

THE QUAKING EXPERIENCE: Speaking From Unknown Places

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by

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the nature of the quaking experience - those moments when unpredictable and energetic speaking breaks out as people lose their composure. Out of the tension between wanting to be silent and inconspicuous and the knowledge that something must be said comes a movement towards quaking speech. It often moves people to express unexplored differences and encounter unfamiliar parts of themselves.

Drawing from personal experiences as teacher, counsellor, therapist, student, and group facilitator, I present here a number of scenes and open-ended narratives of situations in which quaking occurred. These are interspersed with reflective passages pondering the nature of my interpretive inquiry into this topic.


Examiners

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved partner, Trixi Fidelman, who has supported me through the shakiest times, taught me so much about hanging in, and trusting in my body's wisdom.

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1. 1 What We Cannot Know

There are times when life is too much to contain and people speak what they never imagined they could say. Something breaks out, seeking release from isolation and darkness. What was once reserved, suddenly becomes a reservoir of lively speech. In these situations we usually don't know what will be said. The internal censors have lost their influence at that instant when words move into public space, assuming an existence of their own. It seems important for us to inhabit these regions, listen to the cues, allow ourselves to be moved, even while in difficult circumstance where outside authority or guidelines don't always make sense. For this seems to be the approaching condition of the times. In the balance of things, there must be a place for emptiness, not knowing, ambiguity and uncertainty. Otherwise we will clutter and overcrowd our beings with ideas about how things must be, leaving no opportunity to open to the condition which embraces us as equal beings walking always on the brink of death, never really knowing enough to change what is unchangeable, powerless to control forces which have obliterated all who have gone before us and left only stories, which have become our history.

Over the past 3 years I have recorded notes of significant moments in my practice - conversations with the people I met as clients, encounters during group sessions and personal development

activities, dialogues with colleagues, loose transcription of individual sessions - pertaining to the experience of speaking from unknown places. In addition, I have kept a journal, which began as a project for Curriculum Studies courses, but expanded into hundreds of pages of recollection and reflection on the genealogy of my teaching and counseling practice.

Here was clear evidence of a movement away from legitimated educational practice in colleges towards alternative engagement where there was more space for quaking. I was allowing myself to stray into the unexplored territory, and, as I wandered off more often, my anxiety became more of a sign of life. The shakiness of life itself became an invitation for uncertain speech, breaking the spell of holding on to certain notions, releasing the discomfort of resisting the unknown. In these pages I have depicted some of these moments, woven into narratives, and interspersed with reflective passages pertaining to the nature of my inquiry and its relationship to hermeneutic investigation. I believe that this will speak more directly to the reader about the nature of this experience.

In an entry on October 24, 1991, I wrote: “ I’ve been drawn, a lot of the time, toward life at the margins of our culture; those who live there often come with a desperation that pushes them, when invited, to express what is not being spoken elsewhere. They mirror the dispossessed parts of my own experience.” Moving outside the limits of my own reference -points often left me exposed to things I didn’t understand. When I spoke at these times, there often was a vibrancy that reached others and affected their speaking as well.

I find myself wondering these days about the destructive

forms of global quaking that seems to be approaching. Could this be a rebellion against the will to reduce the unknowable into forms of knowledge which we can predict and master and speak about with ease ? What would it be like if the history of words left as imprints on pages by scholars and researchers and archivists was to give way to a history of bodies breathing life into words through the voicing and moving of tales unfolding as we meet forces greater than ourselves ? What would happen if what we spoke came from this awareness of limitation ? That all is, ultimately, speculation and pattern-making and play, bringing us together and helping us to create ever-changing patterns amidst the ruthless passage of time.

## 1.2 Hidden Power Struggles

Throughout my years of educational experience - as college instructor, school counsellor, group leader, researcher, coordinator of counsellor training in Native communities, therapist - I have wondered about the darker side of knowledge, the blind spots in one's practice, where one might, through ambitiousness or zeal, push out in directions others weren't always ready to move towards. In her book, For Your Own Good: Hidden Roots of Cruelty in Child-Rearing, Alice Miller (1988) reminds us that unacknowledged childhood sufferings may resurface in our adult lives as oppressive influences unconsciously imposed on others "for their own good." Miller contends that to break the cycle of demeaning practices, we might benefit from the realization that our own aggression towards others " is the attempt to exterminate (our) own former weakness

and to avoid sorrow.”(Miller, 1988, pp. 188-189). We need to examine our own mistreatment and suffering, in spite of our tendencies to idealize what we’ve been through, in order not to pass it on any further. Miller concludes her book with an invitation:

I wonder if what is called pedagogy may not simply be a question of power, and if we shouldn’t be speaking and writing much more about hidden power struggles instead of racking our brains about finding better methods of child-rearing. (Miller, p. 277)

As I look back and consider some of the most vital moments in my practice, I realize that at the heart of these experiences there was a moving toward conflict, a potential for power struggle, usually arising when I had a rigid agenda or plan of action which did not anticipate all the influences at work. In order to engage respectfully with others, I had to sensitize myself to my own limits of anxiety as well as to those of the others with whom I was meeting. Gradually, I began to realize that acknowledging my anxiety and allowing myself to speak at such moments could move us beyond power struggle. Often the urge to seek control over a situation would be closely linked to some unacknowledged fear or tension or conflict which, if disclosed, would open up unexpected avenues of exploration.

We cannot shape anything without its consent and

participation. When minds and bodies and spirits truly meet, every idea becomes a gathering-place; words spoken evoke other words. There is no permanent centre of attention as inspiration moves about from place to place, body to body. And no one can predict the outcome.

### 1.3 Riding the Waves of Inquiry

The very act of revisiting some of my experiences, writing about them without the need to impose an exact interpretation, but inviting the narratives themselves to speak, leaves me open to hear them in new ways. I want to write about these moments because they seem to chronicle a deepening relationship and response to the calling of education, one in which I struggled with the urge to exert power and influence over others while, at the same time, awakening to a vast, unmanageable human contact and wisdom, urging me “to bend to the task of guardianship over the truth of Being.” (Levin, 1989, p. 273). My attention was especially drawn when people allowed conversations to develop as they were moved to speak, not only from safe, composed, thought-out positions, but in the midst of

chaotic states, when things didn't quite make sense but something further needed to be spoken.

Whenever I could manage to persist through such exchanges, I found that those engaged would become animated. No one seemed to be in control of the conversation. New, unexpected turns would arise, and someone who had hardly spoken would become eloquent. People would speak in ways that seemed out of character. There was no longer any telling where the conversation would go to next as new connections were formed and new patterns emerged. There were also pauses and stillness, what T.S. Eliot alludes to:

We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion.  
(Eliot, Four Quartets).

As I struggle to make sense out of these uncertain moments, I am reminded of my first efforts to ride the ocean waves on a boogie-board. Much of the time was spent watching the waves crest, waiting for a huge swell to come my way; then I paddled like hell to keep up with the peak of surging motion. On my first afternoon, I caught only three waves that I could read well enough to be carried in all the way to shore. I watched my friend riding his way into

shore all afternoon. “ It takes time,” he shouted. “Just keep waiting, then stay with the movement when it comes your way. ”

Hermeneutic inquiry requires a similar tenacity, for it requires us to stay with what moves us rather than shift into “the stance of a spectator who desires to control, predict and manipulate what is now displayed in front of us as an objective array in which we have no stake.”(Jardine, 1992, p.2). A lot of the work is in the watching, waiting, and paddling like hell. We can pin down experience by subjecting it to exacting methods of research in which we have no stake, but in the process we lose our connection to our “desire regarding our relationship to ourselves, to others and to the Earth.”(Jardine, 1992, p. 2) On the other hand, we can allow the texts of our own narratives to speak to us, listening to the felt sense of what stirs in us at each reading, trusting in the waves of bodily response as part of the surging movement that carries us forward. We can stay with the ambiguity and trust in the unexpected. Maybe we can adjust our expectations and stay with what moves us long enough to ride in to shore.

## 1.4 Recollecting the Body

As a therapist I have heard countless stories by people who acknowledged their stuckness in life situations. I was often struck by the dull, lifeless monotones in their voices as they recounted tales of incredible suffering and poignant loss. In order to escape from the imprisoning routine and endless details of the compulsive story, which had no place for the unexpected, they had to learn to trust in their bodily responses and risk losing control as they allowed themselves to speak. Then the narrative would speak in new ways.

My hope is that I will be able to follow my own advice as I tell these narratives, for I am beginning to realize that even though I can suggest that these remembrances have touched me deeply, I still have not had the time to stand back and breathe, listen to what is being spoken, allowing their full impact to reach me. Recently, as a client described her inability to find words with which to express her overwhelming sadness, she began to split off. I handed her some writing paper and suggested that she ramble on to herself through

free-writing. Afterwards she became quite animated as she read out a passage. Her struggle echoes my own:

I have a difficult time with words there is an appropriate way of communicating and I don't get it and i wonder if i will I've been trying and i still hear the garbage I'm stuck stuck stuck give me my time time time people don't understand how can you have a conversation when you need 10 minutes or two days to think about what the person said my energy goes light and i hear myself wonder if I'm going to say the wrong thing to the wrong person and we'll all end up in jail the jail cell sucks.

### 1.5 Getting Into the Act

For the past three years I have been living with this thesis, bringing the pressing questions with me into every situation, speaking with those curious about developments, listening closely to what was spoken. As I did so, I noticed how quaking experiences were occurring more often - the very spirit of inquiry invokes fresh movements, reacquaintances, urgency. To respect the integrity of this project, then, it must assume a shape and style fitting of its own existence: a story unfolding itself amidst many fragments, moving in many directions simultaneously, erupting and interrupting itself, filled with drama, opening to unexpected possibilities. It

sometimes must hover between silence and sound, washing things under or over as it waits for the cresting of what wants to be spoken.

There are intense moments when life speaks poignantly, as if the spotlight zooms in and there is a hush all around as everything gathers to acknowledge the significance of what is present. These scenes catch our attention and stand out in memory. Like Beckett characters, trapped in a predictable and common place, something escapes into longing speech in the midst of tedium, breaks the pattern; suddenly, the ordinary becomes filled with possibility.

To evoke a sense of this experience, then, I have chosen to present narratives in which the dramatic possibilities are not cut away. For when people speak in embodied states, allowing themselves to be moved, what follows is often lyrical and dramatic by nature, reaching our bodies with the resonance of words filled with motion, emerging from warm, breathing bodies resounding with rhythm.

My own relationship with education has moved steadily from classroom to counselling room as I sought more space for surprise, quaking, and silence. From the earliest days I could sense that the

contact in classroom discussions would be confined to the channels of public discourse. Often, when a topic touched on memory, association, or personal narrative, an intensity of engagement would enter the room which, for those unaccustomed to such exchange, would appear threatening. At such moments those unfamiliar with quaking would remind us of our location within an academic setting, where our agreement was to emphasize theoretical knowledge, formal research methods, and established traditions of inquiry as clear contexts for our conversations. In submitting this paper within this context, I have the opportunity, once again, to introduce conversation which may not always fall within the borders of traditional academic talk.

Moreno, the founder of psychodrama believed that people had a great need to *act out* things, to throw themselves as performers into the events that were unfolding around them, and that this need was completely unmet in their humdrum daily lives. They were, in a sense, emotionally disenfranchised. Moreno recognised that people could discover themselves - *create* themselves - in such activities. Ordinary people also wanted to participate in the unfolding historical dramas of the time - not just vote, but participate

*emotionally*. His discovery could be summed up in Jimmy Durante's favorite line: "Everybody wants to get into the act." (Anderson, 1990, p.121).

## 1.6 Entering the Parable

The meanings of these narratives are open-ended . The reader is invited to bring his or her own experience into play. I could not resist the impulse to respond, at times, to what I heard being called into question. I have paused to listen to the echoing intonations and intimations, but I have also trusted in the process of telling itself, which cannot limit what is interpreted to this time and this space. David Jardine refers to this as "non-representational writing". He comments:

We live in a world in which we never completely know what will follow, so we never fully know what this thing now before us essentially is, because we never know what will be made of it, what will come of it. The future has a fecund relation to the present. In the future, the present will no longer be what it used to be. This is why Martin Heidegger linked up *Being and Time*. *This* is "The end of philosophy and the task of thinking."(Jardine, 1992, p. 101)

The open end is an opportunity for the reader to react, becoming a

part of the story, somewhat akin to Kafka's world of parables:

Many complain that the words of the wise are always merely parables and of no use in daily life, which is the life we have. When the sage says: "Go over," he does not mean that you should cross to some actual place, which we could do anyhow if the labor were worth it; he means some fabulous yonder, something unknown to us, something too that he cannot designate more precisely, and therefore cannot help us here in the very least. All these parables really set out to say really is that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already.. But the cares we have to struggle with every day: that is a different matter.

Concerning this a man once said: Why such reluctance ? If you would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares.

Another said: I bet this is also a parable.

The first said: You have won.

The second said: But unfortunately only in parable.

The first one said: No, in reality: in parable you have lost.(Cited in Kylin, 1984, p.23)

## 1.7 A Caravanserai

At the centre of the grounds a crowd had gathered. People were everywhere, mulling around a raised platform, where the prominent speakers sat. Hardly any attention was paid to the proceedings as small groups huddled together to gossip or catch up on news. A few were tossing and kicking a ball around lazily. Then someone walked briskly onto the field, picked up the ball, and called out to another

for attention as the ball was hurled, then caught, somewhat in surprise, then hurled back to another. This sudden burst of energy soon spread, and a small group of players followed the movement of the ball, gathering up more people as a game unfolded. Rules were invented, then changed, as each new situation carried along the players to the edge of the ground, past the platform, off into the countryside, where a huge tent appeared. They moved inside and joined a gathering of speakers. The walls of the tent were like the membrane of an ear, pulsating with the sound of the voice of the speaker, holding the listeners inside close. Stories were told of seeking after truth, obstacles and failures, the despair of being lost. One tale stirred up another. No one could listen without being moved to speak of what they, too, had come to know. Then they would stand up to speak. Out of this collective history something new was being born.

## Chapter 2

## The Movement Away From Certainty

### 2.1 The Art Of Thievery

The teachings are all around us and in our midst. They are offered freely, yet one must be willing to pay the price, be prepared to participate in the unknown, without guarantees. I am reminded of a story:

There once was a master thief who devoted himself to his craft with great care. His son wished to learn his secret, wondering how he had managed to avoid being caught for so many years. So the father invited him to come out with him on his next expedition in order to learn the art of thievery.

Father and son stole their way into an estate at the edge of the city and began to gather up valuables. Suddenly the father made a great commotion, threw all the things he had gathered out upon the floor with a clatter, and scurried out of the building, leaving his son in dismay. The disturbed residents began to seek out the source of the commotion. The son quickly darted into a closet and buried himself beneath a pile of clothes. A servant, who had heard the noise and traced it to this room, opened up the cupboard door. Terrified by the prospect of being caught, the son boldly stood up, blew out the servant's candle, and raced to the door. A party of residents tore out after him. In his flight, the son spotted a well ahead of him, with a pile of rocks nearby. He lunged into the neighbouring woods, hid himself in a deep thicket, and threw a rock into the well so his

pursuers would think that he had dove in. They waited a long time for him to surface, then concluded that he had drowned.

The son returned to his father's house, exhausted and irate at his betrayal. "I thought you were going to teach me how to master thievery !" he exclaimed. The father looked fondly at his son and placed his arm around his shoulders. " I did ."(Anonymous)

When we allow ourselves to wander from what has been well-established, we often find ourselves in difficulty. Under these circumstances, we may be almost ready to give up and face the humiliation or embarrassment of not knowing what to do. All the schooling or theory are inadequate because the situation could not be anticipated, and our response must be quicker than strictly mental deliberation. We can then learn the art of thievery - finding unexpected openings in the midst of desperate or uncharted situations. Stealing our way out of stuck places.

