had been deeply moved and had come home to my (inner) self. It is difficult to convey the significance of this re-union, this coming home (to self). We may be somewhat startled at the sudden transformation, but a shift in one's thinking can produce remarkable effects.

**Journal entry: April, 1995**

*I have been living life irreverently. My attempts to reconnect with the sacred in life stand out now. In my searching, I was seeking reverence. In the rush and frustration of the past few months I've felt an urge, an urgency to reconnect with my inner spirit. I selected books on spirituality, I chose to learn to draw; not just to draw pictures, but to see, to become more aware.*

*Nothing was making sense. I felt overwhelmed, too much reading, too much writing, reams of words. I became angry and bitter about it, began to question its*

*validity. What had it been about? What good was it? How could I use it to write a thesis? I was consciously seeking awareness, looking for it through drawing, through reading, through writing. But I was blocking it somehow. A colleague's use of third person in her writing about herself sparked something. I needed to step outside of myself and look at it all through different eyes. I donned fish eyes, the lens that sees the whole picture in one instant.*

*Exploring my work through fish lens has allowed me to look back on my work about relationship [journal writings from a previous year] and recognize the impact that writing has had on my life. By being open to relationship, my life and work have changed. I had never recognized the impact and power of writing about relationship. I never appreciated the writing or the experience. I just lived without seeing it through appreciative eyes. With fish eye lens I noticed the impact the writing has had on my life and because I consciously acknowledge it I now have a renewed appreciation for the kind of writing I've done, and for being open.*

*Opening up has allowed me to hear the stories of my students. I learned about life with disability, the struggles of a lesbian mother, of young men who were experiencing for the first time insights into themselves and into feminism. I learned the struggles of mental illness and the vortex that swallowed a young woman. I learned the story of a young woman, strong in her feminist perspective, and how it was important to her to avoid the abuse her mother suffered. I saw the strength and self-power in two young women who were brought up in egalitarian homes and noted that while both were strong in self, they remained aloof from others. There was the young alcoholic woman and her story of therapy with her family. The wise woman who had been abused by her father and became addicted to drugs, who had overcome this and now worked helping others who had been abused. The stories, the lives. I was teaching social work and the social issues were encased in the stories of these people.*

*The term has been one that teachers all dream of. Students have been transformed and I too have been deeply affected by several students--I have developed awe and*

*respect as they share their struggles and their wisdom and passion and their honesty and vulnerability and anger and humour and courage and drive.*

*To me, reverence means appreciation. I have reverence for life, but when one gets busy, it is hard to find time to reconnect with this. It is something that I've been working on--all my effort to write about awareness, my trips to the seaside, going for walks, the books that I purchased by Thich Nhat Hanh, were all attempts to recapture this--there was an almost desperate quest. I reconnected with drawing. I thought that was a path I could try. Questing silence, peacefulness, awareness, quiet, time alone, away from responsibilities; but nothing seemed to be working. But that word "reverence" spoke to me. I ended up back at the library, finding books on soul, peace and all the ones that I searched were out. Others were on this quest too. So I went home and began to think. It struck me that the mirror image was very similar to the pond reflecting back. How the mirror image was broken by slipping behind and seeing from another perspective. How doing this helps one see oneself and everything else. It is not a brassy mirror image. It is the whole of one's life, a hologram. The image of slipping into the fish and seeing through its eyes was similar. Also hearing a colleague's piece, where she wrote about herself in third person struck me and showed me a way of seeing it all from "another" perspective. So the two ideas of seeing my writing of life from a different perspective and using the idea of reverence seemed to work. I thought about my student [the student who had given me the gift of fish] and what a richness our relationship had brought to me--how I learned about her and her people from her sharing her story. It struck me that I had this rich experience only because I had been open to relationship.*

*I began to realize that the writing I did last year on relationship had opened me. It had allowed me to open to relationship in a different way than before. I had become my writing.*

**In myth and fairy tale, the king...is most often a metaphor for the Self...This particular ruler, the centre of the Grail myth, is called the Fisher**

**King. Now the fish has often served as a symbol of the Self. Jesus made his followers ‘fishers of men’ so that they could probe the waters of the unconscious and capture the shining, silvery fish of the Self (Johnson, 1995, p. 28).**

Salvation by immersion in water ties in.

I have been an avid reader of the grail legends, but I had ignored the story of Parsival. It held little appeal to me until the writing of this thesis. It was the call of the fish that prompted me to look at it. It was a gift that has helped me re-view my experiences and sense the profoundness of them. My sense of these past events has shifted as I sense their significance. The seemingly unconnected events were part of the great story.

Parsival may represent the outer self (the ego). His journey may be symbolic of our outer lives: seeing a vision in one’s youth, following it and fulfilling it, becoming disillusioned with it, and seeking some deeper meaning at some time in one’s life. This turning point is often associated with mid-life. At this time, individuals often question their purposes and reassess their life direction. They recognize that some change is needed and finding ways of re-generating is essential. My own personal journey may be an analogy for others who once lived corded to the “Tao” in life, and through rationalism or cynicism or public pressure or busyness have lost that connection and suddenly find themselves in the dark night of the soul, searching. If the call is heeded, as with Parsival, there may be a “healing” through reunification with the inner self (the Fisher King, the archetypal Self, the Tao, the Christ, the Great Spirit--each person and culture has their own name for it ) and a subsequent restoration. Being fish. Being Self.

### **In Flow--Being There**

#### **Journal Entry:**

*I teach best when I teach from my soul. In much the same way as I write best when I write from my soul. When I try to write well, the work loses its vitality. But when I*

*write from my soul, the words are right--write themselves--they flow from my being, from being. When I write in the moment that I am connected, the writing feels good, it touches me and moves me. I feel in touch with life, at one with self, at one with life, integrated, whole. My being in touch with my being. When I teach from that place, the work flows. I am fully engaged--there in the moment with my whole being.*

*Much of the work of being teacher is inner work. Writing oneself. Righting oneself. Through the writing we examine our SELF, notice the inconsistencies between our being and being. When our being and our being unite, become integrated, we live from our BEING, we live in our Being. We are not fragmented, but whole. When I try to be a good teacher, I separate from myself. I act in a role. I become conscious of self. In much the same way, when one writes in a conscious way, it is self-conscious writing--we watch ourselves--stand separate from our SELF. When I am engaged in teaching or writing I am not conscious of the quality of the teaching or writing until it is over. Then I get a tremendous feeling of fulfilment. Last term I was so engaged in the work, I didn't notice its quality until it was over. In much the same way, I have gained appreciation for the writing I did last year. When I wrote I had the feeling afterward of being in my being. I became one with the writing and I remember afterward feeling whole. But I didn't realize that the writing came into my being. It became a part of me. I embodied it. I lived what I wrote. I lived the writing. I lived it before I wrote, I lived it after I wrote it and the writing of it brought my way of being into focus. Examining my experience through the writing helped me congeal the essence of the experience. I "noticed," I "saw," the source of my dis-ease through the microscope and fine focussing in my writing. When I saw the essence, the "germ" that was infecting my teaching, preventing my being in the teaching, I was able to transform the germ from an invasive and insidious destructor into a "germ" of life and allow it to germinate. To grow. To become a con-structive force that brought me into BEING in my work.*

*In January when I spoke of being stuck, I was stuck. I was bumping into the mirror once again. Reflecting on rather than reflecting in. So the Being fish metaphor spoke powerfully. As I opened to the metaphor, I became fish and saw the world through*

*fish eyes. Like the fish-eye lens in a camera, I saw all in one instant. I shifted from a narrow focus into a focus that took all in. A moment of nuance. And the work will flow from the metaphor, into the metaphor, out of the metaphor. Fish forms the work and fish in-forms the work. Integrated. Holistic. Wise. This writing is about the writer writing and the writing writing the writer.*

*I know when the writing comes from an honest place. I have a wholesome feeling when I work from this place. The writing is charged, alive, alert, deep, honest. And now I know the kind of writing that will come into my thesis, that will form the work. It forms itself. I form it when I am in it, not when I am outside of it. When I am outside of it, it is stilted. Is this like self-directed learning? When we are into the learning we merge into the work and it directs us, but because we are in the learning, we are part of the directing of it. (This is elusive, like the fish, hard to hold, wanting to slip out of hands that try to tie it down).*

### **Coming Home to One's Self**

This work has been about connecting. I have been dis-connected from my inner self and that has manifested in my relationship with other. Becoming conscious of the separation has been an important part of my work. As I remember my past, I also remember a part of me that has been silent (silenced). As I listen into the deep waters, I remember a way of being that washes through me, and I feel a new energy flowing.

#### **I CONSIDER A TREE**

**I can look on it as a picture: stiff column in a shock of light, a splash of green with the delicate blue and silver of the background.**

**I can perceive it as movement: flowing veins on cling, pressing pith, suck of the roots, breathing of the leaves, ceaseless commerce with earth and air-- and the obscure growth itself.**

**I can classify it in a species and study it as a type in its structure and mode of life.**

**I can subdue its actual presence and form so sternly that I recognize it only as an expression of law--of the laws in accordance with which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or those in accordance with the component substances mingle and separate.**

**I can dissipate it and perpetuate it in number, in pure numerical relation.**

**In all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution.**

**It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer *It*. I have been seized by the power of exclusiveness.**

**To effect this, it is not necessary for me to give up any of the ways in which I consider the tree. There is nothing from which I have to turn my eyes away in order to see, and no knowledge that I would have to forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and type, law and number, indivisibly united in this event.**

**Everything belonging to the tree is in this: its form and structure, its colors and chemical composition, its intercourse with the elements and the stars, are all present in a single whole.**

**The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no value depending on my mood; but it is bodied over and against me and has to do with me, as I with it--only in a different way.**

**Let no attempt be made to sap the strength from the meaning of the relation: relation is mutual (Buber, 1958, pp. 7-8).**

While lost in the experience of writing, I got a deep impression that my early childhood and its freedom to explore the gully, the night sky, the prairie and its vastness, the clouds in the sky, and my current exploration of fish were of the same quality of existence: unfettered by form, explorative, full of wonder and awe. In such instances, one

moves beyond the boundaries of our skin, into a state of consciousness that is self-transcendent. One senses the underlying unity and interconnection of all.