## 2.2 The Young Man, the Old Man, and the Sea

***During my second term of teaching practicum in Vancouver, I stumbled up against my worst fear - standing before an entire class of teenagers with nothing to say.***

*I had been assigned the grade 9C English class, and was quite excited about the prospects of exploring Hemingway's Old Man And The Sea. During the second week of teaching, I decided it was about time to pull out all the stops and truly share my love for this dramatic account of the human struggle with forces greater than ourselves. I entered the common room, armed with pages of class notes, and my copy of Hemingways's novella, which I had carefully marked off with strips of annotated paper. A few of the other English teachers in the room noticed my enthusiasm.*

*"Old Man and The Sea," someone called out. "Whose class are you teaching ?*

*I replied that it was Jim Braiththwaite's, the 9c's.*

*I thought I detected faint smiles on the faces of the other teachers, but there was no time to pursue our conversation further as the bell rang. The class never quite got off the ground. Most of the students hadn't read the chapters assigned. Nobody seemed particularly interested in discussing the book or anything related to literature. I stood there, desperately seeking some way to stir up curiosity. Blank faces or downcast*

*eyes greeted my desperate glances around the room.*

*Then I was struck by what seemed at the time to be a bright idea. Perhaps we could talk about the issues related to Hemingway's world, which seemed so timeless to me. I cast out what I thought would be enticing questions, hoping to draw one or two curious students out of their quietness.*

*“Have any of you ever thought about why we get into power struggles ? Why do you think people are attracted to take on things that seem powerful ? Why do we match our strength against others' strength ?”*

*A long, painful silence was the only response.*

*Finally, I decided to try something a bit more risky – the idea of a tug of war – as a means of illustrating one of the central metaphors of the book.*

*“Has anybody here ever had a tug of war contest ?”*

*The room erupted. Steven, one of the more sullen faces in the class until now, suddenly jerked his arm up and called out, “ Why don't we try one now ? I know where we can get a rope.”*

*“Yea,” somebody else cried out, “ we can take it out onto the playground and form teams.”*

*Before I could assess the situation, two other boys threw up their hands and volunteered to go with Steven to the gym to fetch the rope for our experiment. My pause of hesitation was taken as a sign of approval by these boys, who immediately lurched toward the door and scrambled down the hallway.*

*I wanted to take advantage of this moment of enthusiasm by initiating further discussion of the dynamics of tug-of-war contests while the boys were off in search of our implement. But the class soon sank back into apathy. I filled the time with a long monologue on the nature of teamwork, hoping that our messengers would return soon. But there was still no sign of them. Finally, I suggested that everyone spend some time reading or reviewing the chapters assigned.*

*Then I heard a distant uproar down the hall. There were loud voices and shouting sounds. It seemed to be coming closer. I opened the door and took in the sight of a mass of tangled rope and boys, dragging and winding its tail down the corridors. One of the boys had been tied up by one leg and was being hauled by the others across the cold linoleum floors. His body was convulsing with protest and laughter as they kept on pulling*

*in spite of all his efforts to resist by digging his heels into the floor. Meanwhile the doors to the classrooms along the way were opening, one by one, as they passed. My worst horror was being acted out. Every teacher in the entire school was now witnessing my complete ineptitude and public humiliation.*

*“What’s going on out here ?”, I heard an angry voice call out. Then another teacher asked the boys about which class they were supposed to be attending. I wanted to slip back behind the door to our classroom and pretend that I had nothing to do with them. But I forced myself to walk down the hall and retrieve the lost emissaries, beckoning for them to follow me with as firm a gesture as I could manage at the time.*

*Back inside the class, I had to stand in front of another tribunal of smirking faces. Steven and his cohorts were now elevated to the status of heroes. I sat against the top of the desk, steadying myself, then gazing into the eyes of each grinning person, wondering what it was that was making this moment of my defeat into such a triumph for the students.*

*I sank into speechlessness and caught my breath. For a brief moment I felt the urge to lash out at these beasts who had*

*destroyed my credibility and mocked all my efforts with such hideous glee. I thought about sending them to the office and sending letters to their parents to force them to face the horrible consequences of their rashness. I glared out at them, fantasizing about all the ways I might make them know what it felt like to be humiliated, indignant that they could even imagine they'd get away with something like this.*

*Then a wave of hopelessness came over me as images of my own school years flashed by- all the energy and effort spent daydreaming, clowning around, or waiting for a teacher to show some sign of weakness that would break the monotony of routine. Anything that would bring a laugh was considered fair game, often at another's expense. A rush of words came pouring out of my quivering chest. I told them about how hopeless I was feeling at that moment, how I wanted to punish them, just like all the teachers that I'd had to contend with had dealt with me. I talked about how useless it seemed to attempt to teach something to those who resented my very presence in their lives. I shared some of my memories about school pranks I'd participated in and my own regrets that I had also allowed*

*myself to follow the crowd. I talked about how schools seemed to be places of endless contest between teachers and students, the teachers using everything in their power to motivate students to complete their work, and the students resisting with every ounce of energy available. I also recalled the moments alone, when the school day had ended and there was nobody to snicker with or plot further diversions. There was only a dull sense of having passed through another meaningless day. I could feel myself falling into sadness as I spoke. There was an attentive silence all around and a lot of eyes looking out at me.*

*“ Why do we do this ?” I couldn’t help asking. “Why must we try to defeat one another just to kill more time ? Is there no other way to spend our time together ?”*

*The bell rang, and students slowly moved towards the door.*

*There was no further mention of this incident in subsequent classes. There seemed to be an unspoken understanding amongst us, after that, about some common suffering we’d all shared. We settled into the Hemingway novella and spoke about the old man’s struggles to conquer the great fish, how he almost gave up but, in the end, emerged*

*victorious. We wondered about the quality of his triumph, whether he had simply spent himself trying to master some strange creature, or discovered something else in the process of hauling ashore a massive carcass for the sharks to finish off. Most students completed their reading assignments and showed mild interest in the other literature introduced in class.*

*In my last period with them I thanked them for their cooperation. At the end of this session, Steven was about to leave, but turned back toward me. He looked down for a moment, then smiled and said, “ I guess we all have to keep learning, don’t we ? Hang in there. “*

*I later learned that this class had consisted mostly of “slow learners,” repeaters, and “difficult” students. My initial enthusiasm about teaching Hemingway to this class had brought some amusement to the more seasoned teachers.*

### 2.3 Recognising the Call of Provocation

Things had gotten out of hand, and the entire school philosophy was called into question. Hemingway’s marlin was flopping all over

the corridors, unsettling everybody as it struggled to resist the pulling force of authority determined to draw youth one way only. What would happen to those who refused to remain silent or still ? What would the consequences be for pulling back across the rope and dragging the teaching profession into a struggle ? How would I respond to students turning away from the authoritative text ?

In my moment of giving up on the plan there was an opening. An unexpected voice emerged - the voice of my own childhood. I chose to allow it to speak openly in class rather than to go into combat against the very reactions to authority which had once been my own. The sadness which came upon me as I spoke could not be disguised; it struck a chord of kinship that resonated throughout the class. It brought my own childhood wounds into the conversation. But it also spoke with the reflectiveness of a maturing man, making sense of his experience, inviting youth to gather around. Rather than yielding to the impulse to combat the very reactions to dominance which had once been my own, I joined forces with the students so that there was not only a speaking but a listening to experience.

In this instance I had allowed myself to respond to the calling of the students. *Their* provocation was an invitation for me to come

forward in a vulnerable state by dropping the professional facade. John Martini has commented on similar moments in the classroom, when teachers perceive a more deeply human resonance. These “interruptions” are vital:

One common refrain spoke of a period of provocation or “calling” from students followed by acts of anger then conciliation on the part of the teacher....Young people want to know if, under the cool and calm of efficient teaching and excellent time-on-task ratios, life itself has a chance, or whether the surface is all there is. And the best way to find out may be to provoke the teacher into showing him/herself. How a teacher responds to that challenge determines whether a child will learn that growing up doesn't mean becoming forgetful about what it is like to grow up, to be a child, but quite the opposite.(Smith., 1986, p.246)

#### 2.4 The Unspeakable Finds Its Way

What had begun as a dreaded scenario created space for us to explore vital concerns which ordinarily would be unspeakable within the school. The death and darkness of The Old Man and the Sea had spilled out into the room. This was a beginning for me in my life as a teacher, pointing out the limits of being positive at the expense of true feeling. David Smith speaks of this in his discussion of the work of critical theory:

There is something deeply disturbing about classrooms under the influence of a teacher who is compulsively driven to be “enthusiastic” and to provide a “good experience for the kids.” It is not that such a predisposition is bad, only that it may be inadequate to articulate the full complexity at work not only in children’s lives, but also in the world at large. (Smith, 1986, p247)

Smith(1986) points out the balance that might be restored if we were to follow the critical theorist practice of attending to dialectical oppositions and inquiring into the negatives,”the silences, the blockages, the unspeakables of life.”

## 2.5 The Quaking Experience

Old knowledge/languages are inadequate in the task of naming the unfamiliar. This is why the language which emerges from meeting a stranger is always analogical -- it speaks of resemblances of how things are like one another even while quite different ( Smith, 1988, p.277). It speaks in terms which might be called "oracular":

Ambiguity brings forth a new speaking by pointing to the limits and finitude of our understanding at the same time as making us available to understanding. When speech

grinds to a halt, or reduces to chatter, because there is nothing more to be said....(Smith, 1988, pp. 277-8)

There is a “conversation of life already in progress.”(Smith, 1988, p.278 ) “Things speak for themselves,” Smith tells us, “ in order that they may be understood on their own terms. An oracle will speak only if it is consulted by those whose eyes and ears are open, that is, attentive to what is indeed being said.”

Recently, I came upon a passage from a novel by Lindsay Clarke (1991), describing the meeting-house of the early Quakers:

In the silent spellbound meditation of the Meeting-house, sooner or later someone would feel compelled to speak. And not simply because they had something to say but because something demanded to be said through them. As, it seemed, this dream insisted on speaking now through me.

I'd had something of the same experience at public meetings - the tension between wanting to keep silent, inconspicuous, and knowing that something must be said. It happened at difficult moments, when you were least sure of yourself yet certain that the thing should be said. You quaked. It was a little like the birth-pangs of a poem. It clattered and banged until the words were out, and even then it didn't stop. ....

....For quaking was what happened when you endured inside yourself the tension of divisive forces. It was what happened when you refused to shrug them off neither disowning your own violence nor deploying it; not admitting only the good and throwing off the evil in the teeth of the opposition, but holding the conflict together

inside yourself as yours - the dark and the light of it, the love and the lovelessness, the terror and the hope. And as you did this you changed. The situation changed - though whether it changed enough was another question.(Clarke, 1991, pp. 384-385)

Sometimes we venture forth into quaking. Then all we have learned about courtesy and tact gives way to the uncertainty of not knowing what will be spoken, how it will reach others, what will be stirred up. Something leaps into the unknown, even as we listen for friendly signs.

## 2.6 A Cup of Tea

Making space for the unfamiliar is a sacred discipline. It requires us to pause from our ambitions and notice the abundant teachings of ordinary circumstances offering us direction. In Zen there are many stories alluding to this:

A renowned scholar, who had reached the limits of his knowledge, decided to visit a sage. The scholar was eager to speak with his host, for he was filled with many questions. But the sage kept postponing this encounter, suggesting that they sit down to drink some tea instead. He remained silent while his guest sat down and waited for the water to boil. Then he began to pour some tea into the scholar's cup. It filled to the top. Still he kept pouring. The tea ran out over the edge of the cup and

spilled out onto the table. But the teapot was still raised. Finally the scholar burst out, “ My cup is full ! Can’t you see ?” The sage stopped and turned to his guest, “Yes, it is good to notice such things. One must recognise when things are already full in order to empty them before pouring. Your mind is also full. Please stop to empty yourself of what you think you know before proceeding any further.”(Reps, 1989, p.6 )

## 2.7 A Breakdown

***My first full-time teaching position in Montreal quickly exposed me to the limits of my knowledge. I was not prepared for the blank expression on the students’ faces, their lack of curiosity about the material I’d enthusiastically prepared, and the general fatigue that bore down upon me.***

***After three months of this, my health gave out. I remember staring out from my 6th floor hospital bed, thinking about how I’d tried to keep up with all the latest information but hadn’t seemed to reach my students. I remember deciding to return to the world of the living, opening to the possibility that there might be some way to live with my discomfort of not knowing how to engage with people.***

***I felt the familiar loneliness as I entered the classroom***

*during my first week back at the college. We were discussing short stories related to the theme of human values. I noticed an agitated expression on the face of one of the students and recognised my panic at the prospect of not reaching people one more time. I couldn't bear it any longer.*

*“ What is it, Edward ? You seem bothered by something .”*

*Edward looked up, paused, then decided to blurt out what was on his mind. “All this talk about goals and values. Whose values ? I don't even know what my own values are or why I should bother to pursue them.”*

*I paused to consider this, when another voice broke in. It was Judy Smiley's, the girl who usually sat at the back and chatted with her friends.*

*“What I want to know is why people get so worked up about goals anyway. Doesn't that just keep them busy for the sake of being driven ? How can you find time to enjoy life and look around you if you're always striving to achieve things ?”*

*I cleared my throat, stalling for more time to collect my thoughts.*

*The long pause was embarrassing. I was supposed to have the*

**answers.**

***“Well, I don’t know, I’m not sure, I...”***

***Before I completed my sentence, a dozen hands were waving at me. The students began to offer their views, their voices growing louder as they competed to be heard. I had to holler out in order to maintain some focus.***

***“Hold on, hold on. I think I understand what you’re talking about. You think that goals exist but we place too much emphasis on future outcomes. Once we attain them, we have to find new ones to set in front of us”.***

***“Yeah”, Edward called out, “ What’s the rush to advance anywhere ? Is progress really that great ?”***

***There was a long silence. I could feel my chest pounding as all eyes had turned to me. We had gone ten minutes past the end of class. I began to talk about my own confusion about this and suggested that we pick up on this discussion at the beginning of our next class.***

## 2.8 Listening to the Emptiness

Awakening to limitation sometimes feels sickening. This very realization draws us closer to life, initiating apprenticeship into “guardianship over the truth of Being.” Levin describes this:

...it means making a space of good listening for all the voices of history, all the different human voices, living and dead, through which the ‘truth’ of Being, polyphonic, melodious, full of harmonies and discords, speaks and has spoken; it means letting the ground of its different resonances, its different intonations, resound and reverberate - long enough, and loudly enough, to split wide open the world of our deaf indifference. (Levin, 1989, p. 273)

It was my acknowledgement of doubt that opened up the conversation. The presence of uncertainty was an invitation to wonder, to compare interpretations and welcome difference. Then the room became animated. In listening to others I also could recognise what was kindred, for the questions asked embraced us all. A new listening entered our space. Carl Rogers has remarked:

I have often noticed... that the more deeply I can hear the meanings of this person, the more there is that happens. One thing I have come to look upon as almost universal is that when a person realises that he has been deeply heard...in some real sense he is weeping for joy. It is as though he were saying, ‘Thank God somebody has heard me. Someone knows what it’s like to be me. I have had the

fantasy of a prisoner in a dungeon, tapping out day after day a Morse code message 'Does anybody hear me? Is there anybody there? Can anyone hear me?' And finally, one day, he hears some faint tappings which spell out 'Yes'. By that one simple response he is released from his loneliness; he has become a human being again. (Levin, p. 88).

## 2.9 Where Theory Fails

*After six years of teaching English and Humanities courses at community colleges, I realized that the discussions in my classes were touching deep emotional responses. I had to deal with my own discomfort and awkwardness when the mood in class would become emotionally charged. Often I didn't know what to say when someone would become shaky as they talked about things that mattered.*

*At this point I was presented with an opportunity to learn about living with more uncertainty. Bea Carson, a nursing instructor at the college, requested a member of our department to co-lead a class on death and dying. She'd recently recovered from the shock of her sister's death and, having discovered her own inability to cope with this loss, wanted to share what she'd*

*been learning from Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. When she first spoke to me about the utter failure of all her professional training to prepare for the actual loss of someone close to her, I was quite moved. I could sense that our classes would carry me into a new realm.*

*I began to read about the dynamics of grief and the denial of death in our culture. During our classes I would present much of the information while Bea would tell stories about her experience with her sister, and her conversations with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and some of the people whom she'd since encountered in her work. The atmosphere in these sessions was intense. I tried to compose myself throughout these sessions, believing that it was my responsibility to stay calm enough to support others through their emotional chaos. I convinced myself that understanding everything I could about losing control would help me to assist those undergoing loss.*

*In the midst of these experiences something totally unexpected happened. On March 1, 1977, I received a phone call from my sister in Montreal. My father was in the hospital and his heart was failing. He would lose his ability to breathe and*

*would slowly suffocate within one month. There was a 50/50 chance that he would benefit from a complex by-pass operation. The only surgeon prepared to perform this was in Houston, Texas. I called my father in the hospital in Montreal.*

*All my learning about dying seemed to be calling now. What would I tell him to offer some comfort ? We'd never shared feelings openly or even acknowledged loving. I could feel the vastness of the miles between us as we spoke. His voice was sullen and unfamiliar. My stomach was tight and my chest so heavy, no words could be found. Then I remembered Kubler-Ross' teachings about the stages of loss.*

*"Where are you at ?", I finally said.*

*"What do you mean ?", dad replied.*

*I desperately wanted to break the spell of silence which I'd spent the past three months teaching about. I forced myself to ask another question, "Do you think you're going to die ?"*

*I tried to explain to him what I'd been learning about denial. Dad quietly told me that he wasn't ready to throw in the towel yet and that I didn't need to disrupt my work to fly all the way to Houston. I wished him well and told him I'd be with him*

*in spirit at the time of his ordeal.*

*After I hung up, I was filled with confusion and doubt. I'd been frozen throughout this conversation. How could one undo 35 years in a few long-distance moments ? I responded to the fear in me as I had learned to do over the years - by appearing to be composed, searching for information to cancel out and console that which could never be determined.*

*I waited nervously the next day for my sister's call from Houston. Late that night she finally reached me with the news that the operation had succeeded for a brief time but dad had never regained consciousness. My first thought was , "What a ridiculous joke !"*

*I flew to Montreal for the funeral, reading Learning to Say Goodbye by Eda LeShan (1978) . Throughout my week in Montreal I would paraphrase what I had learned from my reading and discussions about death and loss. I wanted people to see how well I'd managed to come to terms with these matters. This numbness and composure left me alone again.*

## 2.10 Prison Heroism

In The Denial of Death Ernest Becker alludes to these strategies of composure as part of the formation of character:

These techniques become an armor that hold the person prisoner. The very defenses that he needs in order to move about with self-confidence and self-esteem become his life-long trap. In order to transcend himself he must break down that which he needs in order to live. . . . In the prison of one's character one can pretend and feel that he is *somebody*, that the world is manageable, that there is a reason for one's life, a ready justification for one's action...prison heroism. (Becker, 1973, p.86)

Becker points out, "The prison of one's character is painstakingly built to deny one thing and one thing only: one's creatureliness...a defecating creature." (Becker, 1973, p. 87). In our retreat from the anxiety of knowing death, we may seek out a path to know more about life. This maintains character and perpetuates the myth that intellectual knowing offers us mastery over life. This also mirrors the education we may have received - so many institutions strive to maintain the reputation of being places with character, and, in the process of guarding against unruly and

unmanageable influences and practices, they inadvertently imprison knowledge. For anxiety becomes the enemy then.

In order to be released from this condition, then, there would have to be a tolerance of anxiety. Becker reminds us of Kierkegaard's response to this state: "the school of anxiety leads to possibility *only by destroying* the vital lie of character...the self must be broken in order to become a self."(Becker, 1973, p. 88).The neurotic condition of our times, however, is one which seeks guarantees, won't risk self-image or pay the price that nature wants of us: to age, fall ill, or be injured, and die. And so, instead of living experience we can ideate it, working it out in our heads instead of arranging it in action. (Becker, 1973, p. 183).

In Speaking With Boneless Tongue, David Jardine (1992) calls this "the rage for order." He quotes Susan Griffin:

We are afraid to remember what we, in our bodies, and in our feelings still know, but what, in our fragmented, civilized consciousness we have been persuaded to forget. That, like the forests we destroy, or the rivers we try to tame, we are Nature.(Jardine, 1992, p. 24)

The "rage for order" keeps its cool and plans its objectives even as the heart and soul cry out for attention. At the college

where I taught, I had a supervisor who challenged my objectives for a course on death and dying because they were too obscure to be determined objectively. He told me about his mother, who was dying of cancer in the hospital at the time. Then he read out my stated course intention: "to enhance each participant's sense of mortality and its personal meaning." He turned back to me with disgust and said, "All this talk is mere speculation. My mother's in a coma now - a complete vegetable - not even a vague resemblance to the woman I called mother." I asked him how he was handling this hardship. He shrugged and told me that he'd stopped visiting and had given up on her as a living being. As far as he was concerned, she was already dead. Later in our conversation, he recommended that I seek further training by taking a course on thanatology at the university, so that I could include more theoretically sound data about death and loss. He abhorred the messiness of dying as well as the unclear and unclear context of my course outline.

The danger of separating our symbolic self from our physical body is that it sets up a condition in which we must try to be a hero almost entirely ideationally from within a bad body-seating. We may rely on thoughts alone, separate from generous emotions in an

expansive and secure body. The body becomes our betrayal, our continually open wound.(Becker,1973, p. 218-219). Ortega says:

These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost is without remission...never finds himself.(cited in Becker, 1973, p.8 )

## Chapter 3 Removing the Armor of Knowledge

### 3.1 Speaking With Mortality

All my efforts to steep myself in the literature didn't remove the numbness and unreality I 'd experienced after my father had died. It seemed necessary to yield to the unknown even more now. Ira Progoff's perspective on dialogue offered another opening:

As we move more deeply into our lives, it becomes apparent that not only human beings but artworks that we do, institutions in which we believe, situations in which we become involved also have life histories. To that degree, human or not, they are also persons, and they can be related to as persons. It thus becomes possible to enter into dialogue relationships in all the meaningful aspects of our lives. (Progoff, 1983, p.42)

And so I began to dialogue with death. It told me that if I wanted to truly facilitate learning, I would get out of the way and trust *it* to guide our classes. I should let the students know this, so they would listen for *it*, too. It told me that at every moment a small death was happening, that if one were alert enough, one could recognise *its* presence in the losses, disappointments, unexpected

turns of events, and sense of being out of control of life.

### 3.2 A Nudge

*My classes gradually became more open to the unpredictable moments as Death guided us along. One day, as we were discussing bereavement, I could sense an uneasy formality in the room. I introduced a particular notion of deathexis, disidentifying from the "object" of our love by inviting full emotional expression of that which has kept us attached to it. Students were having difficulty grasping this concept. A few people challenged the notion and became angry at the very suggestion that one could actually distance one's feelings from the loved one. My heart beat quickly as I sensed an obscure inclination forming itself in me. Throughout our discussion it would not go away. Finally, I decided to follow this thread of possibility.*

*I told the class about it. "I have an idea, I'm not sure where it will lead us, but I think it might clarify the situation. Would you bear with me?"*

***Everyone nodded.***

***I turned to a dirty styrofoam cup on one of the tables and poured out the coffee residue into the waste basket. I suggested that we pass it around and have each person write their name on it, then stroke it, and draw a symbol of their love on it. It finally came back to me, a collective history of our group and a beautiful expression of each person in class. I could feel my gut tighten as I crumpled it up and tossed it into the basket, talking about the tragic fate which had come upon it.***

***As soon as I had allowed myself to follow this impulse, I began to doubt my own motives. I could feel the violence of my gesture and the incredulity, rage, tears, and hysteria surfacing around me. People accused me of manipulation. I had to admit that the dramatic effect had been quite powerful, and I might actually have enjoyed the impact. But I hadn't, at the time, preconceived this impulse. I agreed to reflect further on this possibility, however. Then I wondered about the meaning of each person's reaction to this event, how it related to their own style of dealing with disappointments and losses in their lives. We spent two hours de-briefing this experience.***

*The students seemed to open up more after this. A number of people came by to explore their concerns further. Many continued to discuss the effects of that session with friends, who also became involved. I started to share some of the dialogues I'd been having with Death.*

*"Listen," Death told me , " You can't play it safe with me. Your reputation and credibility will always be at stake if you follow my guidance. On the other hand, you'll die of boredom if you introduce only what has been tested and proven."*

*I wanted to know how I could determine if these inspirations were, in fact, Death's guidance rather than my own egotistic ambitions to exert power over my students. Death replied:*

*Just watch your energy level. If you are moved deeply, then you can be sure it is my doing. I shove people off the ledge, back into life. Teaching is always a great risk, a nudge into the unfamiliar, even though you may think you know what's about to happen. You can bring the course outline or readings or activities with you, but you must also remain receptive, alert and responsive to the presence of your students. When people speak from their lived experience honestly, then I am the teacher. Please remember this: you are never totally in control - in your classes or in your life." (from my journal)*

### 3.3 The Need to Know and the Fear of Knowing

Abraham Maslow has written about the relationship between knowledge and anxiety. The fear of knowledge of oneself is often isomorphic with fear of the outside world so that we can speak of fear of knowledge in general without discriminating too sharply fear-of-the-inner from fear-of-the-outer. Our subtle capacity to conceal our anxieties and fears is so great that, unless we are overwhelmed, we may deny they even exist. Because we may not “know” we are afraid, we may become threatened by the unfamiliar, the vaguely perceived, the mysterious, the hidden, or the unexpected. One way of rendering them familiar and manageable is to know them and understand them. In this way, knowledge may have not only a forward-growing function, but also an anxiety-reducing one (Maslow, 1968, p. 63).

On the other hand, when we know something thoroughly, we must also recognise the need to take suitable action. Maslow cites the example of the average citizen’s need to ignore the trainloads passing through to the death camps in Nazi Germany. He goes on:

In any case, this close relationship between knowing and doing can help us to interpret one cause of the fear of knowing as deeply a fear of doing, a fear of the consequences that flow from knowing, a fear of its dangerous responsibilities. Often it is better not to know, because *if* you did know, then you would have to act and stick your neck out. (Maslow, 1968, pp. 63-65)

One could recognise in this dynamic the underlying conflict we face each time we must consider encountering another. On the one hand, it would seem meaningful to call into question some of the incongruities of normal reality and culture which necessarily involve a narrowing down of the world and shutting off of experience. On the other hand, some of this may be necessary to maintain a healthy degree of obliviousness, both to the terrors of the world and to our own crippling anxieties. Otto Rank refers to this as "partialization:

...the normal man bites off what he can chew and digest of life, and no more. In other words men aren't built to be gods, to take in the whole world; they are built like other creatures, to take in the piece of ground in front of their noses. Gods can take in the whole of creation because they alone can make sense of it, know what it is all about and for. But as soon as man lifts his nose from the ground and starts sniffing at eternal problems like life and death...then he is in trouble. (Becker, 1973, p. 178)

This is a dangerous balancing-act, indeed, for beneath the

surface of our everyday decisions, there is this relationship with a natural world which may or may not conform to our ideations. We run the risk, at one extreme, of moving back from action, fearing what we cannot understand and allowing ourselves to be over-shadowed by the thought that anything we do will lead to death. On the other extreme, we might construct too much and attempt to chew off the whole world without ever really taking it in through our senses..

Perhaps these extremes are the source of much quaking, as what is held back rubs against what needs to be acknowledged. The pressure and heat build up below the surface until there is an eruption. We know that the middle path is the way of sanity and relatedness and spirit, yet, in the process of learning to find and trust in the balance-point, we may fall over again and again in either direction. Could it be that quaking is what we undergo in the process of learning to listen to the calling of life/death ?

### 3.4 Trusting the Process

***When I was an English instructor at a community college, I received a flyer in the mail from Doug Lambert, the liason officer***

*for the RCMP. It mentioned a series of presentations he was introducing to enhance public support and community awareness of police matters. I was teaching a Communications course for Youth Services students. When I read about the 90 minute presentation on "The Influence of Communication and Body Language on Status", "I thought that the role-play format would appeal to the energetic group of students undergoing an intensive process of self-examination as part of their training.*

*I called Doug, who informed me of his plans for the session. He would arrive dressed as a derelict and speak with the students. After the break he would reappear in his police uniform to discuss their responses. As I walked along the hallway to my office on the scheduled day, I noticed a disshevelled drunk, leaning up against my door. His unshaven face, unruly hair, broken front tooth, tattered army jacket and khaki pants seemed terribly out of place in the carpeted hallway outside our offices. He perked up and spotted me coming his way, standing up to extend a handshake. A strong stench of booze wafted out in my direction.*

*"Hi, I'm Doug. You must be Alan."*

*I told him about how authentic he looked. Doug proudly informed me of the bottle of beer he'd poured over himself, the tooth he'd blackened out, and the three days' growth he'd allowed himself to sprout during his days off before our scheduled session. As we discussed the outline for the class, I felt more assured that this man was dedicated to his work and knew what he was doing.*

*At the scheduled hour, Doug walked into my classroom and sat down. I introduced him to the class and told the students that he lived in the skid row part of town. He'd been good enough to come to talk with us about his experiences on the street. Doug stood up, swayed a bit, and began to bad-mouth the middle-class world from which he knew these students had been raised. He told them that the trouble with social workers and do-gooders was that they felt guilty and visited his world as tourists, without any real knowledge or concern for the people who lived there. The students were drawn in by his accusations almost immediately. They tried to reassure him that they weren't just tourists or novelty-seekers, and that they felt deep concern for his welfare.*

*Doug began to express his cynicism towards the police, talking about how they harrassed him and his friends, often brutally injuring them without care for the people they were messing up, simply to act out their jollies. The students appeared to be quite shaken, nodding as they heard one horror story after another. Everyone was sitting up attentively when break time arrived.*

*As Doug moved towards the door, a young lady approached him and asked if she could have a word in private. They sat down in the corner of the classroom. She took out a pen and paper and wrote something down. Tears were in her eyes. I overheard her promising to visit him, urging him to not give up hope, assuring him that she really did care about what would happen to him.*

*When Doug and I headed down the hall towards a distant washroom, I found myself feeling upset. Yet I dismissed these reactions as mere stage fright - I was, after all, a co-participant in this performance. Doug proceeded to wash off his makeup and reach into his dufflebag for razor, lather, deoderant, toothpaste and toothbrush. He cleaned himself up briskly and shifted into the starched blue uniform and cap. I wanted to talk about his*

*agreement to keep the appointment with Ellen, but he was too absorbed now in changing himself into the image of a police officer. We hurried back for the beginning of the next act of this performance.*

*Doug entered the room with the tall, cocky posture of a law enforcer. He introduced himself abruptly as Officer Lambert, holding his cap under his arm, and gazing out alertly towards the students. He gave a confident lecture about the ways by which people judge one another according to appearances. He spoke in a crisp voice, making vigorous gestures as he went on about the negative views people have of police uniforms. A huddle of stone-faced students sat opposite him. Nobody looked up. Finally, Doug asked if anyone had any questions.*

*"Yes," someone retorted, " Just one question - Why ?... Why did you do this?"*

*Doug raced on about the impact of appearances on communication. He seemed quite abstract, formal, impersonal.*

*"You deceived us !," an angry voice bellowed.*

*A girl in the front row was in tears with exasperation. "I believe that you took pleasure in doing this so you could control our*

*emotions. That's sick !"*

*Another girl accused me of betraying the class by conspiring to this performance and agreeing to have them set up. There seemed to be a lot of resentment about the fact that this deception had been staged by a policeman, used to having his way over people. Here he was, controlling people one more time.*