I remember seeing crocuses on the hill and getting down and noticing their ugliness. A greyish sprout unfolding. Looking closer, opening the bud and amazed at the colour--pale lilac and stark orange in the centre. ( No wonder I got my dad to paint my room lilac.) I felt its fuzzy stem. I really saw the crocus. Really experienced its ugliness, its unfolding beauty. A prairie crocus is not as delicate and sweet as a coastal crocus. You have to really work to see its beauty.

My fish is like the prairie crocus. Not particularly appealing at first glance, in its apparent slipperiness [elusiveness]. But as you get to know it, its beauty captivates you. As it unfolds, you sense its beauty, its magnificence, and marvel at the world contained.

*Afterword: June 28, 1996*

*From this working of the Fisher King story, I began to see that adult education must be attentive to both the development of the outer human and the inner human. In much of the academic literature, there has been a focus on the outer (hu)man, particularly in the area of professional development. We are beginning to see some attentiveness to the development of the inner being, and to the imaginative, creative realm. The work of Mezirow(1990), Friere(1970) and Daloz(1986) are attentive to personal development and transformation. Karpiak (1993, 1994) and Boucouvalas (1993) note that awareness of levels and states of consciousness might transform adult education. Karpiak (1993) has drawn on the work of Wilber and created a "full-spectrum" model of human consciousness:*

*Wilber (1981, 1995) argues that our task is to shift beyond the boundaries of our present limited rationality to a wider integrated rationality or "vision logic." Vision logic permits us to hold various relational perspectives together at once to reconcile seemingly incompatible notions (Wilber, 1995, p. 185). Through vision-logic, we shift from correspondence thinking to coherence thinking.*

*And, suggests Wilber, it is vision-logic that will prepare us for the challenge of the global network. (Karpiak, 1993, pp. 43-44).*

*She notes the implications for adult education:*

*At the Rational Level, it is appropriate to focus educational programs on developing particular, discrete knowledge, skills, or competencies. At the Integrated Level, however, a 'whole-person,' experiential, reflective, and shared approach becomes more appropriate. And finally at the Transpersonal Level, the focus may shift toward the social, ecological and universal (Karpiak, 1993, pp. 61-62).*

*Karpiak (1995) detects 'subtle' signals of change:*

- a) the subtle signals of a global network--that we are citizens of the planet, interconnected to people, places, and events;*
- b) the subtle signals of new ideas--replacing old, linear, top-down thinking with an understanding of nature in terms of interrelationships and connectedness;*
- c) the subtle signals of human evolution--that we have the potential to develop toward higher levels of complexity and integration;*
- d) the subtle signals of spirit--our search for meaning, and through meaning, finding our own significance and value;*
- e) the subtle signals of community--opening ourselves to others, and working with others collectively (p. 41).*

*She discusses each signal and notes that in attending to these subtle signals, we may be releasing ourselves to an evolution in our thinking and our interaction with one another. She notes the implications for adult education organizations and suggests that adult education needs to be more attentive to moving the themes of meaning, spirituality, and human consciousness to a more central place. She also notes that our consciousness of our connectedness to others and our attentiveness to our relationship with the world, call adult education to attend to social awareness and social responsibility.*

*I find another gap of silence as I re-search the adult education literature. There is very little discussion about the impact of childhood on adult learning. There is writing that contrasts pedagogy and andragogy (Knowles, 1980) in an effort to define adult learners as distinct. This need to distinguish adult education as a unique specialty has tended to obscure the relationship between childhood experiences and learning and the adult learner. For example, Anne Louise Brookes (1992) in *Feminist Pedagogy* details how her childhood experiences of sexual abuse impacted on her adult learning and research, and in turn how the adult learning allowed her to re-view these experiences. Much of what I share of my own transformation in the fisher king story also speaks to the presence of childhood experiences in adult life. Perhaps adult education needs to recognize that childhood is an integral part of adulthood.*

*Implicit in the story of Parsival is the awareness of the impact of context on the individual. Parsival does not explore his inner self because it is not the proper knightly quest. He has been conditioned by his culture not to ask about the inner self represented by the Fisher King. What are we conditioned by our culture to exclude? What do we not see because it is not recognized by the dominant culture? How do we notice what is not seen and hear that which is silenced?*

*Current feminist literature advocates the importance of recognizing context, and its impact on the individual. In the following section, I explore some of the cultural context in which my own inquiry takes place.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE STRUGGLE UPSTREAM

At some point the salmon re-enters the stream that was its homing ground. The same waters that hatched it as an egg and nurtured it and swept it out to sea are revisited. But this time the current is pushing against the salmon, exerting a powerful counterforce.

The fish exerts a courageous battle against these currents. We are drawn to the riverbank to watch the miracle of this struggle. We watch as the salmon lies quietly, gathering its energy; we are startled by a splash and draw in our breath as we see it move strongly, determinedly against a current that seems impossible to surmount. We feel its defeat as it is pushed back. And it lies still for a while, gathering momentum until it makes another furious effort to swim upstream. We all shout in jubilation as we see its success. We stand on the shores, at one with the salmon.

In the following chapter I share several of my struggles: with the institution, with the literature, and with finding personal voice in academe. In this struggle, I recognize that the “personal is political” and its mirror image, that the “political is personal”.

**...Autobiographical studies are windows which permit us to see again that which we loved before, and in so doing, see more clearly what and whom we love in the present. The regressive phase of *currere* asks us to speak again in the lost language of cranes, to see again what was outside our windows, and to become married--that is, in unison--with ourselves and with those around us, by renewing our vows to the past, exchanging vows with those who are present, and dancing our way until the morning dawns (Pinar, 1991, p. 267).**

Novak (1970) identifies the notion of the ‘experience of nothingness,’ which he calls “the formlessness, the aimlessness, the disunity implicit in [one’s] own insignificance, [one’s] own mortality, and ultimately [one’s] dissolution” (Novak, 1970, p. 15). He sees it as corresponding to the mystic’s ‘dark night of the soul,’ a metaphor for the sense of emptiness felt by those who have broken their ties with conventional sources of value, but

have not yet discovered their grounding in new sources. This description might be seen to be analogous to the description of the nemo. “ Women...live in a male-defined world in which culture has, for the most part, denied them access to power. The ordinary experience of women in patriarchy may be seen as akin to the experience of nothingness” (Christ, 1980, p. 18). Similar to Fowles, who suggests that facing the nemo can be evolutionary, Novak argues that the experience of nothingness need not be paralyzing, but rather, it can be liberating. When we are non-attached, nothing is beyond questioning. In the following sections, conventions are questioned.

### **Life and the Academy**

Bolen (1994) notes that the *vesica piscis* means “vessel of fish”, and that before it became a Christian symbol, it was a universal symbol of the Mother Goddess. In Greek, the word *delphos* means both womb and fish, and there are many different cultural associations between goddess and fish. The *vesica piscis* is on the lid of the Chalice Well at Glastonbury, Somerset, the legendary resting place of the Grail. I find it an interesting connection that this symbol is connected to the Grail and the story that I have investigated. The early roots of the symbol and its connection to women has been overlooked and obscured over time. Analogies might be made to the ways that women’s voices, women’s ways of being have been overlooked, obscured and silenced over time.

In these sections, I note my experience of being a woman in a patriarchal institution. I parallel my struggles in the academy to the fish swimming upstream. I have not found it a particularly easy environment to work in. Like a river’s strong current, it seeks to direct the learner’s path. To maintain self-direction and to speak in the mother-tongue is a struggle. The following entry may convey some of the struggle.

#### **Journal entry: October, 1995**

*The roller coaster of thoughts and emotions that a letter from Graduate Studies has evoked.*[The letter stated that my five year deadline had expired, and correspondence with my advisor had ensued, and to continue, I would have to pay considerably more for my tuition and attain special permission]. *At first I was elated--a deadline! Someone has*

*finally invoked finity on this infinite work. I never had the guts to do that; I was always thinking it would evolve in its own time (which it has, but could continue to remain in this process stage forever).*

*Then to frustration. Who makes these rules? Why wasn't I directly addressed in the process of making this decision--what am I, chopped liver?*

*When I phoned to talk to a secretary about the letter and get more information (the secretary always seems to be able to tell me more than administrators), she seemed surprised at my indignation with the letter. This was just a form letter, they send hundreds of such letters and this was more or less a standard letter. That made me feel a little better (I wasn't the only delinquent and no one was picking on me in particular); and it made me feel a little worse (my individual case was just another one to slot into a box and respond to).*

*And I know that this is logical, and the way it has to be when you are working with hundreds of people. But at the same moment, it is disturbing. We have developed amazingly efficient bureaucracies that are in danger of losing touch with their purpose. The structure begins to become more important than the people it was developed to serve.*

*No one seems to understand the difficulty of being a student with parenting responsibilities. I am being penalized (financially) for making the choice to be home with my children in the summers. Is this an example of the way women are oppressed and subtly kept out of academia? At one time I had been granted a fellowship, but had to deny it (or have it denied) because I could only pursue my studies on a part-time basis because of my obligations to my children. It was a choice I made, but there were structures that worked against the pursuit of continuing my education. How many other students are penalized because they are only able to pursue part-time studies, perhaps because of disability, perhaps family responsibility, perhaps work demands? Why is there no provision for assessment of their individual cases when extension is required?*

Perhaps a journal entry can convey something that is hard to put into words.

*How do I convey to the academics the life of a female "mature," (mature...is that what I am?) responsible (oppressed by responsibility?) student who has a passion for learning and desperately wants to keep alive by learning, despite the obstacles placed in the way-- children crying, wanting a little attention, to be watched as they jump on the trampoline, just to be noticed; suppers, lunches and breakfasts--and the shopping to fill the cupboards (no time for bargain hunting); the laundry, the sorting and the organizing; the lawn that calls out "cut me, cut me." The fall bulbs that need planting so they can nourish the soul in the spring (why am I always postponing this on my to-do list until I have to dig through the hard ground to bury the bulbs?); then there's the commutes to drive everyone to school (and to their after-school activities) and just when you finally, finally, get some quiet to devote to the writing, a phone call from the school, "your daughter's sick." And for weeks you are distracted as the flu or cold makes its way through each family member, whose voice pierces the silence "Do you think you could get me a drink?"-- just as you sit down to read an article.*

*Constant interruption. Constant. It is a mother's life, and you begin to resent it. Then you begin to feel guilty for resenting it (thank god for guilty consciences). And you begin to question--isn't this the life I chose? Parenthood? And you make the decision to put that first. To be there, fully there when you are needed--even if it takes long hours to be there with your child as she experiences the frustration of growing up. The long talks, the time just spent being there, doing her hair, going for a bike ride together. And you know it was the right choice and a very special experience when she hugs you spontaneously for months afterward.*

*This is the life of an academic mother. And slowly, slowly the seed of the thesis grows and is nurtured by time and ten minutes of thought here, ten minutes there. An article is read one day, or maybe a few paragraphs here and a few paragraphs an hour later and a few more the next morning (or maybe a few days later). Is it any wonder women have been so skilled at quilting--taking tiny fragments, bits and pieces and working them into a pattern? It represents our life--little bits and pieces, perhaps some special ones, collected over time, an array of colours and textures, bits and pieces sewn together into a rich*

*tapestry. It takes time to piece a quilt. And patience. It's one of the "extra" things that seem to be important to devote time to doing. It gives a sense of accomplishment, a joy in completion (and most importantly, a sense of joy throughout the entire process). Out of all the devotion and care a wonderful quilt evolves. And every time it is used, it evokes a pleasant sensation in the woman. Sometimes it is the pride in seeing the whole project as a completed whole; an enjoyment of the pattern or the colour. It helps her recognize that all the separate activities of collecting, planning, cutting, sewing are all a part of the process; that each aspect of the process was important and vital, that no stage could be neglected, or not seen as important. Each evokes memories--only she knows how many times one corner was taken out and restitched to take out the little puckered spot where she rushed a bit (although no one else would notice). When she looks at the quilt a feeling of fulfilment sweeps through her. It is easy to admire the beauty of the finished product, to critique its fine lines, use of colour, pattern, and to sometimes just enjoy the overall beauty. But do we ever probe the mystery of the quilt--recognize what's beneath its surface--notice the hours, the thinking that went into it, appreciate the precious time that was devoted to the project, wonder about WHY this woman would take the time to devote herself to the project. Do we know the stories of the selection of the fabrics--that the one pattern reminded her of her grandmother; that she was partial to blue because it reminded her of the prairie sky? Do we catch the (bitter) humour of the lace that was cut from her wedding dress because she knew she would never fit into it again and there was nothing nostalgic about it anyway? Do we hear the stories and the laughter and feel the wash of the tears of the women who worked with her in the stitching?*

*And to think that all we see is the quilt.*

*And furthermore...(perhaps she's ranting now) someone even questions the work of the quilt at all--what the hell is she doing quilting? Haven't women got better things to do with their time? Couldn't a computer come up with a thousand graphic images? Why, we could probably devise a machine to cut the fabric (which we could buy in bulk from a third-world country). Hell, we could probably put out thousands of those damn things in*

*the time it took her to make one! We could use recycled batting--keep those damn environmentalists happy...( she is ranting now).*

I enjoyed writing this piece--the imagery flowed from some place deep inside me. The earlier section was more didactic and so much more of a struggle to compose, as I struggled to find words to logically convey my frustration. As an adult learner who is working and parenting, I find that this university has not accommodated for the learning needs of the part-time adult learner. I wonder if it is women who are particularly excluded and oppressed by current policies.

The writing of this piece was an interesting experience. The first section, in which I tried to deconstruct the logic of the current policies was a struggle; the section where I engaged in the metaphor of the quilt flowed naturally--there was no struggle to be logical and yet the logic is implicit. I think these two pieces symbolize two ways of being in the world--the one is linear, logical, deductive, what Ursula Le Guin calls the father tongue (Le Guin, 1986) and the other is holistic, imagistic and flowing, inductive (it might be called the mother-tongue). Perhaps these parallel the contrast between institutional learning with its pre-planned modules and clearly laid out objectives, and the wandering explorations of self-directed learning.

### **Ripples Outward: Writing as a Form of Professional Development.**

As teacher and as learner, I struggle against the current of Tylerian (1949) transmission model learning of traditional classrooms, a model that has infiltrated adult education, and certainly was evident in much of the professional development that I have been exposed to. The following journal entry conveys my struggle to find an alternative form of professional development:

*For the past few years I have been engaged in journal writing. I write about my teaching, but the boundaries between professional and personal life seem to fade and experiences from my childhood and my parenting seem to slip in. We seem to separate our personal and professional development, as if they were mutually exclusive*

categories. I have come to see them as deeply intertwined, and many of the stories and reflections that I share reveal this.

I've labelled this work *Being fish: Sounding the depths in the reflective pools of life-long learning*. My self-directed learning and its flow sounds puny beside institutional learning and its industry of objectives, experts, and syllabuses all neatly planned and packaged. My darting about in haphazard searches pales in comparison. And yet, when I enter a deep pool and enter into an investigation where I examine my work in light of the Tao, the classroom pales.

When I first started working on the masters program four years ago I explored professional development. I read deeply and widely in that body of literature and was left feeling discontent. Most professional development experiences seemed contrived, imposed on teachers. Change came from outside and teachers were to con-form--squeeze themselves to fit the form, even if it wasn't true to them--con(form) themselves. Teachers seem to go to professional development seminars, get all excited, try to bring the new ideas to their practice, and when they run into difficulty implementing it, drop it (Joyce and Showers, 1980). What I was seeking was a form of professional development that was more real, meaningful, relevant. A form that in-forms, that would allow teachers to study their own practice deeply. That invited them to change, to seek information when relevant. Engaged practice. Thoughtful practice.

That is why I became interested in writing and in working with others who were engaged in this kind of inquiry. This way of working seemed so much more ALIVE and real than imposed forms of professional development.

I can learn about something, but may not have internalized it. That is what happens in professional development seminars. What we need are forms of professional development that help people while in the process of trying to change their practice, that help internalize the learning so that it becomes embodied in the professional. Collaborative groups are one form of on-going support. For example, in our classes we each had to do our own work, but the sharing, pooling of ideas, the inquiring, the questioning, the conversations and arguments, the thoughts were an integral part of the learning.

*I also see exploratory writing as a form of personal and professional development. I've seen myself change in my practice and the change was mediated through this medium. The writing on relationships, trans-formed me, moved me into a new form. The dialogues I had with colleagues, both in person and in writing, were also forms of professional development.*

*Self-directed learning/professional development*

*Experiencing/writing: Are they mirrors of one another?*

### **Re-viewing the Swiftly Moving Current of Adult Education Literature**

I find that after engaging in a self-directed learning inquiry, such as I have done here, I am eager to re-view the current adult education literature. I am particularly interested in locating works that shed light on my experiences, that help me understand more fully the work that I have been engaged in. In turn, my experience helps me to decipher the meaning implied in the written texts.

As I re-enter the stream of adult education literature, I find that there has been movement in recent years and I am heartened by more recent writings. These capture again the quest of adult education--not to reduce learning to capsule form, but to honour it in the fullness of life.

The salmon has an innate sonar system that as yet defies description by science. It seems to have an intuitive sense of its life mission. As human beings, we also have an innate curiosity, a desire to learn. Knowles and Tough have suggested that learners are capable of self-direction. In my initial encounters with adult education and its literature, I was particularly enthralled with the work of Knowles. He seemed to have a deep respect for the adult learner and a resistance to authoritarian institutions. He seemed to want to break the pattern of traditional authoritarian pedagogy and redefine a more liberating approach to adult learning. He spoke about the need for congruence between the institution and its philosophy of the adult learner and he challenged the institution to reform (Knowles, 1980).

**On-line bulletin board-- Journal entry, 1992**

*The quality of learning that takes place in an institution is affected by the atmosphere it creates. Can we have freedom to learn, to think, to explore in an institution that is oppressive, rigid, hierarchical, controlling, repressive, intolerant, constipated? We have to examine the very heart of an institution that conducts itself in these ways. Our institutions teach by everything that they DO and they often demonstrate opposite lessons in their operations from what they promote in their programs( Knowles, 1980). From reading Knowles, I've learned that the quality of learning that takes place in an institution is affected by the environment the institution creates. It has to be true to its purpose on all levels. It must be true to itself. It provides an environment that either facilitates or inhibits learning and inquiry.*

Knowles was able to convey passion and show respect for the adult learner and for an egalitarian approach to adult learning and he saw its place in a democratic society. He recognized the importance of climate in adult education activities, with features such as acceptance and acknowledgement of individual differences, recognition of the importance of feelings as well as ideas and skills in learning, mutual respect and risk taking, authenticity, supportive interpersonal relations, collaboration rather than competition, and informality (Knowles, 1984, pp. 119-120). I know that the ideas he spoke influenced my teaching. I became more attentive to classroom climate, and to the power relations between teacher and learner.

In the following journal entry I come to question the notion of self-directed learning.