*The class ended. I knew that I would have to live with this for a long time. Doug and I went to the cafeteria for a coffee. As I wondered about his motives for this kind of work, he told me that this part of the job had been voluntary. In fact, he'd introduced the proposal for these sessions on his own initiative and agreed to offer them on his spare time. He talked about how hard it was to stay in this field without burning out, how the average officer lasted 3 1/2 years, how the family violence and deception which they faced daily took its toll. I could see the effects of frustration in this man as he spoke about the growing edginess, cynicism, and violence he had witnessed amongst his colleagues.*

*There seemed to be only one route left to explore now. It was based upon a phrase which I'd read about in group dynamics*

*literature: "Trust in the process." William Stafford describes this in similar terms as he depicts the writing process. He comments on a passage from Blake's "Jerusalem":*

*I give you the end of a golden string,  
Only wind it into a ball,  
It will lead you in at Heavens gate  
Built in Jerusalems wall  
(Stafford, 1978, p.42)*

*Stafford tells us, "Starting with anything, the pattern begins; the little thread leads onward." ( Stafford, 1978, p. 43). At this point I was beginning to catch a glimpse of a little thread.*

*During the next class I apologized for inviting Doug without completely understanding or considering what he was up to. I listened to a chorus of angry and upset voices expressing a sense of betrayal. I voiced my concern that our trust would be irreconcilably destroyed. Then there was a long uncomfortable silence. It seemed like there was nowhere left to proceed.*

*Then the students began to talk about their history with betrayal - unpleasant brushes with the law; difficulties with authority. In a number of cases there had been arrests. As the*

*stories surfaced, more and more energy filled the room. I realised that these were people drawn to a helping profession because they'd already known a lot about the hardship, abuse, and injustice from the other side. As these sentiments were revealed, a lot of the wounds became more apparent. I proposed that we invite Doug back for another session to really explore our differences.*

*Doug was nervous on the phone, but reluctantly accepted my invitation to our next class. This time the students were prepared for his abstractions.*

*"Alright," someone said, "Whats really in this for you ? We've been talking about you a lot, wondering what you get out of setting people up like that."*

*Doug hesitated, then blurted out a long, jagged, gasping account of what it feels like to be lied to by people wherever you go, and then face their contempt and hostility even when you approached them with respect and good will. He talked about witnessing two buddies almost ready to snap, growing bitter and cynical. One had begun to beat his wife. The students gazed out at him, listening with full attention. It was as if the*

*other half of the derelict were speaking now. Some of the students began to nod. They told Doug that they could appreciate his situation and began to tell about the violence they'd experienced in their own lives.*

*"We all want to change things," someone said. There's just so much anger stored up in us all. We seem to inflict it on one another and keep it circulating instead of openly acknowledging it and assuming responsibility for our own."*

*The lyrics from a popular Rolling Stones song came to my mind. I mentioned "Sympathy For the Devil," which seemed to describe our current discussion so well. A student happened to have a tape of this song in his locker and suggested that we end our class by all listening to it together:*

*Just as every cop is a criminal  
and all the sinners saints  
cause half this tale,  
just call me Lucifer,  
cause I'm in need of some restraint.  
So if you meet me, have some courtesy,  
have some sympathy and some taste,  
stop all your well-earned politics  
or I'll lay your soul to waste.  
Pleased to meet you,  
hope you guess my name,  
but what's bugging you  
is the nature of my game.*

***(Rolling Stones. Sympathy for the Devil)***

3.5 Another Leap

I thought about this episode for many years afterwards. Years later, I visited the college and ran into Randy Drake, the chairman of the Law Enforcement program. I told him about this encounter and he became silent.

"Whats the matter ?,"I asked.

"Doug's not with us any more. About a year after that class he walked up to the top of an office building and jumped."

I had sensed Doug's distress, but knew little about counselling then. I think this was one more nudge in that direction.

Whenever I doubt myself, still wanting to apologize for others' discomfort or buried emotion, I think of the other danger - cutting off feeling and intimacy and intensity, removing the emotional component from our conversations, avoiding personal disclosure. I realize now that my willingness to hang in with everyone for the aftermath of the drama had been very difficult, but also a turning-point. I began to ask of myself, "Has this gone far enough ?" as well

as considering, "Am I letting this go too far ? "

Education, in its truest sense, brings us to the brink of life, for it exposes our humanness by drawing us up against difficulty.

Sally Gadow tells us:

...knowing is part of our being. We cannot decline it, anymore than we can decline embodiment. But just as we can decide whether the body shall be a means of refusing life or embracing it, we decide whether knowing is to accomplish for us distance from the world or engagement. (Gadow, 1990, p. 3)

The most difficult moments also invite us to experience a fuller sense of being:

In deciding our attitude towards difficulty we create our selves and our being in the world...free to refuse or accept life's offers requiring us to reveal ourselves...to become what we are not yet...Although we may not know exactly where we are going, we are called by difficulty to life itself, to continually strike out new paths. (Oldham, 1990, p.109)

### 3.6 Hanging Out

There are times when I feel stupid. The internal critic shouts, "You just don't get it. What's the matter with you ? Stop being so stupid. Don't ask obvious questions." The world moves too quickly and my questioning disturbs its motion, interfering with the pace

around me, breaking the rhythm of a progress. I feel, then, like an intruder, breaking in on things. When I don't leap forth to explore what doesn't make sense, if I don't allow myself to ask about what I feel stupid about, I begin to think of myself as someone who is exceptionally slow. Handicapped.

The mentally handicapped men I meet teach me about the value of taking things slowly, reminding me of Roethke's ( 1980) world in "The Waking":

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know ?  
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Bruner tells us : "When there is a disruption or exceptional situation, narrative has the power to make sense of it. "(Bruner, 1990, p.56)

***I was a bit unsettled when I met Brian Rice, a stocky, 37-year-old man, who shuffles his feet as he walks and sways from side to side with a grin on his face. He has a few front teeth left and some strands of blonde hair flanking a balding forehead,***

*which is usually covered with sweat resulting from the medication he must take. From the very start, my relationship with Brian pushed me out of my depth. He'd assaulted almost every staff member in the group home where he'd lived for the past two years and succeeded in terrorizing the other residents enough to comply with his demands. I'd been asked to explore anger management techniques with him.*

*Each time I'd invite him to talk about his situation, Brian would shake his head vigorously. I began to doubt my ability to influence his behaviour, especially since he'd become an expert in recognizing psychological interventions or professional strategies, having lived in institutions much of his life. I used to have an agenda to follow when he would visit my office. But as soon as Brian detected any planned activity, he'd refuse to participate. "No, that," he'd call out, with some irritation, "I hate that." Then he'd draw my attention to some detail about my office which fascinated him.*

*After several sessions like this, I began to question whether I could be of any service to Brian. Nevertheless, I was urged by his caregivers to continue just hanging out with him. I*

*found it difficult, though, to justify my hourly income just to hang out with somebody. All kinds of strategies to explore his anger still passed through my mind, but all to no avail. Finally I allowed myself to enjoy our time together, responding to his suggestions and playing along with whatever he noticed and wished to explore. Brian would point to the moisture forming on the window pane , drawing my attention to the droplets streaming downwards in patterns that seemed alive to him. Or he'd recoil at the muffled sound of footsteps overhead, which made him laugh and wonder whether somebody would fall from the ceiling into our laps. Sometimes he'd take me on a tour of my office, showing me the hidden shapes in the artwork on the walls. Other times he'd listen to the music on the radio, mimicking sounds and words which stood out and seemed to amuse him. On one occasion he pointed out passages from various books which he'd discovered on my bookshelves. He howled with delight as he repeated some of the words from the excerpts I read out, translating everything into the ludicrous tones and syllables of psychobabble.*

*After he noticed the tea in a cupboard by my desk one day,*

*we developed a tea ritual. Brian would come in and head for the cupboard, then take out the selections of tea, sniffing each one and asking me for its name. He'd make a selection and set up the cups and sugar and milk while I filled up the kettle. Then he'd settle down in the seat beside my desk, and begin to notice things all around. We'd spend the rest of our time following our senses and sharing what we noticed.*

### 3.7 Waking Slow

*Gradually a ritual developed around Brian's visits. He'd come in, place his arm around me, and exclaim, "Hello, my friend! Tea ?" We'd sip tea, then I'd accompany Brian as he explored whatever he could find in my office. Over a period of time, I allowed myself to become more and more outlandish. On one occasion Brian bashed his leg against my desk and was furious, about to pound his fist against it in retaliation. "Stupid desk," I bellowed out," to his surprise, "Don't you hurt my friend." Brian stopped and turned to me. He was laying his head against his arm, with a grinning expression I had learned to recognise as*

*delight. "Tell it !", he exclaimed, and huddled behind me to watch closely as I told off the desk. I pretended that the desk could answer. It apologised and told us that it had been impacted, too, by Brian's weight. Maybe they both could watch out for one another. Brian nodded enthusiastically.*

*From that time on he'd deliberately bump into things, pretending it was accidental, then expressing shock and pain. "Tell it !" Brian would insist, then hunch himself up to witness this encounter with anticipated glee. Eventually he showed me the wounds he'd inflicted on himself - gashes on his forehead, leaking sores or scabs he'd picked open on his leg. I'd lean over and talk to them; they'd tell me all about the pain they held inside and tried to conceal from others. On one occasion I allowed myself to show Brian the sadness I felt as I looked at a nasty wound he'd recently aggravated. "No more," he called out to me, as a few tears trickled out of the corner of my eyes. Soon afterwards the injuries began to disappear.*

*One day when Brian was in a bad mood, he bashed into a wall and told me he'd have to go to the hospital because his arm was broken. He responded enthusiastically when I offered to*

*attend to it and bandage it up in a towel. I spoke to the arm and expressed my concern for its pain. By the end of the session he bounced out of the room.*

*My world began to expand as Brian would show me all the unexpected turns of events possible. Everything seemed alive now, a potential source of dialogue, even the stuffed gorilla which he brought with him regularly after I'd questioned his caregivers' refusal to allow him any toys which might suggest that he was childish. Brian was angry at it one day and threw it into the waste basket in disgust. "In the garbage !" he shouted in disgust. "You no good." When I began to cry for it , he rushed over to retrieve it, stroking it softly in loving tones. Brian repeated this gesture a number of times over the weeks, then he began to pause as he was about to hurl the object of contempt into the garbage. Eventually, he began to remember its cries and stop himself. "It O.K.," he would say, "we put you to sleep." He also began to talk to himself about calming down now, rocking back and forth and counting from one to ten, even though it had been previously determined that he could not count.*

*Brian gradually brought more and more of his world into my office – even his collection of stuffed creatures, his country and western music, his cowboy boots.*

*The other clients in the waiting-room were affected by his presence. On one occasion, a man had been meeting with me to explore his violence. Hed told me about how shocked he was when some of the men in his support group had told him about how angry he appeared. As our session ended, Brian came into the waiting-room and extended a hand out to greet this man. He quickly withdrew it and shook his hand from side to side, in obvious pain, then hollered, "Ow ! Boy. you strong !" On another occasion Brian met another man from the anger support group. When he noticed the cowboy hat and boots, he stopped dead in his tracks and shouted, "A cowboy ! Him real ?", then nodded his head excitedly. "Boy, you big and strong. Real man !" he shouted.*

*As I let go of concerns about affecting him and doing what I imagined I was being paid to do, I was being moved by Brian's presence. Something was happening between us. I think of the words of Levinas:*

***In saying something to you, I not only present a text, but I expose discover, present, and offer myself to you, who happens to hear me. You surprise me by coming to me. Even if I invited you, I must face a disturbance of the world...your entering into my dwelling place interrupts the coherence of my world; you disarrange my order in which all things familiar to me have their proper place, function, and time. Your emergence makes holes in the walls of my house. (cited in Peperzak, 1989, p.6)***

## Chapter 4

## The Shaking That keeps Us Steady

### 4.1 A Wakeup Calling

As the accelerated speed of transmitted information transforms us into instant data-collectors, hurrying off to key in the latest electronic draft of updated research, we risk losing our sense of wisdom, which sometimes requires slow, uncertain, receptive states of being. We may, in our pursuit of new advances in knowledge, lose sight of the fact that all knowing is surrounded, ultimately, by darkness and death.

The movement toward symbolic reality is one way of coping with an otherwise terrifying biological existence:

One substitutes the magical, all-inclusive world of the self for the real, fragmentary world of experience. Again, in this sense, everyone is neurotic, as everyone holds back from life in some ways and lets his symbolic world-view arrange things: that is what cultural morality is for. We can, however, live more symbolically, creating discourses about our existence which give us a sense of control over our destiny.(Becker, 1973, p. 183)

It is more predictable and safe to construct symbolic portraits of how things should be than to stand in the midst of our own shaky experience, uttering words that speak of what troubles us, puzzles us, or touches us deeply - in simple, direct, immediate language that does not look over its shoulder for approval.

Roethke (1980) offers a wonderful description of the movement and energy awakened when being encounters Being, uninterrupted by theory:

Great Nature has another thing to do  
To you and me; so take the lively air,  
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.  
What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.  
(Roethke. The waking)

If we were to remain in our senses, awake to our mortality, all knowing would have to be shaky, at best. As I reflect upon quaking, talk about it and alert myself to its presence all around, my practice begins to resonate with a different quality. I no longer need to know exactly what I will say or do before I engage in a situation. I can trust in what moves me and remain sensitive to how others are affected. As I do so, the shakiness becomes less threatening, for it

may well be the calling of life reaching out for more life.