**Journal Entry: March 30, 1996**

*In some respects this particular inquiry has been conducted in a self-directed manner--I proceeded on my own, making the decisions--I decided what the directions of my learning effort were, what resources to us, and what methods pursue. The study represents a learner constructing knowledge. It was an individual attempting to make meaning out of disparate events. As I began, there was no (pre)conceived notion of what it was that I was to discover. I began to actively engage with the topic--being attentive to*

*fish in whatever form I found it. Fish began to appear everywhere--in books, quotes, artwork, pottery, at the grocery store, in magazine ads, in cards, in Native lore, in land claims, in men's discussions, in the news. And I tried to negotiate the waters--what was the meaning of all of this? How could I interpret this? Were these things connected? How? How were they different? How could I make what was not apparent transparent? I had to construct the meaning, make it meaningful, and make it relevant to my situation. In the early stages I reviewed what I already knew about fish from my own experiences of fishing with my father. I also looked into the meaning(s) that had already been deciphered by others--for example, Joseph Campbell (1972) had made statements about what fish symbolized in a particular piece, such as the Fisher King. I had to translate how that particular meaning was relevant to MY life. I had to deconstruct the story of Parsival and began to understand that it might be interpreted as symbolizing the integration of the outer-focused man (Parsival) with the inner-focused man (Fisher King) so that he could achieve the Grail experience. Fortunately I was able to locate the work of others who had worked to deconstruct the story, and through working and re-working these interpretations, and trying to synthesize these and re-construct these, I began to see a deeper meaning to the story--that it represented an integration of separate elements. I had also done some previous inquiry into Jung's work, and because I had some awareness of his ideas, I could use this knowledge to bridge what appeared to be disparate ideas. In turn, because of this story, I began to understand Jung's concept of integration, where before it was an idea that I had read and held in my mind, but couldn't understand, because I couldn't relate it to experience. And then I had to make the quantum leap to make it have relevance to my personal situation. Again, it involved deconstructing a story, juxtaposing it against elements of mine, looking for some "fit", playing with it, until I finally began to see the connections. Was the meaning there all along, waiting for me to un-cover it? Was there no implicit meaning, and any meaning that I was to dis-cover was my own construction? Did I only see what I saw because it fit? Were there other meanings that I didn't see because I haven't had life experiences that would allow that interpretation? What did I not see? Why did I see what I did?*

*I re-read, re-viewed the work on constructivism in the literature. I had read it before, but it had not engaged me because I couldn't make any connections with it. Now I reread it in Candy's text and I found it provocative. I begin to see what another intended. I begin to understand another's text. I juxtapose it against my experience with this inquiry and test out whether their theorizing sheds meaning on my experience. I notice any discrepancies--what is the model missing? What is my interpretation missing? I analyze and synthesize their ideas and my experience. I notice connections, I notice the gaps.*

*My work demonstrates a learner learning. A learner trying to make meaning, constructing and reconstructing. And as I begin to deconstruct and reconstruct how meaning was constructed, I begin to learn about learning. I begin a new cycle, a new inquiry, built on my previous inquiry. There is a parallel with the life cycle of the fish. It gives up its life so that other new fish might live. Its "sacrifice", its degeneration, is a (re)generative act. Even its carcass gives life to other forms. The birds feast on its eyes, the bear eats its flesh, the micro-organisms digest its rotting carcass. All is inter-connected. All inquiry is inter-connected. Another's ideas inform me. I inform others. Some ideas conform, some inform, and some transform. Can I then, when I recognize how others are implicated in (this) inquiry, call the work self-directed?*

Candy (1991) argues for a constructivist interpretation of self-directed learning and writes, "learning in its fullest context is a social activity, and the attainment of full personal autonomy--both in learning and outside it--must recognize this interdependence" (p. 22).

Brookfield notes: "The self in self-directed learning is not an autonomous, innocent self, contentedly floating free from cultural influences. It has not sprung fully formed out of a political vacuum. It is, rather, an embedded self, a self whose instincts, values, needs, and beliefs have been shaped by the surrounding culture. As such it is a self that reflects the constraints and contradictions, as well as the liberatory possibilities, of that culture" (Brookfield, 1993, p. 236). He notes that Griffin suggests that the discourse on self-direction has not included questions of power and control in society and that humanistic adult educators have depoliticized and decontextualized the practice, in favour of concern

for personal growth. Collins writes that “far from empowering adult students, self-directed learning strategies steer them to a negotiated compromise with predominate interests which promote social conformity” (1988, p. 63). Brookfield suggests reframing the concept of self-direction as an inherently political idea, and suggests that it can be interpreted as part of a belief that people should control their own environments and destinies rather than having these framed by external authorities. It is heartening to see this re-examination of the assumptions that are the foundations of self-directed learning.

When I got the letter from the Graduate Study’s office, I was forced to recognize that the institution imposed constraints on my work in the form of deadlines, tuition costs and limited resources and materials in the field of adult education. I also had to face the fact that others had to approve of my final work and deem it acceptable. Up until that time, I had tried to bracket these constraints and proceed as if these ominous restrictions were not interfering. Although I enjoy the freedom of directing the course of my learning, of making decisions about how to proceed, allowing for the creative impulse to enter and form the work, I recognize that institutional learning does not always allow for this. I have sought out pockets where I could be as self-directed as possible, but eventually the institution imposes its voice, and forces me to attention. I must make choices. I must conform my work to meet the standards, or face dis-membering. I can push at the boundaries of the standards, but in the end, I recognize the power that has been granted to the institution by those who have been (willing) members. And I have to face that I may be complicit in perpetuating the hegemony. As Brookfield notes, “Those engaged in (a) fully realized form of self-directed learning would understand how easily external control can unwittingly be internalized in the form of an automatic self-censorship--an instinctive reaction that ‘I can’t learn this because it’s out of bounds’” (Brookfield, 1993, p. 234).

Self-directed learning. Like the word “fish,” on the surface it appears to be self-explanatory. But as we move into the depths, we detect that there are many subtle nuances to the word. In light of this critique, I struggle to recapture some of the meaning of self-directed learning that I acknowledged when influenced by Knowles. I recognize the impact of contextual restraints, and know that these must be acknowledged. Does this mean that we must abandon the concept of self-directed learning? Can we re-define it so that it

acknowledges the cultural context that the learner is swimming in? Where does the individual learner's struggle with their own biography fit in? Pinar offers some insight.

**We (Pinar and Madeleine R. Grumet) have devised a method by means of which the researcher can examine his or her 'limit situations,' in Friere's sense, his or her own participation in frozen social and psychological structures, and his or her complicity in the arrest of intellectual development characteristic of American schooling. Essential to our formulation is acknowledgement of the false duality of 'self' and 'world.' Human being is irrevocably 'being-in-the-world'. The world is both cause and consequence of the conditioned and the chosen in human life. Our aspiration is to gain increasing access to that which has been conditioned, allow it to surface, to be released or permitted to remain (in either case in consciousness), hence open to the conscious intentions of the individual (Pinar, 1994, p. 90).**

**Further, one begins to glimpse how autobiographical work of this nature, as it transforms the individual, must transform the material structures of society. While the linkage between the individual's work and social transformation cannot be explicit or simple, we know--given the inseparable and dialectical relation between consciousness and matter--that the self has material consequences (Pinar, 1994, p. 109).**

### **Struggling with the Academic Form**

One of the first books that I encountered in adult education was "*The Ulyssean Adult*" by John McLeish (1970). He drew on the story of Ulysses and the poem by Keats. It was an exhilarating read. He wove the stories of adult learners who had achieved their greatest accomplishments late in their adult life. He captured my imagination, made learning come alive. How many pieces are there in academic circles that capture our imagination? *Five years ago, when I read the latest trends in adult education, I still sensed an excitement by the authors, but it was restrained.* What had been lost? Perhaps

they had lost touch with the 'art' of teaching. It seemed that for a time, adult educational research became lost in the Tylerian world of measurement and objectives. Much of the literature was of the linear, logical vein. Most of it was spoken in the father tongue. When one speaks in the father tongue exclusively, what is not said? What is silenced? Who is silenced?

Carol Christ writes about her struggle to choose to write in the mother-tongue or father tongue.

**Every work of my book was forged in the crucible of personal experience and struggle. And yet everything in my training told me that I had to present my work in an impersonal, dispassionate, third-person 'objective' 'scholarly' voice. I desperately wanted my work to be accepted by other scholars, by male scholars, who hold power in the field, because I wanted to find my way back to graduate teaching in Religious Studies, where I felt I could have the most impact on the future of feminist studies in religion. But I also wanted to be true to my own experience and to write in a way that would be understood by many other women.**

**...This sometimes means that our work is unfairly dismissed as being unscholarly. Even more critical, and more deeply challenging to the scholarly ethos, is our recognition that 'objectivity' is a myth. We understand that even the most seemingly objective scholarship in every field reflects an implicit interest in preserving the patriarchal status quo, including certain notions of canon, authority and tradition from which the contributions of women have been excluded. However, because these concerns are often unstated, they often go unrecognized (Christ, 1980, pp. x-xi).**

I struggle to maintain integrity in my work, not to compromise my inquiry (or my teaching) to meet some pre-ordained standards of research or structure. But I recognize the presence of external control(s) and its power. Is it possible to be authentically self-directed within an institution? Do we internalize the control and engage in self-censorship so that our work will be accepted?

I sometimes feel my creativity cut as I work through much of the academic literature in the adult education field. I feel the mother-world part of me severed. Where is the mother tongue? How often are references made to literature, poetry, to creativity, to the imaginative in the academic entries in adult education? It seems to be centered on methods and techniques almost exclusively. It is full of jargon. Where is the spirit in it? Where is the thoughtfulness, the exploration, the playfulness? How often are there articles addressing topics such as caring? Where is the person(al)? Why is the subject(ive person) banished from this kingdom?

Why has there been so little reference to feminist literature in adult education? Feminist process is congruent with adult education principles. Only recently have I seen articles that suggest the possible impact of feminist theory and practice on adult education (Merriam, 1993; Brookfield, 1993). Why does it not draw more extensively on this body of knowledge? As Brookfield (1993) acknowledges, this work challenges the

**patriarchal notion of atomistic self-determination as an educational ideal and as the natural end point of a person's psychological development. In its place it advances a feminist valuing of interdependence and a socially constructed interpretation of the self as equally viable educational ideals and as legitimate foci for conceptualizing psychological development. Building in these foci has been a body of work on feminist pedagogy ...that emphasizes interdependence, connectedness, and the politics of nurturance (Brookfield, 1993, p. 240).**

My struggles in the academy have been both painful and joyous. In many ways I am awakened to think more deeply, and I have enjoyed the comradery and challenge of others who are interested in learning. But at the same time, I am becoming aware of the constraints of the learning atmosphere. I have come to realize that I have (been) separated from important aspects of being human.

Is there a way to bridge the father-tongue and the mother-tongue?

*I went fishing with my father as a child and played on the bank, turning rocks over and constructing little worlds while my father fished. My father was the fisher, trying to hook*

*the fish, the theorist, trying to catch the essence. My approach as a child was to “be” in the environment and explore it and watch the fish in wonder, not to catch them, but to understand them, wonder about them and appreciate them. Chase the minnows, frolic in the water, gaze at the sunset, look at the stars. A child’s sense of wonder. These are two characters engaged in very different ways. The dichotomy is very real for me. I want to engage in the theorizing in a meaningful way, meaningful for me personally, in a playful, reflecting kind of way, the way I have done in my writing, the way I did as a child. But there is a father-world that has already organized, hooked the theory for me and I co-exist with it. It is larger than me and somewhat imposing and has the power to negate my childish, playful ways. If it doesn’t honour the learning process that I am engaged in, my playfulness can be ignored. (On the other hand, if I only engage in the playfulness, I block out the insights of the experienced voices. There needs to be an interaction between the two and honouring of both ways of coming to know). Child and father should talk. Share.*

**He shrugs. ‘I’m listening’... She says...’You listen but don’t hear!’**

**Distinguishing the way the Chinese will, between effort and result...One listens...why should a listening person not hear? What’s taken for granted in English...is spelled out in Chinese...Ting de jian in Mandarin means ‘one listens and hears.’ Ting bu jian means ‘One listens but fails to hear. (Gish Jen, in Merker, 1992, p. 37).**

***Afterthoughts: June 26, 1996***

***The notion of identifying mother-world and father-world strikes me as more appropriate than identifying masculine and feminine qualities, as if they are forever cast in stone. Culturally, we have inherited a view of women and men that certainly informs us, and the notion of mother-world and father-world helps acknowledge this inheritance. But we are all the offspring of mothers and fathers, whatever our gender, and we have the capacity to combine elements of the father-world and the mother-world into our being, no matter what our gender, so that we begin to redefine the***

*traditional definitions. This might help us move beyond the masculine/feminine dichotomy.*

*Afterthought: June 24, 1996*

*The symbol of “fish” is two circles, whose circumferences pass through the centre-point of each of, creating a fish shape in the intersection. This is an interesting metaphor that might illustrate how mother-world and father-world, each represented by the circles, meet in the fish shape.*

*In writing this work I have tried to give recognition to both an intuitive, exploratory way of speaking and to a rational, explanatory way of speaking. This work is an attempt to dialogue in both voices. In particular, the Parsival/Fisher King story and its analysis illustrates the richness of this kind of dialogue.*

The story of Parsival and his unification with the Fisher King is representative of the outer (hu)man uniting with the inner (hu)man. Adult education must be attentive to the development of both the outer and inner aspects of human life and be aware that the maturing adult may be seeking integration of these two aspects that may have been separated. My own struggle with this may be representative of other adult learners' struggles. As I re-viewed the literature on adult education, it became apparent that we have become very focussed on the “outer (hu)man,” on the workplace and professional development. The difficulty with this focus is that it accepts the milieu as it is; it does not seek to encourage the learner to critique the foundations it is built on. Thus the insight in this work that is significant is the importance of attending to “milieu” or context that the adult learner is living in. The work in these chapters helped me to see that we cannot only focus on the outer human or the inner human. We must also become aware of the context in which the individual lives and note its impact on the individual (learner). We must find ways of helping the learner notice the environment and its impact and critique it. The work of Friere and feminist critique encourages this kind of analysis and awareness. It is important that adult education maintain contact with its early roots in critical awareness.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SPAWNING: PASSING ON

#### **Journal entry: June, 1996**

*I remember when I first became exposed to adult education. I had been working out in the community with adult learning groups. At first I entered these groups as a learner. But as my confidence grew, I began to teach what I had learned to others. It was explorative teaching; I did what worked. I watched and listened to the reactions of participants and gained my knowledge about how to work with adult learners by trial and error. I watched what others did and got new ideas. I reflected on what ignited my passions for learning and incorporated that knowledge into my work. It was a refining process. A friend invited me to join her in taking a class in adult education at university. It was an exciting course and introduced me to the foundational literature of adult education. I found that much of it resonated with my own learning and teaching experiences. Theory and practice meshed. Each informed the other.*

It is not always easy to integrate theory and practice. I struggle to live what I have learned, and to bring my understanding into practice. I struggle to negotiate a way of working and teaching that creates conditions that are empowering for learners, that increases their personal, interpersonal and political awareness. In this section I share these struggles to “pass on” to others.

It was an(other) interesting coincidence. My daughter was reading *The Hobbit* and wanted my illustrated copy. I searched the shelves of books and in my search *The Sword in the Stone* fell onto the floor and the brittle spine broke. It opened onto a page where I had underlined a sentence. (I had read the book many years ago when I was in my first year of university.) The underlined sentence: “Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance.”

The passage was one in which Merlyn was teaching Wart, the future King Arthur. He teaches, not in a “stuffy classroom,” but by turning Arthur into a fish! Had this story

survived somewhere in the deep pools of my mind only to re-emerge in my openness to the title “Being Fish”? What kind of magic was at work?

**It was a very different from the universe to which he had been accustomed. For one thing, the heaven or sky above him was now a perfect circle poised a few inches above his head. The horizon had closed in to this. In order to imagine yourself in the Wart’s position, you will have to picture a round horizon, a few inches above your head, instead of the flat horizon which you have usually seen. Under the horizon of air you will have to imagine another horizon of under water, spherical and practically upside down--for the surface of the water acted partly like a mirror to what was below it. It is difficult to imagine. What makes it a great deal more difficult to imagine is that everything which human beings would consider to be above water was fringed with all colours of the spectrum. For instance, if you happened to be fishing for the Wart, he would have seen you, at the rim of the tea saucer which was the upper air to him, not as one person waving a fishing rod, but as seven people whose outlines were red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, all waving the same rod whose colours were as varied. In fact you would have been a rainbow man to him, a beacon of flashing and radiating colours, which ran into one another and had rays all about....**

**The next lovely thing was that the Wart had no weight. He was not earth-bound any more and did not have to plod along on a flat surface, pressed down by gravity and the weight of the atmosphere. He could do what men have always wanted to do, that is, fly. There is practically no difference between flying in the water and flying in the air. The best of it was that he did not have to fly in a machine, by pulling levers and sitting still, but he could do it with his own body. It was like the dreams people have (White, 1938, p. 56).**

Imagination is what allows Wart to think in other dimensions and not be restricted by earthly conventions. I see that the play with metaphor in my work allows me the same

freedom to fly through time and superimpose past, present and future and think in other dimensions. Immediately when I opened to *Being Fish*, I saw my work through fish-eye lens. This shift in perspective allowed me to see my work with new eyes, and allowed me to see what I might not have seen otherwise. As learners and instructors, we might draw more on the powers of imagination to assist us in exploring.

Most importantly, the text identifies the centrality of experience as a (re)source for knowledge. **“Understanding erupts out of life itself...teaching must first and foremost attune itself to what is ALREADY AT WORK in our lives and the lives of (those) we teach.”** (Jardine, p. 11)

**Journal entry: January 18, 1995**

*I love the cover of the version of The Sword in the Stone. Arthur sits at Merlyn's feet eagerly listening to wizened Merlyn. Merlyn's studio is crammed with objects of his study--bottles, preserved animals, books, skulls, measuring tools, live animals. An owl is perched on his shoulder.*

*Merlyn and Arthur have a very special relationship as teacher and student. Merlyn is indeed the elder, the knowledgeable one, the teacher, and Arthur the eager and willing learner. But Merlyn can only live on through Arthur. He knows his teaching of Arthur is what will make a difference to the future. All Merlyn's beliefs and values can only come alive through Arthur. He must teach Arthur so that Arthur embodies the beliefs, so that Arthur comes to know in a way that his actions will demonstrate what it is that Merlyn teaches him. He must teach Arthur enough to understand and be conscious of his actions. But he must also teach Arthur self-reliance. It is not enough to teach Arthur "about" things and how he should act. Arthur will be confronted with unforeseen circumstances and will have to respond. If Merlyn teaches him well, Arthur will be ready and able to face difficult situations. He will have to be able to work out the possible consequences of his choices and choose wisely.*

*He chooses to teach Arthur through giving Arthur experiences. He doesn't just tell him about power and despots. He turns Arthur into a fish who visits the "King of the Moat," Black Peter, who espouses the imperative of power: "There is nothing...except*

*the power that you profess to seek: power to grind and power to digest, power to seek and power to find, power to await and power to claim, all power and pitilessness springing from the nape of the neck.....Power is of the individual mind, but the mind's power alone is not enough. The power of strength decides everything in the end, and only Might is right.*" (White, 1938, p. 62). *Wart is hypnotized by the pretentiousness of the King and narrowly escapes being killed by the fish as it lashes out at him. Merlyn does not seem to moralize about what happened. He seems to have faith that teaching through experience is powerful enough to teach the important lessons of rule by tyranny. He accompanied Arthur on this particular adventure, but insisted that "... in future you will have to go by yourself. Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance."*

*The experiences that many graduate students speak of and their encounters with power at the university mirror this. They are powerful lessons in student-teacher relationships. They are more graphic and personally meaningful than formal lectures on power and relationship. Ironically, it is sometimes in the same classes where we are studying liberatory curriculum that the environment is repressive and oppressive. We can learn lessons about power experientially, and those who learn, without being told explicitly, internalize those lessons and vow to never abuse power in their teaching. They become more conscious of working to achieve egalitarian relationships. On the other hand, as almost happened to Wart, there are those who are mesmerized by the power, who let it hypnotize them, never question it or become aware of it and who are swallowed by it (and will surely swallow others, given the chance).*

Merlyn has great trust in experiential learning. He provides Wart with a number of experiences and encounters with various creatures, and through these encounters, Wart gains knowledge and understanding. He plays at various ways of being. In one of his final lessons, he plays the autocrat with a helpless hedgehog, who cowers humbly under the oppression. Finally, Wart seems to sense the cruelty of his abusive play with power and apologizes. It is as if this was the passing of a test, since it is then that he is given his final lesson, a treatise on man as delivered by badger.