## 4.2 A Halloween Conversation

*I first thought about quaking during a graduate class in Curriculum Inquiry at the University. The instructor had introduced us to an inquiry into the nature of conversation recorded as Gilles Deleuze dialogued with Claire Parnet . He read out a passage from the text:*

*There's nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. I should like to say what a style is. It belongs to people of whom you normally say, 'They have no style.' This is not a signifying structure, nor a reflected organization, nor a spontaneous inspiration, nor an orchestration, nor a little piece of music. It is an assemblage, an assemblage of enunciation. A style is managing to stammer in one's own language. It is difficult, because there has to be a need for such stammering. Not being a stammerer in one's speech, but being a stammerer of language itself. Being like a foreigner in one's own language. Constructing a line of flight.(Deleuze, 1987, p.4)*

*We talked about the vitality of conversations which move freely between people as they allow something which is between the two, outside the two, and which flows in another direction. (Deleuze, 1987, p.7)*

*During our meetings, we allotted some time for students to go off in small groups to explore the possibility of engaging in conversations about each person's inquiry. After a number of sessions, some students expressed concern that we weren't covering enough material or examining issues related to curriculum inquiry. They wanted us to meet for a longer time in the large group so we could collectively explore some common concerns about education. They requested that the instructor assign specific readings so we could focus our discussions in class rather than ramble on in every direction. The instructor, however, was committed to inquiry based on lived experience and natural curiosity about issues related to each person's practice. He insisted that the reading material which he passed out to us and the themes which we identified from our own practice could become gathering-points from which to carry on our conversation. He also offered to schedule presentations for those interested in sharing their findings.*

*The lack of structure was nerve-racking to some students, while others seemed quite eager to speak about some of the critical events in their educational practice. The restlessness of*

*those wanting structure was a tangible force in the room, especially during the long pauses or apparent digressions. Pronounced sighs, arm-crossing and un-crossing, escalating asides, intense doodling - every effort was made to draw attention to the irritation. Still, the instructor left us to our own devices to somehow gather around the material which had been introduced.*

*In the late afternoon of Halloween, we met at our usual space. One of the students came wearing a pair of glasses with bulging eyes and a Groucho Marx mustache. A few people chuckled and tried them on, then passed them back to her as the instructor entered the room. He read another passage to us from Deleuze:*

*Charm is the source of life just as style is the source of writing. Life is not your history - those who have no charm have no life, it is as though they are dead. But the charm is not the person. It is what makes people be grasped as so many combinations and so many unique chances from which such combination has been drawn. It is a throw of the dice which necessarily wins, since it affirms chance sufficiently instead of detaching or mutilating chance or reducing it to probabilities. Thus through each fragile combination a power of life is affirmed with a strength, an obstinancy, an unequalled persistence in the being. (Deleuze, 1987, p.5)*

*There was a long silence, then the conversation moved out into a variety of directions – talk about the wonderful, warm autumn weather and the approaching darkness as we were about to move the clock back; anecdotes about recent teaching experiences; comments about other classes; questions about the final evaluation process for this course. One could sense the irritation as a few people began to engage in separate conversations which grew louder and louder until the room was filled with the sound of competing voices. Sandra Simpson quietly slipped on her Halloween glasses and began to talk about some of the discoveries in her recent journal entries. Her bulging eyes and mustache made everything she said seem hilarious. "These things work," Sandra roared, in an exaggerated Brooklyn accent, "They make you talk different." She passed them on to the person beside her, who picked up the cue and began to talk about her journal. Everyone's attention was drawn to this ridiculous sight. The class became more and more intoxicated by the incongruous conversations. The glasses moved around the circle, as each person picked them up, placed*

*them on their nose with some degree of seriousness, and proceeded to enunciate a brief statement. By the time the instructor received the talking glasses, the room had broken out into a complete uproar. His body shook quietly as he sat and read out another passage from Deleuze.*

*It took a while for the explosion of hysterical laughter, squealing, and convulsions to subside. Gradually the room fell silent with relief. Then June Wells began to speak, very softly: "Sometimes there are moments when life seems like music," she said. "Words can barely capture the exquisite movement and combinations of sound. This is a precious part of my life that I hardly speak of. I'd like to read a passage that I wrote about this the other night, then play a tape of some music which I composed."*

*She read us a sensuous passage about moments when life's music reaches out to us. There was a palpable movement of lingering words, breathing into patterns of meaning, then halting, and turning in new directions. Her last words trailed off, then she played the tape. The piano music seemed to affirm what the words had spoken of, filling the space with a soft,*

*quiet, expansive sound, then slipping us back into silence. June's eyes were moist. So were the eyes of others.*

*No one spoke for a long while. Then Ronald, a high school physics teacher, cleared his throat and broke in.*

*"That reminds me of a Bach fugue," he said. "A lot of point and counterpoint. Quite an intricate structure."*

*This remark seemed to antagonise Terry, a counselling student.*

*"I'm offended," he snorted. "Here we are, listening to a piece of music which this person has created with such soulfulness and vulnerability, and you have to destroy the mood with your analysis."*

*Terry's outrage seemed to escalate as he went on about Ronald's intrusive comments. "I've had enough of these kinds of reactions, reducing everything to comparison, speaking always in terms of structure. Don't you have any feelings?"*

*Ronald was taken aback. He began to justify his comments, speaking about the beauty which form assumed in his world, how the intricacy of design was deeply moving to him. But Terry persisted in his diatribe.*

*A few others joined in, describing what their experience of*

*listening had been like. June commented that she simply had shared the music and didn't believe that there could be any appropriate response to it. By this time Ronald was shaking his head in disbelief.*

*"I cant believe this class," he exclaimed. "This seems more like an encounter group than a course on curriculum interpretation. I didn't come here to work out my emotional history with people." He stormed out of the room as the class came to an end.*

*It seemed important to address this event during the next class, but no one mentioned it. Ronald was back, but his body language clearly indicated that he'd opted out, except to receive the credits. Finally, I had to speak.*

*"Look," I said. "So much of what we've discussed here has focused on bringing our selves fully into our practice. We need to talk about what happened during our last session. If we can't communicate clearly amongst one another, how can we expect to be of support to the people we meet with professionally ?"*

*Ronald reiterated his refusal to become involved in any more personal exchanges. He insisted that his only purpose in attending these classes was to learn more about curriculum.*

*Ronald did discuss this event with other students outside of class however, and a few others began to subsequently hint at their dissatisfaction with the overemphasis upon personal conversation. The morale seemed to decline until, during the last few weeks, Ronald and a few others didn't attend classes. There were rumors that a formal complaint had been filed at the dean's office. Still, nobody spoke about this in class.*

*During our final session, the instructor asked if we had any closing comments or presentations to share. He told us that he didn't believe that there were ever any true endings to things, as inquiry is an ongoing process. Terry told us about an AU project he'd been working on since the halloween class. He said he'd hoped to be able to interview everyone, but the differences in our schedules had limited his ability to do so. He had managed to prepare a retrospective of the class which had stirred up so much controversy. We watched a one-hour documentary in which people from class had responded to the question: " Do you think there is an appropriate response to a work of art ?"*

*Those who spoke before the camera, did so with a lot of feelings about what had transpired that night. At the end, Terry*

***summarised the variety of perspectives of this experience, then turned to the camera for a closeup of his closing remarks:***

***I made a mistake, I was guilty of doing the very thing I accused Ronald of doing - imposing my standard of appropriate response upon others, subjecting him to my own analysis. It's so easy to lose sight of this when you want to blame the other for your own discomfort.***

***There were tears in his eyes. Ronald wasn't there that day.***

#### 4.3 The Earthquake Within

Berman speaks of the double entendre which Michael Balint plays on in his book, The Basic Fault:

.. by "fault" Balint did not just mean a mistake; his analogy was that of a geological fault, a gap or crevice in the earth that produces earthquakes under conditions of sufficient stress. The fault is also a *default*; in terms of the human condition, there is also some way in which, during the early childhood of most ( if not all ) of us, the person who was closest to us ( usually our mother ) failed to move in harmony with our needs. She was frequently absent when we needed her, or intrusive when we needed to be left alone. In either case a mismatch occurred, what the Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank called a case of faulty mirroring, which tends to be the rule rather than the exception. The "fit" between our selves and our first human environment was off, and from that point on, relations between ourselves and the world, Self and Other, were disturbed. This surfaced in

our psyche as the feeling that something was not quite right, was somehow missing. A crevice, an abyss of sorts ( John Fowles' nemo) had irrevocably opened up in our soul, and we would spend the rest of our lives, usually in an unconscious and driven way, attempting to fill it up. (Berman,1990, p. 24)

When we are in our body most of the time, this gap is not so threatening. However, if we are removed from somatic experience, we may seek a substitute for being grounded. "Much of what passes for 'culture' and 'personality' in our society tends to fall into this category, and it is the result of running from silence, and from genuine somatic experience."(Berman. p. 20)

#### 4.4 Dropping One's Guard

***In prison I am faced with my own despair and doubt. In the presence of guards and fences and intercoms, interrupted by announcements or repairmen, the sessions on nonviolence which I co-lead with my partner are, at the very best, informal. We come prepared with flipcharts and handouts and videos, determined to offer these men some experience which might offer a glimpse of light. The inmates we meet with are often,***

*through their very decision to sit in on our sessions, considering alternatives. Nevertheless, they must still live by the code.*

*We are left with the task of opening up a conversation about the nature of violence within these walls where dominance is the rule. The material which we introduce stirs up a lot of curiosity but inevitably it is we who we must stand trial before these men. They want to know what brings us into their midst; they've been psychologized to death and are suspicious of anyone who will try to change them.*

*"What's in this for you ?," they want to know. Each time we are asked this question, we have to dig deep into our souls to speak. Linda tells them about what it's like to have spent 12 years watching women she knew and loved coming back wounded, maimed, mutilated, murdered. Sometimes I speak about the violence in myself which is echoed through each story I hear; other times I am moved to share stories about the intense suffering I have witnessed when violent men I have known decide to expose their hurt rather than pass it onto another.*

*Nevertheless it takes more than argumentation to reach those who have become intensely cynical, hopeless, or hardened through years of numbing to pain. I think of the Zen koan about the goose which escaped from the bottle it was enclosed in. "How did it get out ?" students were asked. The Zen master suddenly clapped his hands and exclaimed to his students - "The goose is out !"*

*Each group presents us with another opportunity to defy normal logic or discourse; for many inmates are people who have lost their ability to watch over themselves. They have bought into the normalizing gaze which Foucault writes about to describe those subjugated into becoming feeble bodies:*

*Those persons in the spaces could never detect whether they were being observed at any particular point in time. Such persons had little choice but to assume that they were the subject of a guardian's gaze at any time. Thus, they experienced themselves as the subjects of the ever-present gaze. This mechanism of power had the effect of inciting persons to act as if they were always observed.(White, 1990, p.69)*

*And so the law of the pecking-order is ever-present, even as a few guards come down and men begin to speak about their fears and hurt.*

***"Look," somebody says, "this is a prison, you can't be serious about all this nonviolence stuff. Sure, the suffering won't be passed on to others if we let ourselves feel it, but how do you expect us to put up with all the crap around here? If we take it without fighting back, we'll be marked as wimps."***

***We point out that we're all in a prison of some sort, relying on the authority of the guards outside us to establish order because we've lost our contact with the guides within. Many inmates can't handle the freedom on the outside because they've come to believe that there is no decision-maker within them. Still, the men won't be convinced.***

***I can't be touched by these men without carrying our conversations with me as I walk back outside these walls. My own imprisoned experience stirs up memory, a sense of things held back or abandoned in the haste to get on with life. In my journal, memories leak out - about unthinking acts of violence in my life.***

***The next day I decide to read excerpts from my journal:***

***I remembered the days of my former marriage, all my experiences came back - the years of saving face, deceit, distortions, all designed to protect my***

*image and save me from the sadness and loss of control which might surface if I showed my fears and hurt. It is so familiar to fight, defend, crusade, seeking victory over the opposition but who ever teaches us how to suffer disappointment or loss ? How can we live this way without paying the price - anxiety and tension, illness, maybe numbness. Eventually we hardly remember what the strange, uncomfortable sensations in our bodies are about. All without our knowledge. The watcher disappears. We lose our inner authority and guardian, who once looked over us and warned us of danger. Now we no longer recognise the explosions of rage that erupt from bodies we no long inhabit - emotional putdowns, cutting remarks, harsh words. Until it is too late and someone has been injured and we are overcome with remorse. One more time. (from my Journal).*

*After I hear myself speaking this, there is great surprise - not only that I allowed myself to voice these words in a prison but also by the sadness that I feel, slowing me down as it moves through my muscles and joints. I wonder about what these men are thinking and feeling now. There is a quietness in the room. Joe, one of the most outspoken men, used to taking up more than his share of space, nods.*

*"I know what you mean," he utters softly.*

*Each person is invited to speak about his greatest loss. One by one, they tell us about their entry to this prison, what it was*

*like as they realized that they were, in fact, losing their freedom. It takes a long time for each story to emerge, as the speaker falters, clears his throat, chokes back the quivering in his throat or chin, apologizes for almost losing it. One man talks about the familiarity of this routine, in which he relives his childhood over and over again - being handcuffed to a bed by his father as he is calling out for attention. After the session the men thank us.*

*"I'm shaking all over," one of them tells us. He looks a bit worried.*

*"You're quaking," I tell him back.*

*"What the hell is that ?", he grins.*

*"Its a breaking out. Like an earthquake. Things rub against one another deep down, friction builds up, and heat ,then the earthquakes within us."*

*He laughs. "Sounds like big stuff. Will I survive ?"*

*"If you hang in with it, you might actually be set free. Its what*

***happens when things are kept locked up inside for so long."***

***The one who was handcuffed comes over to shake our hands,***

***then leaves quietly.***

#### 4.5 The Watcher

In the midst of the quaking, as everything familiar falls away, there is still something which takes in the drama without taking sides or investing in outcomes. Even as we are dissolving into the action, there is a "witnessing center" capable of witnessing our affairs without judging them, avoiding them, dramatizing them, working on them or justifying them. Ken Wilbur describes this state:

We simply reflect any sensations or thoughts that arise without clinging to them or pushing them away, just as a mirror perfectly and impartially reflects whatever passes in front of it. Says Chuang Tzu, "The perfect man employs his mind as a mirror. It grasps nothing; it refuses nothing; it receives, but does not keep." (Wilbur, 1981, p. 132)

I first learned about this during a turbulent time of my life. I went out with my friend, Tracy, for a snack at 3 a.m. to Ben's delicatessan in Montreal. The place was packed with an after-hours

crowd- entertainers, bikers, hookers, nightshift workers, sightseers. A huge, bearded, pot-bellied biker walked over to our table and proceeded to poke his fingers into Tracy's plate of french fries. He kept taunting him as he continued to help himself to more fries. I felt my stomach boiling with rage; I held it back until I could hardly breathe. I knew I would have to confront this man. I took a few deep breaths and felt the tension dissolving, then looked up calmly into the eyes of the man standing above us. I told him that he'd better leave our table. "Oh ya ?", he retorted, "How come ?" "Because we prefer our own company," I replied. He gazed at me, squint-eyed, for a minute; I gazed back. Then he decided to walk away. Afterwards I thought about what might have happened if he had decided to challenge me. I had meant what I'd said. The biker knew it. But what if he'd wanted the danger, the encounter with death ? What then ? For years I wondered about this incident. Was this the voice of life or the voice of death ? How could I know that this would keep me alive ?

In the midst of this quaking, insanity and death are always close by. We could, in fact, "lose it," so why bother to risk danger ? Always there is the question of letting things go too far. Still, even

in the worst panic, another presence witnesses as we walk between the thinnest of lines, waivering between eros and thanatos. The part of us that wants to die may also be the part that wants to just let go and surrender to life. There are no guarantees of safety. Yet often, in the midst of the darkness, what seems driven toward destruction can suddenly shift into calmness and clarity in the presence of the watcher. Even as we falter and doubt, something becomes clear and calm when it hears life calling out.