Despite the evidence of the learning that (my life) experience provides, I seem to have a little less faith than Merlyn in purely experiential learning. As a teacher and learner,

I am convinced that learning can be enhanced by interventions that promote conscious awareness and interpretation of the meaning(s) of experience. I have been influenced by the humanist works of Maslow, Rogers, Fromm, and Lewin. Humanism draws on phenomenology, but rather than seeking only to “describe human experience, humanists ask how it might be ‘extended, enriched, or made more meaningful’; an effort is made to help people to ‘to grow and evolve more fully into the realization of their potential’.”(Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 78). I have been searching for ways of teaching and learning that deepen understanding of our experiences. Experience is a very powerful and influential teacher, but if we leave it unexamined, we do not always learn the full impact of its lesson(s). When we do not examine our (hi)story, and learn what it reveals, we may continue in uninformed and/or dysfunctional patterns. Becoming consciously aware of the meaning of our experience allows us to understand and move on. For example, the graduate students’ experiences with power was a rich resource that could have been explored more fully. They might have brought their experience with power into conscious awareness by examining the (ab)use of power and its impact on them. This exposure of what is implicit in an experience might have made them more attentive and thoughtful about their own personal use of power in their future teaching. Kolb (1984) recognizes that as humans, our survival depends on our ability to adapt, not only in the reactive sense of fitting into the physical and social worlds, but in the proactive sense of creating and shaping those worlds.

***How do we bring (new) awareness to light? How do we lift the fog that obscures and blurs our vision? How do we become more aware? How do we begin to see what we haven’t seen before? How do we deepen and broaden and heighten our awareness and our understanding? How do we live the present moment and “fill it fuller and fuller, with the past and the future, until it (shines), whole, bright, deep with understanding”?***

Experience is a rich resource that can be tapped. I have found the work of Kolb to be very helpful in identifying and understanding some of the key dimensions of learning from experience. Kolb has drawn on the work of Lewin, Piaget and Dewey, as well as

many other scholars in formulating his theory. I find it a holistic approach, in that although aspects have been separated out for attention, it recognizes that these are connected to the full experience. Learning involves the integrated functioning of the total being--thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving. Kolb identifies aspects of the learning process.

The first is a prehension dimension that includes dialectically opposed modes of grasping experience, one via direct apprehension of immediate concrete experience, the other through indirect comprehension of symbolic representations of experience. The second is a transformation dimension, which includes two dialectically opposed modes of transforming experience, one via intentional reflection, the other extensional action (Kolb, 1984, pp. 58-59).

He maintains that all these elements are all are equipotent in their contribution to the learning process, and that their synthesis produces higher levels of learning.

All the learning strategies (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) taken separately have a certain incompleteness to them. Although one can analytically identify certain learning achievements in each of the four elementary learning modes...more powerful and adaptive forms of learning emerge when these strategies are used in combination (Kolb, 1984,p. 65).

Ironically, it has been this identification, this separating out of elements of the learning process that has been very helpful for me as learner and instructor. It helps me attend to an experience in various ways, and extends understanding.

In my own teaching, I have recognized the value of beginning with a learner's life experiences and drawing out what the experience can tell us (dis-covering what is hidden beneath the surface of the experience), and making the hidden and/or implicit, tacit knowledge, explicit. We begin by noticing and describing an experience and then proceed to interpret the experience by looking at it in particular ways. In reflecting on experiences, learners are able to articulate possible meanings of their experience. An experience can be filtered through various lenses and new insights about the experience emerge. At the same time, insights about the lens we are using may emerge. Thus the experience becomes

richer and also, the experience heightens our awareness of the lens. In reflection, there is a reciprocity between the experience and the lens we use to reflect on the experience; one informs the other and there can be a synergistic effect, as the following entry illustrates.

**Journal entry: Ebb and Flow**

*There is an ebb and flow between experiencing and knowing. At one moment I am fully engaged in an experience, but it is only in the reflection afterward that I come to know that experience, to appreciate it, extract its essence, and bring it to consciousness so that I can take that on with me. Otherwise it sits in my mind and certainly may affect me, but in an unconscious way. That was dramatically illustrated for me in the past few months. I ended one writing year with certain key themes: looking for wisdom, seeking integrity between theory and practice, and being open to relationship. That writing affected my practice. In teaching the past few months, I carried those themes with me. And while I was at work, I was hardly aware of their effect on me. But it is through engaging in deep reflection afterward that I realized that I had become those themes. I had integrated them into my life so that they were not just abstract theory, but rather, I was living theory.*

How had this happened? How do we come to embody theory in our practice? It seemed that temporarily separating certain concepts out of life experiences, becoming aware of them and noticing their presence or absence through the act of reflective writing, informed me, in-formed me, and was a part of the process that allowed me to (re)integrate, (re)connect these concepts back into my teaching, not as an appended theory, but as an embodied theory.

Pinar (1994) has identified that regression, progression, analysis and synthesis are a valuable aspects of the process that may inform (past, present and future) action. It is paradoxical that it is the act of separating these elements from the whole learning process that informs us, allows us to consciously make connections and enhances and deepens our experience.

It is helpful for us to recognize what has contributed to our deeper understanding, so that we can continue to utilize these approaches and share these with others who seek

to understand more deeply. I have already talked about, and demonstrated the importance of the writing process in this research. I also recognize that talking to others and reading have been important in making connections and attaining deeper meaning.

In this thesis I have shared many life experiences and the learning that has flowed from these experiences. Often it was not until much later that I was able to put labels on what it was I learned, to “name” the experience. For example, my relationship with my grandfather was unconditional love. It was many years later that term would come into my vocabulary. But my experience with my grandfather allowed me to understand that concept. In turn, the naming of the experience helped me to recognize its meaning. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between language and experience. One enlightens or informs the other.

In my first experiences at university, I encountered the work of Joan Tough (1976), who wrote about the importance of talk with young children. It was the talk about the experience that was vital to assist young children to make connections between their experiences. Experiencing alone wasn't enough. It was the articulation of the experience that yielded the insights, the connections, the dis-discovery (uncovering the layers). Reflection and analysis are important aspect of the learning. Just as I have found the method of currere and writing to catalyse those insights, they can be generated in thoughtful discussion, too:

**Collaboration: Enhancing Reflection**

*Self-directed learning does not mean that one has to work alone in the learning process. We can seek outside support with colleagues, the literature, with experts. But in the end the learning is a personal experience. No one else can learn for me. Others can teach me, but they cannot make me learn. They can invite, but it is one's self that learns in the end.*

*I know that my collaboration with others has enriched my work and theirs. We grow bold together. We change; we've made radical changes to our practices and work through many problems together. We push each other to broaden our thinking and understanding. We experiment together. I might try a new idea and it works; my colleague might try it and find it bombs for her. But there is something powerful at work*

*in collaboration. In the end we still are self-directed, we still choose our own way, we still have to be true to ourselves and that may involve different paths. But we are stretched in the collaboration. In the end, teaching is a solitary activity, but working together adds depth and dimension. It in-forms us. We form ourselves. A very different way of forming than imposed professional development.*

Belenky et al. distinguish between “really talking” and didactic talk in which the speaker’s intention is to hold forth rather than share ideas:

**‘Really talking’ requires careful listening; it implies a mutually shared agreement that together you are creating the optimum setting so that half-baked or emergent ideas can grow. “Real talk” reaches deep into the experience of each participant; it also draws on the analytic abilities of each. Conversation...includes discourses and exploration, talking and listening, questions, argument, speculation, and sharing (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 144).**

When I refer to discussion in collaboration, it is “real talk”, with its reciprocity and cooperation, and absence of domination that I am referring to. In much the same way, reading can provide such enlightenment, and can echo the “real talk” with other(s):

*I consult the (academic) literature to extend my personal theorizing. I am a voracious reader, extending my search into other disciplines. Part of the reason I read is to help me understand the meaning of my experience; I have a natural curiosity to see how others interpret a similar experience. This reading informs me and in-forms me; that is, it gives me information and it also supplies conceptions that I use to form the experience so that I can understand it in some way. I find that by rubbing my own experiences and insights against those of other philosophers my vision is polished or extended. Thus, my encounter with the literature takes the form of a dialogue. I find the literature informs me and helps me to interpret my experience; in turn, my experience and insights help me to find meaning in the literature and also enable me to critique what I read.*

**Journal entry: October, 1992**

*The ideal learning situation would be for learners to go through the whole cycle that we go through in order to teach: identify what we already know about a subject, and then research and wade through a topic; identify key components, embellish the key components with illustrations, examples; identify interconnections and then teach that to someone else. When I design a learning activity I follow a similar pattern: I start with the learners' experiences and knowledge and have them wade through that information to identify key themes. When they work with others they collaborate and elaborate on their individual experiences. We pool the information that we already have within the group through sharing stories and insights and theorize from that. We examine what others say on the topic--we draw from others' interpretations in the literature and use that to reshape our own interpretations. We talk about how we are going to apply the information to a specific situation. Then they have to take the learning and apply it, enact what is learned. That is the hardest part! It involves changing our actions, getting out of our comfort zones, it involves risk, and it is scary. I remember one time when I was presenting in a long, narrow hotel room. The room set up was theatre style, with all chairs focussed to the front. It was not a collaborative atmosphere. I knew the chairs needed to be revised into a more circular shape, but I had some hesitancy. I asked others for ideas and support. At that point I needed others to confirm and support my decision, and I needed to hear the follow-up response affirming the results of my decision. As I try to encourage others to take risk in their learning, I remember this incident and recall the support I needed to institute a simple decision. We often overlook the courage it takes to make even a simple change. We need to talk more about this aspect of learning.*

*You can learn about things, but it doesn't mean that you will ACT on them. When does that moment come when we will do what we have learned about? Once that moment comes and you incorporate the knowledge into action, you're never the same as you were before. The blueprint is altered, the structure is changed, a window is opened. We can teach others about whatever we want, we can offer the possibilities, we can add to their resource pool, but we can't act on it for them. Perhaps we can influence; perhaps we can*

*set up situations where it is safe to try things. So the DOING is really an important part of the learning process. Doing demonstrates that a person has in-corporated (embodied) what they have learned about. But a further extension is the awareness of the doing. Here we go with the reflective practitioner again: PRAXIS. To have a complete learning situation we need all parts: learning about, doing, thinking about what was done, theorizing, doing again.*

The notion of embodying the theory might be seen as an integration of the theory into one's being. It was separated out of the whole in order to understand it and attend to it, examine it, and alter it or appreciate it. This alludes to a relationship between separation and connection.

**Perhaps it is inevitable that specialization precede integration in development, inevitable that youth be spent in a search for identity in the service of society, until in a last reach for wholeness we grasp that unified consciousness that has eluded us. As William Butler Yeats so eloquently put it, 'Nothing can be sole and whole that has not been rent.' For wholeness cannot be fully appreciated save in contrast to the experience of fragmentation, compartmentalization, and specialization. Kurt Lewin's observation that pulsation from differentiation to integration is the throb of the great engine of development is writ large as a universal social pattern of civilization (Kolb, 1984, p. 212).**

### **Teaching: Drawing From Within**

As teachers and learners, we bring the richness of our experience to whatever learning activity we enter. The experiences we have are a part of us; we draw on them. We are the embodiment of what we know, what we have learned, what we have come to understand. Our activities, our choices, how we participate in each experience is meshed with our past and our dreamed of future. (Our future is part of our past too; we want to move away from...or toward...as a result of our past). All the experiences we have had,

every book that we have read, every person we have met lie dormant and ready for us to pluck up in a moment of awareness and we can act on it.

In the end, we bring ourselves to our work. Depending on the way that we have chosen to experience life, we may bring shallowness or depth. Many of us have been touched by passionate teachers; people who have touched something deep within themselves, who are fully alive and pass that gift on to others. These are people who are in tune with another way of being, another level of consciousness, those who have sounded the depths. They are the Merlyns who pass on their visions.

The following story illustrates a teacher. The story captivated me and moved me and has held me spellbound since my friend Daphne told it to me three years ago. I have held it as a layer in my mind, rolling it over and around, enjoying the images it evokes, wondering about what it teaches me about a “mature” learner, what it says about teaching, what it tells about living and what it tells about a way of experiencing the world and a way of being in the world, a way of being with other. Such is the magic of story; it evokes images, feelings, sensations, and parts of it resonate in our being, echoing and bouncing off other images, weaving its magic, creating new pictures. They sit somewhere in our mind and slowly, slowly, work their powers until...

**The story of JACK WISE TEACHING IN SILENCE as told by Daphne**

**I must tell you about Jack Wise. Jack Wise was--is-- a wonderful teacher of brush stroke and I guess I registered for his class because it required no prerequisite and it was for any discipline. All you had to do was just come and be willing to learn. I parked my car way down in the parking lot at Pearson College which is about the low point of the campus and huffed and puffed my way up to the Max Bell Theatre Building where we were set up. Our class was in the huge lobby which is full of light, southern light. Beautiful, big windows and high, high ceilings. And I met this little man, almost elfish in appearance. His fluff of white hair which is brushed straight back but it would pop up here and there anywhere and his little white beard, Van Dyke kind of beard. Very quiet, very soft spoken, and incredibly powerful, this little man. His philosophy in teaching is to teach without words and it**

is incredible just how much one can learn from him. The second day of the course we were to meet in the classroom and then we'd be going off to make cedar brushes for our work that we were going to be doing. So we did this. Actually, no, it was the first morning. We had had dinner the night before and had gone up to see where the classroom was to be, and not being on campus, I was staying at home and it's about an hour's drive to the campus, by the time you go to the classroom, by the time you go up the hill and get settled in, so I had been rushed to get things done before leaving home so that when I came home everything would be fine and I parked in the parking lot and huffed and puffed my way up the hill and I huffed and puffed my way up the stairs of the Max Bell Theatre and by the time I reached the lobby I was gasping for breath ( HUUH -HUUUU, HUUUU HUUUU, HUUU HUUU) and trying very hard not to show it. Do you know how hard it is to enter a totally silent room with a dozen people who are sitting there being totally silent, not working, just sitting and being silent, and hear your breath coming in huge gasps? I tried to control it, but the more I tried to control it the more oxygen starved I became and so I could do nothing but huff and puff. Much to my relief, one other student came later and, although more fit than I, she too was gasping for breath. And again we sat until the room was silent and the huffing and puffing had abated. And after a bit Jack looked up and said,

“Now we will proceed to the parking lot.” So there you have it, we'd come all this way up from the parking lot and huffed and puffed and where were we headed? Right back down to it. The reason the room had been so silent was because the appointed hour had come and three people were not yet in class and Jack spoke to the class who wanted to get on with things anyway and he said, “No, we will wait. These days we feel we must fill every minute of time with some frantic activity. What we will do now is just sit and do nothing.” And it was very, very hard for some people to sit for fifteen minutes and do nothing. Anyway, we were there and we were all assembled and we'd finished our huffing and puffing and so we--oh we'd been told to bring a rounded rock, something that fit comfortably in our hand and didn't have sharp edges. (Perhaps looking for the rounded rock was what had made

me late, I can't recall.) But we proceeded down to the parking lot and over by the big woodpile Jack had some huge slabs of cedar bark, which was from first growth cedar, and he said first growth cedar seem to make the best brushes. And there was a couple of hatchets and some knives and we were told to take a piece of cedar bark and split off the inside bark and then find and make the brushes whatever size we wanted them. And then to find somewhere like a piece of wood, something smooth but not too hard, then take our rock in our hand and gently, but firmly, roll it and roll it on the end, oh about a foot long on the strip of the bark. And we would do that and we would turn it and do it some more and some more and do it a little harder to try to get the fibres separated and of course if you'd do it HARD, the fibres just broke off so we has to learn just to be patient and do this to separate the fibres. Fortunately, I was talking to Lorne ... who had been in Jack's class before and I had heard him say something about people making quite big brushes and how a piece of cedar bark three inches wide could provide a lifetime of brushes and some of the best brushes were wee ones and the big ones weren't as useful. So, I made several brushes. Most of them were quite small and then we huffed and puffed our way back to the classroom and Jack had this HUGE piece of paper and he rolled it out over three long tables and he said, "There. Now today the first mark that you make with your new brushes--pick your favourite one and we will make BIG marks on this huge piece of paper." So this huge piece of paper requires your biggest brush or one that's an inch or so wide. And I'd never done any calligraphy. Although I had done some Chinese brush stroke painting years ago--but it didn't really count. So I was terrified. How would my mark look like compared to anyone else's? I let about three people go ahead of me and I thought NO, I'd better get this done, because if mine's going to be really dreadful, I didn't want to be the last one to make my mark. So I dipped it in the ink and I very tentatively started out and then I got more bold and just finished it and it looked really ugly.

...Jack taught us many things in his teaching without words...he did talk about silence and he did talk about quietness and he did talk about--ah, one of his

favourite phrases was “All it takes is 100% concentration. That’s all it takes, 100% concentration and if you’re concentrating entirely, you can’t talk at the same time, you can’t be thinking about something else at the same time. All it takes is 100% concentration.”

One day he said that we would meet after lunch at the big tree and he explained how to get there from the dining hall. And we went along this path, through the campus, by the administration building and along this path and actually had to climb a barbwire fence that was down on the ground. Just climb over it and looking down into lovely Pedder Bay below us--we’re not far from the water and we came to Jack, sitting on the ground and looking at this HUGE Douglas Fir, just sitting there. This tiny little man like a little gnome under the tree, just looking at it quietly. People were wandering here and there, looking at the tree and those who got tired of looking at the tree were wandering down the path to see where it went and...looking at and discovering ant hills. I didn’t really know we had such big ant hills full of red ants in our forests. And then we were wondering if we really wanted to sit on the ground because after all there were all these red ants wandering around. And still Jack was quiet. Then slowly we became aware that he had started to talk, with his soft way and everybody gathered around because nobody missed anything that he had to say. And he said, “The Indians believe that all living things breathe and that trees also breathe, but they breathe much more slowly than we and so they inhale and they exhale so slowly that we cannot perceive it and if you sit and communicate with the tree for long enough, it will reveal its spirit to you.” And he had been coming for several years now and spent a lot of time sitting communicating with that tree and he was getting to know it. It was not a particularly beautiful tree but the most wonderful thing about that tree was you could see where it had been struck. The most wonderful thing about it was its survival. You could see it had been struck by lightning and the tip had gone off, but the top was still very high. Where the top had been taken off, fire had burned it and it had great limbs going out and there was one particularly huge limb that went off

to the right from where we were standing, and a little bit forward, and the little branches off that huge branch which was pretty horizontal went straight up and each one was the size of a good modern-day tree, probably larger than the ones they are harvesting for lumber today. There were three of them and they stood tall and you'd wonder how this huge branch that went out could support these because it went a long way out, maybe 25 feet out, to hold this incredible weight, but it did. Some people climbed on the branch and had their picture taken, but it was a really good climb and a jump when you came down, so I didn't think I cared to do that. But it was fun to watch them and we all gathered around it and thinking about it and again people began to wander off. And Jack just sat there communicating with the tree. And one by one our restlessness left us and we too sat and thought about the tree. We saw how it interwound with another tree, a cedar tree and some people thought that they were growing together, but we know that's not possible, that they could not have grown and melded together, but indeed they were supporting each other in one part. And we wondered, with so little soil on the ground where the tree had buried its roots to show, to support this incredible weight, to keep it from just sliding down the hill into the ocean. Then some deer came along and they browsed and still we sat and communed with the tree. After three hours of communing with the tree, Jack rose and said it was time to return to the studio and that's what we did. And once we were there he said now I want you to paint what you saw. Make your mark on the paper to be the tree. And some people used huge watery marks and some people used hundreds of little tiny dry ink marks. In every one you could see the tree.