#### 4.6 A Split

***In the barrenness of the prison environment, I begin to notice what is more pronounced yet similar to life on the outside. The law of dominance is more blatant here; it mirrors the black and white strategies of survivors elsewhere:***

***The strategy here is simple, as the psychotherapist Melanie Klein described it many years ago: if I can split the world into good and bad, and keep good inside and bad outside, I resolve the problem of Self vs. Other by protecting myself from invasion ( which is what, dialectically, I secretly yearn for ). It is a position of grim determination: let***

***Self remain Self and Other remain Other; at least we know where we stand....Energy must be mobilized to expel the intruder and get the lines of demarcation straight once again. The reason that this whole system ultimately fails is that engagement with the Other, which is systematically denied, is what is somatically desired. Victory on the one level turns into defeat on another, more fundamental level. (Berman, 1990, p. 54-55)***

***When I was living back east, I hadn't learned yet to recognize the messages of the body calling for attention. I was just beginning to work with a prison population and had been invited by the pastor to offer a workshop on self-esteem for the sex offenders in protective custody. The men had great admiration for this pastor, and as he joined us as a participant, they occasionally spoke openly of his generosity and love for them. After the first day's session had ended, I ran into the psych nurse in the hallway and expressed my surprise at how cooperative these men seemed to be.***

***She chuckled. "Sex offenders are like that. They're so nice, they could charm anyone. That's how they get away with their secret acts."***

***The next morning I couldn't help noticing how much of the***

*discussion of the inmates seemed to focus on the positive side of things – how life would improve when they got out, how much they appreciated the support of their friends or family who still cared, how fortunate they were to be in this facility, where things weren't so harsh. Many talked about having been saved from their former ways since being converted to Christianity.*

*One of the men, Richard, took exception to this talk. He seemed quite upset as he told us that he didn't want to speak about Christianity any more. When I inquired about his concerns, he hesitated, then began to blurt out all his resentments towards the other men for trying to convert him back to his faith.*

*Then he apologised for his outburst. "I'm confused," he said. "Really fucked up. I think I've been diagnosed as having every psychiatric disease in the book. You name it, I've got it. Nobody can help me, I'm too disturbed." Then Richard grew quiet again.*

*The other men pointed out that Richard had been previously visited by the Holy Spirit through a powerful conversion experience. The church community in his home town had played*

*an important role in his life. In the prison, however, he had turned cynical and refused to participate in any of the devotional activities or discussions. Richard looked angry as this conversation continued.*

*"Ya, that's the problem," he protested. "I lived with a woman whom I should never have been with. First, they told me I was a sinner for living with her without being married. Later, when I wanted to get out of the relationship, I became a sinner for considering a divorce. I got so confused, I didn't know who I was any more."*

*"Maybe you can explore what you truly believe is right for yourself," I ventured to say.*

*Richard insisted that this would be pointless because he was resigning himself to being crazy and hopeless.*

*During the break, I thought about the mood of the group. I was becoming uncomfortable with the emphasis upon salvation and the refusal to talk about what had contributed to the low self-esteem of most of the group members. I decided to shift my plans by introducing an activity that might provoke more reflection on this. I introduced the notion of remorse in which*

*we actively acknowledge and grieve the situations where we have experienced or created harm. I distinguished this from more evasive strategies to retreat from guilt through wishful thinking. Then I invited the men to make up lists of all the "shoulds" and "should-nots" which they'd heard and come to believe in their lives. The men seemed reluctant at first, then proceeded to fill out their lists.*

*In the midst of this activity, I noticed the pastor, shaking visibly. I asked him what was the matter. His face grew red; he was having difficulty speaking.*

*Finally he spoke. "I'm feeling real angry. I don't like where I think this is leading. I imagine that you don't appreciate my position. Everything I believe and live by is either a should or should not. The Bible is based on moral absolutes. If you don't accept the word of the Gospels, then you fall outside of the teachings."*

*As he labored for air, I could sense the concern of all the men. I asked if he was all right. He told me that he was feeling better, having said these things. Then there was a long silence. I didn't know what to say. I wondered to myself what it was that*

*had made the pastor so angry, what this questioning of faith had stirred up in him. My thoughts were interrupted as Bradley began to voice his views about the nature of God's healing ways. "The Lord guides us," he said. "He'll show us the way through our most difficult times if we just recognise that our lives are unmanageable and turn over things to Him." Then someone suggested that we take a break.*

#### 4.7 Searching for the Genuine

It is when contraries meet that quaking often begins. The urge is to move away from such meetings, for the intensity may well be related to the fact that, at such times, we are forced to confront the "nemo" or void which Berman has written about. The problem, he argues, is that in the absence of any somatic anchoring, we may feel the need to merge with bodies of thought or seek out secondary satisfactions which cannot possibly offer what is missing because they fail to penetrate down to the primary somatic layer. (Berman, 1990, p. 22). What falls outside of the familiar draws us back to the gap in our own being, reawakening the felt sense of what is missing.

If we have severed ourselves from this missing part, we may take it as an invader or an evil force, threatening to take our souls from us.

Had I known this at the time, I might have listened more closely to what was calling out from the body of the pastor. The conversation about theology, which focused on an idea of how things might be, had moved us away from what was being experienced in a warm, breathing, unsettled person. I might have simply invited the pastor to share with us his struggle with what he was actually feeling in his body, perhaps tell us a bit about how this related to the ideas affecting him.

Karen Horney recognized this division between the ideal and actual as a source of great suffering. The central inner conflict is between the constructive forces of the real self and the obstructive forces of the pride system, between healthy growth and the drive to prove in actuality the perfection of the idealized self. In Neurosis and Human Growth she tells us:

I realized that people hated and despised themselves with the same intensity and the same irrationality with which they idealized themselves....This then was, in the original draft, the main thesis of this book: *the godlike being is bound to hate his actual being*. With the recognition of this process as an entity, both extremes become more accessible to therapy. The

definition of neurosis too had changed. *Neurosis now became a disturbance in ones relation to self and others.* ( Horney, 1991, p. 368)

The attraction to the ideal draws us away from the deflating realization that we are far from the godlike, for "if the shoulds issue an order as to feelings, imagination waves its magic wand and the border line between what we should feel and what we do feel evaporates. We consciously believe or feel then as we should believe or feel."( Horney. p.82). When the certainty of pseudofeelings is shaken we go through a period of uncertainty which is painful but constructive. Horney describes this:

A person for instance who believed she liked everybody because she should do so may then ask: Do I really like my husband, my pupils, my patients ? Or anybody, at that ? And at that point the questions are unanswerable because only now can all the fears, suspicions, and resentments that have always prevented a free flow of positive feelings, and yet were covered up by the shoulds, be tackled. I call this period constructive because it represents a beginning search for the genuine. (Horney,1991, p.82).

I told the pastor about these ideas a few days later when we had lunch together.

"That lady could say that because she's not a Christian," he told me. " She hasn't been called by the Lord or known His love and grace. What

she considers to be 'neurotic' I would call 'sin' - falling out of connection with the divine."

#### 4.8 Tongue in Cheek

*Pinky Drake is a tall, lanky man in his early twenties with wild unruly hair and brown eyes that blaze into the world. He's lived with a variety of workers and caregivers, moved from group home to home, tried living semi-independently until he was admitted to the hospital for malnutrition and exhaustion. When he first walked into my office with his day worker, Terry, I could sense his intensity and great curiosity. He wanted me to take him on a guided tour of my office. He would stop and notice things, pick them up, and make up a story about what they were doing in my office.*

*He stopped by my puppet collection. " You can tell that they're all happy," he told me. " They all are smiling, even Frankenstein. Except for that one." He pointed to "Beast", a stuffed version of the character which Disney had made popular.*

*I explained to Pinky about Beast's confusion about life,*

*how he felt like an animal inside but had to go along with everyone else's expectations, how hard it was for him to comb his hair and brush his teeth and shave himself when he really wanted his fur to grow back. It was also very upsetting to have everyone look at him with fear written all over them.*

*Pinky moved us along. "Where's that soundproof room you told me about, the one where you can shout and make noise and beat things up without anyone hearing you? Pinky noticed the mattress and pounding block, then told me, " I bet I know what you do with them. You can lie down and close your eyes and talk about what's inside, or you can imagine anything you want. And that foam bat over there - you can use it to beat up whatever bothers you. Nobody will know, outside."*

*Then he noticed the "Oh cards" sitting on my side table. " I bet they have pictures on them that you could make up stories about," Pinky informed me. He asked if he could pick one. It depicted a man with a shadowy face, with bonfires in his eyes.*

*" This man is real angry," he said. "He wants to wipe everybody out because they won't leave him alone. He's getting bigger, so they'd better watch out, he knows how to take care*

*of himself.*

*As we were leaving, Terry, hesitated, then told me, "There's one more thing. Pinky has problems with eating. He hoards his money, then buys 5 or 6 packages of Kraft Dinner and cooks them up. He'll eat a bit, but gets bored and leaves the rest." Terry paused, then added, " Ministry wants me to report to you any unusual or threatening behaviours I notice so you can assess Pinky. Its hard, because most of what Pinky does would fall into that category."*

*" Ya," Pinky said, " I make a lot of jokes, they're just tongue in cheek. The other day I told Judy, the lady at work, that she's real pretty. I'd like to get my hands on her and rape her. It was just tongue in cheek. "*

#### 4.9 An Assessment

In preparing an assessment of Pinky I was confronted with a problem of interpretation. How could I write about this man without also telling my readers about who I am ? The ministry was asking

for my expert professional opinion, so that the world which I construe and all the related values which make it were accepted as the definitive version of Pinky's world. At no point was the question of how he or I understand reality, including ourselves and each other, engaged. In fact, both of us were being held accountable by other invisible forces attending our meeting. We were expected to confirm the reality of commodification and privatization, where people are "helped" even as they are destroyed; people are *driven sane*. (Holzman & Newman, 1988, p.145).

I could encase Pinky within the clinical confines of the DSM-111, which defines depression:

Loss of interest or pleasure in all or almost all usual activities and pastimes, characterized by symptoms such as the following: sad, depressed, blue, hopeless, down in the dumps, irritable. Must be persistent but not necessarily the dominant symptom. At least four of the following symptoms must have been present nearly every day for a period of nearly two weeks ( in children under six, at least three of the first four): 1) Poor appetite or significant weight loss, when not dieting, or increased appetite or significant weight gain ( in children under six, consider failure to make significant weight gains); 2) Insomnia or hypersomnia; 3) Psychomotor agitation or retardation, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down ( in children under six, signs of hyperactivity); 4) Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities or decrease in sexual drive not limited to a period when delusional or

hallucinating (in children under six signs of apathy);5) Loss of energy, fatigue;6) Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach, or excessive or inappropriate guilt, either may be delusional;7) Complaints or evidence of decreased ability to think or concentrate, such as slowed thinking or indecisiveness not associated with marked loosening of associations or incoherence;8) Recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal deviation, wishes to be dead or suicide attempt( Newman, 1988, p.203-204)

I could choose to kill Pinky with normalcy, as Fred Newman (1988) describes it:

It's high time that we appreciate, on social, psychological, cultural, and political grounds, that we had better start curing normalcy. Normalcy is about to kill us all. I do not mean that metaphorically; I mean that literally. We are dying ( physically and emotionally) because of what is normal in our culture. Ours is a profoundly depressed society, not simply on Wall Street, to say the obvious, but on Main Street... let us change the initial premise of our investigation from searching for a cure for a disease, to searching for a *cure for a normal state*. (Newman,1988, p. 206)

#### 4.10 Biting My Tongue

How could I reflect the actual interchange between Pinky and myself and, at the same time, fulfill my responsibility to ensure safety for himself and others ? Was he dangerous? Sexually deviant? Depressed ? If I were to truly reflect my own sense of

being in this report it would read something like this:

Pinky Drake is a curious and creative person who is confused by all the caregivers in his life, each with a distinct idea of what would benefit him, each with a different emotional life, standard of taste, sexual orientation, and sense of appropriateness that Pinky is expected to aspire towards. Pinky likes to please people by conforming to their expectations; so he has transformed himself into a collage of conflicting possibilities that reflects the nature of the support community which is trying to make him into its own conflicted image of wellness.

My recommendation is to offer Pinky our care by talking more about ourselves and entering into relationship with him, telling him about how his diet, appearance, and comments are affecting us, at the same time remaining interested in his world. Pinky's depression seems like a sane response to the conditions around him. His anger and threats might be, in some cases, well-founded, but we could encourage him to tone them down in public. He seems to be, after all, trying to tell us how infuriating it is to be shifted around from place to place, treated as a child, offered praise and rewards designed to satisfy our own sense of decency, and rejected because he does not understand the correct language and pacing of our courtship dance.

I cannot *imagine* the frustration I would feel if I were denied the warmth and touch which others experience, and if I could sense the waves of panic stirred up each time I expressed my desire. Pinky has pointed out that my Frankenstein puppet is quite happy in my office because he has found a place for himself. Would it be possible for us to listen to the monsters we have created through our refusal to respond to their questions about our normality ? Could we find a place for their ways by including ourselves in what is in question ?

#### 4.11 Normality and Crisis

Crisis is one way of drawing attention to that which is missing; it is often the most immediate way for people in desperate circumstances to finally receive attention. It is becoming the normal state of affairs in contemporary society, yet the typical ways people have of dealing with crisis relate to it as abnormal and rare, something that only experts can help with. (Holzman, 1988, p.174)

People come to me to resolve problems without realizing that resolving the contradictions in their lives may only serve to further adapt to alienation. Exposing and employing their conflicts, on the other hand, might enable them to know more about their own histories and the options for their lives ( Holzman, 1988, p.176). Rather than play into the crisis resolution model of our society, where everyone responds with urgency as intense emotion and unpredictable reactions break out, I need to expose the conflicts and contradictions at work and the conditions which precipitate this need. If this were possible, then dangerous tremors might subside

into playful tensions, shaking with life. Unsettlings would become thresholds into alternate spaces.

This is obvious in the lives of the men I meet with; they have become experts in initiating crisis whenever their needs are being dismissed. Their quaking is a disruptive kind which often refuses to be reconciled or tranquilized or therapized into compliance. They invite us to recognize the sense of conflictedness in their environment, and to take notice of the multiplicity of forces pulling them in many directions. To recognize their dilemma, however, we would have to take notice of the ways in which conflict is a normal condition of our culture, so that living in the midst of these contending forces is not any one's failing but the condition around us. ( Dattner & Polk, p.176) We might then include an assessment of these conditions , including ourselves, as part of the assessments we offer our agencies.

## Chapter 5

## In Another Space

### 5.1 All My Relations

Native teachings emphasize the value of relationship. At the end of a prayer or speech someone will say, "All My relations." This can serve as a reminder that when we live in a state of friendliness with life, all beings become our allies. We leave ourselves open to new interpretations as well. Of this Jardine tells us:

Interpretation belies the notion of self-understanding as self-presence, because I am never fully present to myself - kin keep coming, keep peeping out unexpectedly, telling me of this "self" I might have (falsely) considered settled and possessable. (Jardine, 1992, p. 6)

When I worked in the Native community I learned what it was like to stand as an outsider. So many of the traditions and customs were foreign to me. In spite of all my efforts to respect the protocol and rituals practiced, there were moments when I could not escape quick judgement calls, drawing me towards controversy and heated exchange. How does one proceed when there is no clearly-stated

etiquette, and a variety of rival interpretations prevail ? All one can do is ask for the information, then plunge in.

*At the agency I was frequently in this predicament, the only full-time white male staff member, surrounded by those who had known only the abusive side of white male authority. As coordinator of the counsellor training Program, I felt quite moved to be in the midst of a people who were shedding the secrecy and silence of their mistreatment. Almost every day there would be disclosures about the violence of my culture – tales of beatings, blackmail, humiliation, molestation, rape. A world of pain, enveloping me though its poignant narratives. Always I was presented with the question of location: Where do I stand in the midst of this expression ? How will I manage to not take it all on ?*

*One day I was invited to lead a journaling session for a combined group of trainees from the Drug and Alcohol Program and the Sexual Abuse and Family Violence Program. Both groups were well into their training and in the midst of exploring the pain of the past. Aware of the emphasis upon oral culture, I wanted to offer them an alternative to explore what stirred in*

*them when there would be nobody available to hear their accounts after their training sessions had ended.*

*I introduced a free writing exercise so they could allow their thoughts free movement. As the session proceeded, the emotion was almost too much to bear. People sighed, squirmed, stopped breathing. A few walked out. Others went to the bathroom. The smoke and coffee breaks were silent, sullen, charged. I missed the usual frivolity and jesting.*

*I knew that I could abandon the journal format, yet it seemed important to persist with what I had been requested to share. My previous year's experience had shown me the need for trainees to develop some ability to find strength to stay with themselves when they are alone in the midst of their pain. I spoke about the possibilities of dialoguing with our inner critics, making friends with the voices inside us that seem threatening until we listen to recognize their positive intentions. As I spoke, I kept noticing the glazed expressions and restless movement in the room. Finally we broke for lunch.*

*When people shuffled in late after lunch, I realized that I would have to address the situation.*

***"All right," I broke in, "What's up ? I notice a lot of restlessness and impatience."***

***Brenda Hall spoke. "All this writing is bringing back too many bad memories of school. How can I sit in this room and concentrate on writing, she asked, when I feel as if I'm back in the war zone ?" She pointed across from her to Barry, a white male, sitting in on these sessions as part of his practicum. His rolled-up sleeves and white shirt reminded her of the teacher at residential school who'd abused her.***

***As we explored these issues the class became more and more charged. There was an uneasiness all around. Gisele told everyone that she felt something weird was going on. People were showing disrespect by leaving the room without sharing with the group; she couldn't help noticing how the atmosphere was becoming negative. The circle seemed out of balance, she told us. Someone suggested that we pull our chairs in closer to form a tighter circle. Then there was silence.***

***When I proposed a talking circle, it seemed like the most natural direction to proceed in. Many people nodded, and Dan pulled out the small eagle feather which he carried around with***

*him in his cap. He suggested that we sit in silence and have someone say a prayer to change the mood. Then we stood up and held hands. Frank Bell's deep voice resounded:*

*Creator, guide us and make this into a learning opportunity so that we all could stay present and share our experience and heal as a community.*

*We sat down. Dan passed his feather to the person on his left. The talking began.*

Sometimes, when we are at a threshold, we may think we have gone too far. The poet, Diane di Prima, once commented on her students' work:

... very often when I'm reading something that somebody gives me, I find myself saying, you sound like you're just getting started. You know, at the point where the poem finishes. Why not go on for twenty, fifty more pages? Cause what we tend to like to do is put our toe in? - peek in through the door but stay on the threshold. And if you go past the point where you know what you're talking about and then through all the blather that comes after, you might come out in an inner chamber...You might blather for the rest of your life - a lot of us do - but that's a chance you gotta take. ( di Prima,1975.p. 17)

## 5.2 Listening

*In the silent, softening space of the talking circle, the atmosphere shifted to feeling-talk, undefended disclosure, rememberings that were urgent, all that had been stirring in people but couldn't find a way out. As I listened, I thought about how impossible it must seem to Native children from homes filled with violence and danger to suddenly sit attentively in a classroom. How could anyone constantly on the alert for hostility and invasion be expected to sit quietly? The unwillingness to speak about these things amongst invaders could easily become a habit. But now I heard talk about the tightness and nausea in guts, headaches bringing blinding tears to eyes, pressure on chests that almost took the breath away. There was talk of suffocation, how difficult it is to control oneself, yet how equally difficult it is to express oneself when everything in the past has suggested that there will only be repercussions or denial of what has been said.*

*When the circle came around to Maureen, she began to stammer out fears of not being able to voice the pain, of*

*stuffing it down one more time in her life. Then something new seemed to move in her. She lifted up her notebook and began to read. I realized then that this was what had been missing in the previous session. In my concern for not pushing anyone too far, in my carefulness not to violate boundaries, I'd neglected the vital component of the Native community which differs from ours - a recognition of speaking from deep places as a prerequisite for the holding together of community, an acknowledgement of the need to name the unfamiliar which is entering so that it becomes welcome. Otherwise what is strange may be taken as an intrusion. Not to speak at such moments, opting out, would be considered disrespectful, a breaking of the sacred circle tradition. I was later told about how this is the way it used to be before the European values imposed another sort of silence- a shameful, private, secret unspokenness.*

*Mareen read out a passage in which she'd dialogued with a threatening voice inside her, the voice of "Lady", a sweet, sophisticated, beloved side of herself which she'd always resented because it reminded her too much of her sister, who*

*used to take advantage of people. As she began to sob, I felt the quiet, expectant eyes of the other trainees turning to me for guidance. No one spoke. The feather didn't move. I was unsure about what was wanting now, but I also wanted to respect the silence. Finally Brenda spoke. She asked if it would be all right to break the circle so I could attend to Maureen.*

*I decided to share my thoughts with the group, telling them about the dilemma I felt caught in. Since I was a stranger to this culture, I would have to rely on their judgement for further direction. I was perfectly willing to explore things further with Maureen if they thought this would not be disrespectful. A chorus of voices expressed approval. Frank Bell explained the protocol to me: If someone is in need, and willing to explore an issue deeply, the activity of the moment will be postponed so that the person can be attended to with the same spirit of love that is honored by the circle.*

*I moved beside Maureen and invited her to talk about her relationship with her sister. Her words trailed off into wailing cries of pain. After a while, a calmness came over her. It was time to invite the others to share their responses to witnessing*

**Maureen's exploration. People spoke heartfully.**

***I glanced at my watch and realized that we'd gone 25 minutes over the scheduled time. I would have to rush off to catch my next counselling appointment. It seemed fitting to end with a prayer:***

***Creator, Great Spirit, thank you for guiding us through this experience, for keeping us here together rather than scattering us and having us run from learning. We realize that in our fear and pain we want to run away, but when we stay here and trust, then you always guide us and offer healing. Thank you for keeping our hearts and minds open today.***

***All my relations.***

### 5.3 A Return

It was difficult for me to make clear decisions in the Native culture. What had formerly guided me with unquestioned certainty now began to falter. I was caught up in relations I did not know yet:

There are kin of yours out there in the world that you haven't met yet and who know family tales - tales of your family, tales of your family resemblances, tales of what winds and binds your words out into the flesh of the Earth...

... In this game nobody is above and before all the others; [everybody] is at "it" in this game. Thus it is always his

turn in interpreting. This process of interpretation takes place whenever we "understand". (Jardine, 1992, p. 7)

*On the day after the journalling session, the coordinator of the program approached me as soon as I had walked through the door. She had a grim expression on her face, and gestured towards her office. She told me about the disgruntled group of trainees and the controversy which had followed our session the previous afternoon. A few people had expressed outrage concerning my decision to break the talking circle arbitrarily rather than allow those who hadn't spoken the opportunity to receive the feather. One person had been particularly upset because he'd had to go home without de-briefing some very disturbing memories. I took a deep sigh and headed towards the group room.*

*I began by inviting everyone to express their concerns, telling them that as a visitor to their culture just learning about the ways, I was open to hear about whatever they felt had been disrespectful. One of the women in the family violence program accused me of being controlling because I'd insisted on carrying on with my agenda in spite of the pain in the group, subverting*

*their needs to the formal material as so many white people have done over the centuries. She herself was a member of the white community, sitting in on an exchange program. I acknowledged her concern. A number of trainees expressed their approval about the previous days' proceedings. Frank Bell, a young man who had been initiated in the longhouse when he was 15, spoke. His words flowed out quietly and carefully:*

*My father was a spiritual man, he taught me many of the ways of our people when I was young. He used to tell me: the simpler things are, the deeper they go. It's not the rules that give our life dignity, but the spirit of love by which we respond to one another.*

*Someone nodded, and pointed out that this had been the guiding spirit of what had taken place. Dan, who had kept his head down until now, couldn't remain silent any longer:*

*In my tradition, we respect the circle above all. It is what holds us together and keeps us strong. Out of respect we must offer everyone their chance to speak and hold the feather, no matter how long it takes.*

*I responded to Dan by pointing out that I had previously made an appointment to see a client at the end of the afternoon, and that this commitment required my respect as well. This*

*person would also be in an urgent situation. Furthermore, as counsellors, each of the trainees would have to exercise similar choices when they were employed in their communities, where they would have to make choices amongst the numerous requests for their time and presence. Dan shook his head in disgust, insisting that I had violated something more precious than any schedule.*

*I found myself getting quite agitated as Dan spoke, yet I tried to compose myself and listen to what he had to say. There was something quite familiar to me about his gestures and tone. I gradually recognized in it the ways of some of my uncles, who used to embarrass me by scolding me about my ignorance of the Jewish practices in the synagogue. Rather than teach me about the precepts and carefully guide me when I was unsure about how to put on the prayer shawl or walk before the sacred arc, they'd shake their heads in disapproval. My confidence eroded until I hardly ventured to step away from my seat at the synagogue and volunteer to participate in the rituals at the front. With this realization shaking through me, I could no longer remain silent:*

***I have to tell you that I'm having a hard time listening to you speak this way because it reminds me so much of the way things were in the Jewish community I was raised in. Native people aren't the only oppressed ones. We each have our ways to learn about. But there are so many personalities and so many interpretations of the teachings. It's sometimes hard to learn what exactly is appropriate if others expect you to guess them without first describing what they are about. Most of the time I felt intimidated by the teachings because they served as an avenue for people to express their self-righteousness. I didn't experience the loving spirit which Frank mentioned.***

***After our session ended, Gord Friesen, the prison liason worker, came over and explained to me the various situations and forms of circles used for teaching. He laughed about the delicacy with which one must proceed to learn these things. "After you're embarrassed a few dozen times", he said, "you become more attentive to the cues people give you. It's not easy, and it sometimes hurts, but you learn that way."***

Later, I learned about the god Hermes, the patron of interpreters:

When Hermes is at work...one feels that one's story has been stolen and turned into something else. The [person] tells his tale, and suddenly its plot has been transformed. He resists, as one would try to stop a thief... this is not what I meant at all, not at all. But too late. Hermes has caught the tale, turned its feet around, made black into white, given it wings. And the tale has

gone from the upperworld nexus in which it had begun and been subverted into an underground meaning. (Jardine, 1992, p. 8)

#### 5.4 Clearing Things Up

When we do not name what threatens us, things can easily merge and submerge into unclear forms of resistance. We may resist what is different, suppressing its differences or reducing them to what is already known. Then the environment may become saturated with subtle resentments and unspoken distance, establishing a critical mood.

This is when it is easy for the "ghosts" of a conversation to work their influence. These may be experienced as invisible presences, almost tangible, but unidentifiable or discernible. There may be a vague, uncomfortable sense of something being "off" or missing, a doubt or question not being spoken. Some tension and ill-will is in our midst, yet nobody is acknowledging its presence. If this is not revealed, our doubt may gather strength until we retreat from the conversation within as well as the one around us. If we separate ourselves from what has come to our senses and do not

speaking, then the strangeness may overwhelm us or squeeze out the life from the conversation.

Sonja Straub suggests that these conditions have ecological ramifications; the problems we face as individuals are not only our own problems but often also belong to a certain degree to the field around us. "It is no longer ecological to transform our problems or tensions by trying to send them out into the universe," Straub maintains. Our responsibility includes processing them, finding meaning in them, and using the energy and information in some way. (Straub, 1990, p.47). Instead of isolating from internal criticism, responding to it as negative or neurotic, in need of cure or rearrangement, we can recycle the energy and information which it offers us (Straub, 1990, p. 47-50). Straub maintains that

When we try to get rid of it, we can force the disturbing information to either find ways to express itself where it is less available to our conscious control, as in serious body problems, or force it to become more radical and often more harmful in its attempt to attract our awareness. Also another person in the field, who might be less able than we, may have to pick up the disturbance and find a solution for it....

...Useless or even disturbing "garbage", if it is unfolded and lived with awareness, can develop into something very beautiful that can bring us into close contact with our inner wisdom.( Straub, 1990, p.48-49)

Speaking from unknown places, then, can become a powerful force to reduce the dangers of pollution and warfare and illness.

## 5.5 Openings

As I watched the Native people returning to the earlier teachings, discriminating what was useful from what was not, waking up from their own cultural self-hate, I could no longer deny my own Jewish heritage.

What had been originally experienced as a wound, now seemed more like an opening:

The Wound-as-portal or opening bespeaks a tale of agony, of how the gut bursts open and winds its entrails around trees and burrows down into the pungent, rooted Earth and its crawling intersections. It is a tale of how our humanity, our *humus*, will inevitably be pulled out into the Earth in death and decay. Our lives are Earthly, fragile, wound up with all things in generative, transfiguring inevitabilities of the rhythmmed breath...(Jardine,1992, p.29)

Jardine traces the connections between openness and desire as he discusses James Hillman's insights into Plato's The Symposium :

What comes through the hole (porta) has its source

beyond the wall and cannot easily be detached from the gap (chaos) of its entry. Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds, luring us further. One insight leads to another; one invention suggests another variation - more and more seems to press through the hole, and more and more we find ourselves drawn out into a chaos of possibilities. (Jardine, 1992, p. 28)

In the Native world, previously unacknowledged wounds were exposed, pointing out further exploration:

Hermes here is like Eros, whose father was Poros, "resourcefulness," "way-finding." Since situations require this opportunistic knowing about where the openings are and when the time needs voice...in an encounter, the lacuna, the weak place...gives the opportunity. *Perception of opportunities requires a sensitivity given through one's own wounds.* Here, weakness provides the kind of hermetic, secret perception critical for adaptation to situations. The weak place serves to open us to what is in the air. We feel through our pores which way the wind blows. We turn with the wind; trimmers. An opportunity requires... a sense...which reveals the daimon of a situation. The daimon of a place in antiquity supposedly revealed what the place was good for, its special quality and dangers. The daimon was thought to be a familiaris of the place. To know a situation, one needs to sense what lurks in it. (Jardine, 1992, p. 28)

Awakening to the difficulties of being an outsider in the Native community opened up a new appreciation of what it must have been like for my grandparents to step upon Canadian soil from

Russia. I recognised this as an influence throughout my own life, for I had always had some sense of being on the outside, walking amidst strangers. My parents had regarded the goyim with suspicion, warned me about the dangers of mixing with those outside our own kind. Yet the safety of this world seemed so small. Even though I wandered from the Jewish community, I brought this image of insularity with me to the variations of community I sought to find for myself through Eastern practices and therapeutic communities I hoped would provide the same home. These encounters in the Native community, however, were urging me to take notice of the isolating implications of this unitary identity. I became aware of what Hank Bromley describes as identity politics:

Identity politics offers a relational alternative, emphasizing fluidity and interconnectedness. Far from being an outside contaminant, the connections are central to who one is, and as they change, one's identity also changes. The conventional view of a fixed identity, meaningfully considered in isolation from others, is said to be a false notion secured by terror.(Martin and Mohanty, *Feminist Politics*, p.193). Fear prohibits its relinquishment: fear of one's status being uncertain and contradictory, fear of having a mutable identity, fear of recognizing one's part in exploitive relations. These same fears also impede the relinquishment of a stable but repressive home, as one's home is a crucial component of one's identity.(Bromley,1989, p.211)

Being a visitor, then, reveals to us the hidden meanings of what is absent in our lives or what we have labored hard to keep at a distance:

(We are made) most transparent in the faces of those most different from us. Others always serve initially as a reminder of what we are not. So it is that the fullness of my person requires for its genuine maturity a full openness to others, rather than a strict self-enclosure... (Smith, 1991, p.10)

## 5.6 The Limits of Conversation

When we truly listen to those experiences which have shaped us, we are, quite often, sent plunging into territory that may seem strange, frightening, and difficult to comprehend. The temptation is to seal off the foreboding regions in order to muse upon what inspires us. Many of the social injunctions which influence conversation are called into question. Will we persist in exploring and speaking of matters which have not found acceptance in the village we dwell in ? Can we allow ourselves to welcome uncertainty and shakiness in a culture which devalues the untested in favour of rigorous efforts to achieve perfection? Can we speak with our own voices, which sometimes falter, hesitate, fill with

doubt ? Can we dare to speak of what we do not yet know ?

There are so many variables that move us out of certainty and send out shock waves as we are presented with images, memories, questions - a felt sense of a life we may not have encountered. Rollo May refers to the creative act itself as a source of great anxiety, for as we encounter the unexplored in ourselves, there is the fear of being absorbed into something greater than ourselves which brings with it an intensity that may be more than what we are used to, an ec-stasis or transport from the self we have known. At such times we may be freed from the usual split between subject and object which is a perpetual dichotomy in most human activity( May, 1983, p. 49). In this altered state our sense of identity is at stake:

Anxiety is understandably a concomitant of the shaking of the self-world relationship that occurs in the encounter. Our sense of identity is threatened; the world is not as we experienced it before, and since self and the world are always correlated, we no longer are what we were before...The anxiety we feel is temporary rootlessness, disorientation, it is the anxiety of nothingness.

Creative people, as I see them, are distinguished by the fact that they can live with anxiety.(May, 1983, p. 107)

The struggle, quite often, is one which requires us to confront

that which has been kept under control. Peter Elbow's description of the struggle between "real voice and bad writing" might apply, as well, to speaking:

But these unacceptable elements have energy and power tied up in them that you need to tap if you want to deepen the resonance of your voice. Yet, of course, you are likely to *hate* these sounds: you have trained yourself to shove them away, you use considerable energy in doing so, they are part of your anti-self. When, then, you allow yourself to start using some of these feelings, experiences, and tones of voice in your writing, there is little chance you will be able to use them in a controlled and effective way. Bad writing is almost inevitable...a genuine restructuring requires destructuring. (Elbow, 1973, p.301)

As I revisit some of the moments when I have quaked, I had the urge, quite often, to edit out or embellish a passage which might reveal me in a moment of insensitivity or awkwardness. And yet these experiences drew me deeper into the unknown, shook me up, awakened me to other voices I never would have known.