This story had immediate appeal when Daphne first told it to me. There was something in the way that Jack approached his work that intrigued me. He seemed to have a deep sense of what he was doing and how to do it. Teaching in silence sounded very powerful. I see the wise Merlyn in the form of Jack Wise. Helping others discover what was right there all along, just waiting to be noticed. It reminds me of my experience with drawing my hand--the awakening, the opening up to what is already there.

**Learning to see slow, gradual processes requires slowing down our frenetic pace and paying attention to the subtle as well as the dramatic. If you sit and look into a tide pool, initially you won't see much of anything going on. However, if you watch long enough...the tide pool will suddenly come to life. The world of beautiful creatures is always there, but moving a bit too slowly to be seen at first. The problem is our minds are so locked in one frequency, it's as if we can only see at 78 rpm; we can't see anything at 33 1/3 (Senge, 1990, p. 23).**

At first, I only wanted to tell the second section of the story, since that was the part that had mesmerized me for three years. But I came to recognize that the story of Daphne's self-consciousness was an integral part of the whole. I came to see the two parts echoed and reflected each other; that they were mirror opposites of one another, parts of the whole. The second part of the story illustrates a relationship to the tree that is present in the marks.

As we press ourselves against or into the surface of our media, we leave our mark. To allow that movement to run its natural course until the experience is savoured fully in the marks left behind is to offer the fullness of evidence of the experience.

This is the basis of an expressive, articulate image. Not dead replication of something alive, but an image that is personal, unique, drawn from within, made in homage to the world without (London, 1989, p. 26).

Inner and outer integrate in relationship.

As I re-typed this story, I noticed that both parts were attentive to breathing. One was a self-consciousness of one's own loud gasps filling the silence; the other was a deep listening in the silence to hear the subtlest of sounds. Listening to the breathing. Hearing its story. One was about trying to muffle the sound, to silence it; the other about hearing in the silence. One was silencing the sound so that it would not be heard, the other sounding the silence to hear. Many Eastern meditative practices attend to breathing in order to move one into another state of consciousness.

Echoes, Mirror images

Silence the sound

Sound the silence

Notice

Attuned, Hear the breathing

Of the silent trees.

See what was unseen

Hidden. There.

Listen into the deep

silence

What do we not notice? What is it that is there, but hidden from view? What is it that is right in front of us, but unseen? All around us, but unheard?

**Our first task is to see...yes to see. If you wish to see, listen first. Hearing is the stepping stone toward vision. Thus listen so that through the discipline of hearing you arrive at the glory of seeing.**

**Bernard of Clairvaux**

### **Being Fish**

There is a Tlingit legend that I “heard” from the written work of Dan Kaiper (1978), who, in turn, heard this legend from Holly Tom. It tells of a boy who went to live with his uncle to learn to become a chief like his father. Despite his best efforts, he was not able to achieve the strength and wisdom that would make him a great chief like his father.

One day he and his uncle were fishing when a great storm came and the lashing water swamped their canoe. His uncle was strong and was able to swim to shore, but Tecumseh was drowned. That night his mother had a dream that he was swimming on

the ocean floor with a school of fish. And because the Tglinglit people believe dreams are significant, she never gave up hope that her son would return.

The year after Tecumseh died, no salmon came to spawn. There were no fish and the hunting was scarce; there was famine in the land and it seemed that the people might perish in the cold of the winter.

One night in the moonlight, Tecumseh's mother took her canoe and coasted the water. She caught the flash of a fish jumping in the water; it seemed to beckon her as it jumped time after time. As she approached, it jumped into her boat and flopped about. Such a beauty, a fat, fully grown sockeye--shining silver in the moonlight. She put it in her basket and returned to shore. She followed the tradition of dressing the salmon in cedar boughs and laying it on the roof of her house, to warn the fish spirit that it would soon be killed and call it forth. After three days, the chief took the fish down and was about to prepare it for cooking and cut off its head, when a voice called out, "Do not harm me father." The startled chief looked up and (almost) magically his son appeared before his eyes. There was great jubilation throughout the village, and for a time, their hunger was forgotten. He stood among them and said that he had a gift for them. A gift that could not be seen. He had brought back knowledge of where the salmon were hidden. He could lead his people to where the fish were, and restore them. He became known as the greatest of Indian fishermen.

In listening to this story, I hear about a boy taking a profound journey. He dives into his inner depths to find his own strengths, his own way of being, so that he can contribute what his community needs. He becomes important to his people, not by following his father's path, but by finding his own way. I too, have swum with the fish. I too, have been transformed by my swim in the water world. I too, bring gifts to share. I can bring what I have learned into being, and into my teaching, learning, and research.

The ongoing and re-generative power of the salmon life-cycle is a wonderful metaphor for learning. At the closing of the life cycle, the old (fish) passes on. It passes on its life force and a new generation is spawned. Similarly, Merlyn passes on his vision to

Wart. When I study the work of Kolb, I see how he has synthesized the work of other scholars, and moved on. We see how the past and future are present.

## CLOSING: FULL CIRCLE

Fishermen know how hard it is to stop fishing. A bookmark with a statement by Gladys Taber says it well: **“The curious thing about fishing is you never want to go home. If you catch anything, you can’t stop. If you don’t catch anything, you hate to leave in case something might bite.”** I have been trying to push to find an ending to this work. What I didn’t see at first was that it was right in front of me. All the time I was looking elsewhere for a way to close, and all that time I was living it.

### Re-Cording Resonance

It is forty years since I experienced that moment of separateness as a little girl. I recognize that the struggle with separations and connection has been a life-long theme. I have grown to love my time alone and being separate; my time of solitude when I can reflect and pull the disparate pieces together. It is in these moments that I am able to capture my true essence. But I also treasure the moments when I am with others, when my heart beats with theirs, when we dance to the same drum. I do not feel so alone when I am alone; and now there are times when I do not feel so alone when I am with others. These are the most precious moments of life, when I sense a communion with others. They are sacred moments that celebrate the fluidity of the movement between self and other.

**We can’t ‘have’ ....any *thing*--but we can engage in relationships, we can enter into closeness to others, the carefulness of which transforms us both**  
(London, 1989, p. 24).

### **Poem, 1992: To all my teachers; to myself as teacher**

You may not know it, but you are evaluating me  
 When you look away when I am talking to you  
 When you stop reading my writing to think and  
 jot down words that convey your reaction  
 When you dismiss an idea I shared

with a quick, surface comment

When you look at me, deep into my eyes, with  
a thoughtful expression, draw in your breath  
and pause, in wonder.

These make marks, as powerful as any grade.

When you share the joy when I finally “get” something

When you react in anger at some passing comment I’ve made.

You hold a power.

We all do.

How can we use it wisely?

When we react with genuineness, from deep in our soul

With unconditional caring

When we are moved from the quiet calm place inside ourselves-  
the eye of the storm-

We envelope the other, we merge, we become one.

Learner and learner.

It seems fitting that when I proclaim the importance of experience, that I close this thesis with an experience. Regression--progression--analysis--synthesis. Past--present--future. Nemo--nuance. All are present. This experience is a summary, a resonant recording of my (ongoing) struggle with separation and connection:

**Journal entry (undated): Theory grounded in experience**

*I have been very disturbed this term in working with a student who struck me as very arrogant and self-righteous. The person’s comments were like a razor and always very critical and resistant to the material that we were presenting. How could this person not see what we saw? Why was this person so resistant? I was also concerned with this person’s judgemental attitudes--how would they be able to work respectfully with clients when they judged them so arrogantly? I found myself questioning the material we were*

*presenting, and more painfully, questioning myself. The “nemo” haunts my life again, creating dis-sonant dis-c(h)ord, making me fall out of my comfortable ego. I began to recognize that I was mirroring the judgemental attitudes I was concerned about in the student. How could I be so judgmental of another, particularly when the curriculum I was teaching included a section on the importance of non-judgemental attitudes in working with others? How could I be so incongruent with that which I taught? The course also encourages students to look beneath the surface in an effort to understand rather than judge. Why was I not listening to my own lessons? This began a challenging discussion with colleagues, in which we explored the concept more deeply. My colleague referred to Buddhism, and suggested that if we were to let go of ownership, of attachment, that we might move into a state of being non-judgmental. On one level I could understand and agree, but on the more immediate level I resisted—how could we let go of that which we valued? Usually I do not have a problem with being so judgemental; usually I (my ego) can stand aside and observe a situation without ego involvement. It is a kind of non-attachment that is at the same time caring. When I do this, I begin to understand, rather than judge. But this situation confounded me; I was concerned about how clients would be affected. I struggled to find a way to convey this concern in a way that the person might hear, so that they might think about the impact of their attitude.*

*Slowly, in conversation and written work, this student began to reveal what was beneath the surface. Childhood abuse. “The mirror cracked from side to side.” This information shifted my perspective radically. I began to re-view every statement that the person had made that had infuriated me before and I began to understand. I began to move from judgement to understanding (Greene, 1995). Ego melted. I slipped behind the mirror and entered relationship with this person. Thou. Once again, exploring beneath the surface has moved me. The lesson lives (on).*

Separate. Connected. I. Thou. Reverence. Life-long learning. There is always more to learn, to understand. There is no end...



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