***When I visited Paris, I encountered a rude tabac vendor who refused to take my money for a current events magazine because I didn't have the exact change. He grabbed my money from his wife's hand, threw it back at me, and began to swear in French about the goddamned English. He was working himself up***

*into a fury and shaking his fist in my direction. I wanted him to know that I'd understood his French, and so I tried to reply as calmly but forcefully as possible. My composure crumbled as I began to gasp out the worst swear words, shaking all over and giving him the finger. My voice rose louder and louder until I told him to take his goddamned money and shove it. The vendor turned back and spit. I realized, at that moment, that the situation was becoming dangerous, and so I turned away quickly and walked down the block. The vendor followed me for several blocks until he finally realized that I would not engage further.*

*This event colored my stay in Paris. I spent the next few days replaying this scene over and over, trying to imagine alternate conversations in which I would express my upset in a less hostile way, perhaps inquire about his reasons for feeling so hateful of English-speaking foreigners. It was only weeks later, when I was safe in my familiar surroundings, recounting this event to some friends, that I suddenly remembered my childhood in Montreal and all the conversations I'd had with my father. He'd told me about the hardships of growing up as a Jew in a tough district where getting to school usually meant street*

*fights and gangs. Rather than take more beatings from the French kids, my father had finally decided to take up boxing so he could handle himself on the street. For many years he would try to encourage me to learn boxing, insistent that I would have to take on many battles as I grew older. These requests seemed absurd to me; I chose the opposite route and went out of my way to demonstrate that the world could only be a friendly place.*

*Later, when I attended university, this same stance unwittingly emerged. Even though my father's survival strategies had seemed so crude and desperate, I learned to defend myself intellectually with the same aggression, sometimes obliterating a potential opponent through arguments designed to demonstrate the foolishness of his position.*

*In Paris I finally heard my father's voice. I'd never understood what it meant to stand opposite a brute force which refused to play by the rules of logic, and which projected hatred with such direct fury. I found myself standing in my father's shoes that day, and, because I had never truly heard his voice, I could not recognise it when it almost broke out in me.*

*The deeper reverberations return today when I lead a group for abusive men at the nonviolence society. I listen closely as a man tells us about what it feels like to be a blue collar worker amongst educated supervisors who want to lord it over him. Another talks about the rage he feels when other men make him feel stupid. We talk about the strength it takes to really listen to the unacknowledged voices within us. Otherwise we may find ourselves speaking in ways we detested in others as powerful feelings break out unexpectedly. If we do not listen closely, the voices of our fathers may break out unexpectedly.*

*Behind the need to control hovers the fear of the emergence of our own repressed weakness, humiliation, and helplessness. What is at issue, then, is the fear of a possible resurgence of the split-off parts of ourselves. When we don't hear them or acknowledge them, they may erupt rudely into our conversations.*

*All my Relations.*

## 5.7 Waiting For Silence to Speak

It takes time and trust in the silence for the obscure and unspeakable to make its presence known. For speaking issues forth out of listening closely, letting things move us, waiting for life to rise up in our lungs and chests and throats again. Listen to Maya Angelou:

When I was 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> I was raped. The rapist was a person very well- known to my family. I was hospitalized. The rapist was let out of jail and was found dead that night, and the police suggested that the rapist had been kicked to death.

I was 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>. I thought that I had caused the man's death because I had spoken his name. That was my 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> year old logic. So I stopped talking - for 5 years.

Now to show you again how out of evil there can come good, in those 5 years I read every book from the black school library. I read all the books I could get from the white school library...I memorized Shakespeare - whole plays, 50 sonnets. I memorized Edgar Allen Poe, *all* the poetry. Never having heard it, I memorized it. I read all the black writers... I had Longfellow, Guy du Maupassant, I had Balzac, Rudyard Kipling....

When I decided how to speak, I had a lot to say and many ways with which to say what I had to say. I listened to the black minister and listened to the melody of the preachers

...in my case I was saved (from cynicism) by that muteness...and I was able to draw from human thought, human triumph.(Angelou,1988)

## 5.8 Letting Bodies Speak

Some people suggest that the vitality of speaking from unknown places comes from trusting in first thoughts, what comes to us before the internal censor makes its rulings. Ordinarily we live "in the realm of second and third thoughts, thought on thought, twice and three times removed from the direct connection of the first flash." (Goldberg, 1986, p. 9). We move into the region of the unrehearsed and uncensored, making contact with another in body and spirit, engaging with what emerges in the unstructured moment. This is no easy task; it seems more like a discipline:

For a long time I have been wondering about the relationship between words and feelings. I find it difficult to speak with feeling about the things which touch me. There have been moments when I have allowed myself to speak from this place. This usually involves shakiness and a felt sense of losing control, a need to breathe deeply in order to keep expressing myself. Then the words arise out of my body without being reserved. I feel more acknowledged by people, more present with them, when I can speak from this felt sense in my body. But so much of my learning has been to use words as defense, to recognise the admiration, credibility, and awe which being articulate often brings in our culture. On occasion people have told me that they were intimidated by my ability to speak so well. Sometimes I was flattered, but I also recognised the distancing and

uneasiness of these reactions. Sure, I can impress people if I choose to, but are they really "with" me then ? Am I speaking honestly or simply making pseudo-statements that seem to make sense ? The challenge seems to be in speaking with the unrehearsed, natural, embodied voice, which speaks with such energy when there is not the distraction of worrying about how the audience will take it. And yet, at the same time, there must be some sensitivity and respect for the world of the others - a generosity of caring enough to reach them as they are.(from my journal)

The problem, for me, is this: How can I remain sensitive to this body sense and my audience at the same time ? How can I trust myself to let go of controlling what wants to be said when what emerges from my own body may not be at all what I had hoped to hear:

Body. Work. Of the body. Hard to let go. Show them. What ? Always on display. An audience. A "they." Watching. Approving and disapproving. Watching. What do they say ? Not good enough. He could do better. Or if they're unkind, they'll smile, wait till he turns away, then talk. About pitfalls. Shortcomings. How to get offstage ? Forget about the gazing. Childhood. Familiar scenario. Superimposed. Always. How to let go of the mirror. Feel for myself. Let them feel for themselves. So this performance can end. Being in my body. Breathing. Going off who knows where. My stance. Start with feet on ground. ( from my Journal)

The challenge of attunement is that it requires us to

encompass the whole of a situation while, at the same time, trusting in a not yet clear body-sense. Gendlin calls this "focusing":

The holistic felt sense is more inclusive than reason. It includes the reasons of reason as well as what made the feeling., and much more...

What is at first sensed unclearly and holistically is more basic than the thoughts, feelings, and ways of acting that are already formed, already cut into existing patterns.(Gendlin,1982, p.160)

From this perspective, speaking could be a total mind-body response in which new forms of expression would be breaking out:

Instead of having only the predictable, expected emotions the roles call for, we often have unclear feelings. They are unclear because clear feelings are those that are already patterned. We must make new phrases to express those unclear feelings into daily life. This is the process of form-making. To an extent, we are all engaged increasingly in the form-making process.

This is where the big change can come from. If we accept ourselves and each other as form-makers, we will no longer need to force forms on ourselves or each other.(Gendlin, 1983, p.159)

## Chapter 6

## Another Kind of Listening

### 6.1 Waiting for the Visitor

In these pages there are accounts of moments in which people spoke out unexpectedly, "torn between the contrary impulses to dismiss this dream and to engage with it"(Clarke. p.384). For, until the words moving within them are shared with an other, what has not been revealed yet may indeed appear as nothing more than a dream. In the early stages of inquiry, my urge was to focus on the outbursts and provocations, in which there were eruptions of expression and meaning. It became clear to me, as I proceeded, that the intensity of such moments is related to the degree to which one holds back from attending to that which wants to be heard. Levin depicts the listening of a self "lending an ear to its surroundings and serving as an organ for the dissemination of its audibility." One comes to an attunement arising from an embodied condition where

listening is developed as a capacity of the body- the body of intersubjective, intercorporeal life, the body of the auditorily felt experience, the body as a whole. Thus, in stage III, the listening skill one brings to the communicative situation will be a listening-to-the-other which also listens to the body and hears its needs,

the speech of its needs. It will be a listening that knows when what it needs the other to hear has been both communicated adequately and heard with openness and accuracy. (Levin, 1989, p.109)

There has been so much discussion lately of "finding our voice" and "speaking our truth" or "speaking out anyway". In the midst of my inquiry into these notions, something turned around. It was, perhaps related to an experience at the B.C. Association of Clinical Counsellors of Abusive Men. The second annual conference in Vancouver included over 300 men and women, most of them passionately dedicated to the work of feminism and the transformation of our society towards nonviolence. This was a new milieu for me, and I found myself quite threatened by some of the statements by the panel of keynote speakers. After this session, there was an open mike for participants to respond. A number of people came up and spoke passionately about their concerns. I thought about my inquiry and how important it would be for me to speak at this moment. As I stood before the mike, however, I no longer felt connected to what was spoken. This was not the quaking of "holding contraries together" but a speaking out of fear and defense. I sat down, feeling quite dejected and alone. It took a long

time to make sense of what had happened. In my desire to be heard, I had forgotten to listen and wait for what was wanting to be spoken.

Speaking cannot take place without listening. In the quaking communities there would be a gathered community, sitting in silence. What was spoken would issue forth out of a gathering of listeners. If pressed to say what they were doing in a meeting for worship, many would probably say that they were waiting- "waiting for the touch of something beyond." (Allen.p.3). People would speak when they felt centered, visited by something which commanded their reverence. Speaking then became an offering; it followed from deep listening.

Today, such deep listening is quite rare in public space. We have not allotted much time or space to pause and "go down the well of one's existence and reach the running stream which feeds all the wells above" (Progoff, ). Perhaps this is why we may be heading towards a quaking of a different order from the one practiced in spiritual communities. This may be the Earth's calling, interrupting our certain, controlling, bound-for-destruction discourse, urging us to listen to that which we have failed to hear.

## 6.2 Joining Forces

Respectful learning requires an atmosphere in which this deep listening can occur. Those present realize that their strength resides in listening together; each person will contribute to the community by listening to himself or herself, attending to what is being offered. It is then that self-disclosure moves us out of isolation. In a time when we can no longer deny the multiplicity of interpretations of experience possible, even of previously unquestioned practices and traditions and texts, this seems especially important. If there are no unanimous reference-lists or authorities to settle our differences we can, at least, develop an internal authority system. We can become curious about the many sources that shape our own internal authority system so that when we speak, our talk has the blended force of personal witness and the community's faith (Pinar. p. 271). Bill Pinar refers to this as a notion of *blended force* :

experience animated by both the human and the divine, brings the self out of its obsessive self-absorption into a social and public space. The paradox is

that in order to dwell in public space and give it expression the self must reside in private space (life history) and in divine space that is beyond, but not discontinuous with, sensory space. To become present among ourselves, not as atomized, acquisitive individuals posturing for individual gain but as individuated beings giving our shared experience form and reality through our words and actions, to become so present, the self allows its circumference to extend into its own past...(Pinar. p.271)

### 6.3 Deep Democracy

We live in a time when there are so many voices calling out, so many rival interpretations of truth and method, each claiming to have the answer to the world's unrest. Arnold Mindell has suggested that the new leaders may need the ability to depart from the old ideal of being centered all the time. "Worldwork," he tells us, " must not be limited to inner peace or outer equilibrium but must also apply to real situations where there are chaos and attack, transformation and conflict." (Mindell, 1992 p. 5). Mindell refers to this as "deep democracy":

Although an artist must learn the methods of her brush and paints, it is finally her most special feelings that allow her to be a successful artist. Likewise, the tools of worldwork can only succeed with the attitude of

deep democracy, that special feeling of belief in the inherent importance of all parts of ourselves and all viewpoints in the world around us. While worldwork is a set of tools that must be continuously updated as we better understand our planet, deep democracy is a timeless feeling. It is found in all the perennial spiritual traditions...It is any form of bodywork that encourages us to understand our feelings and movements as global spirits asking for resolution. And it is that type of dreamwork that realizes that images do not belong only to us personally. Deep democracy is found in relationship work when we consider not only what we are saying but also what our bodies are saying. And deep democracy occurs in groupwork when we notice how group and political conflicts are connected to the spirit of the times. (Mindell, 1992, p.6)

At a workshop on worldwork which I attended, Mindell wanted to demonstrate the potential opening which occurs when a group of people speak about their differences. In order to move to this level of discourse, they must be willing to speak personally about what bothers them in their community. Usually there is something which nobody wants to speak openly about; it bothers many people, yet it is too volatile and upsetting to acknowledge because it may disturb the self-image of the community and its members. The deep democracy approach would assume that, for a community to heal, each of its members must be responsible to move through conflict by listening to the voices in themselves which may be suppressed or difficult to

accept.

It took a while before someone in the group admitted that they thought that the influx of oriental people into the Vancouver community was creating problems. Soon others joined in, and a heated conversation about the changing standards of housing taste and ecology developed. As the exchanges grew more animated, the sophistication and carefulness began to fade into more blatant and primary feeling statements.

" What gives *us* the right to impose our values on everybody ?" somebody asked.

The conversation halted, then someone finally blurted out,"We were here first."

This statement seemed to express what many had been secretly thinking but few would admit because of its glaring implications.

A young man responded, " This is what we did to the First Nations people. We invaded their land, so maybe now we can appreciate what they must feel like."

Now the focus shifted, and there was a lot of outrage expressed about the exploitation of our environment by ruthless land developers, government officials, and multi-national executives

with little sensitivity to the cultural and ecological effects of their expansionism.

"I don't agree with what you are saying, at all," another voice broke in. It was the voice of an older Native man. He told about the exploitation which he'd witnessed amongst his own band leaders and people in power.

He went on to talk about the need to recognize domination in our midst rather than to search for it in outside sources.

Finally, a Chinese woman spoke about how confusing this all was to her. She didn't understand why people would respond to her with coolness just because of the color of her skin. It was even more disturbing when her own family would distance from her, each time she chose to adopt values of the white culture. She went on to describe what it felt like to live with this constant sense of rejection and approval, always falling between cultures, and never quite being able to meet either code enough to belong.

What seemed remarkable about this conversation was the willingness of participants to speak about what didn't make sense, what troubled them, yet was risky to disclose. Arnold Mindell refers to this state as an edge-state:

A statement of identity, such as ' I am not that', indicates an edge. Thus, going over an edge is always an immense experience; you feel that your identity is changing, confused, lost or challenged....If you work on your edges, you become, momentarily at least, a fluid person." (Mindell, 1990, p.71)

Mindell believes that much of our stress conditions and physical symptoms of disease point towards unexplored edge states. It is as if edges and their associated double signals behave like bodies between countries. " The problem is that there is no flow of communication between the lands. The parts which are separated are strangers to each other." ( Mindell, 1993, Worldwork Conference).

At the Worldwork workshop the injustices and cruel practices were eventually named. Stating what it was like to be cast aside or denied access or dismissed not only animated and energised the speakers; it also drew attention to what we had overlooked in our own history. Once the fearful responses and critical voices were welcomed as parts of the field, then many positions were identified, and a fluid, moveable conversation developed.

## 6.4 Embracing the Contraries

The skill of deep listening involves a long preparation. It may require us to acknowledge and welcome the outbursts and provocations as explorations towards a more expansive relationship with the forces that divide us and contend for attention. The quaking moments are, at least, awakening us to the strength of holding contraries together, attending to what is in conflict. Heidegger reflects on this in What Is Called Thinking:

What we can do in our present case, or anyway can learn, is to listen closely. To learn listening, too, is the common concern of teacher and student. No-one is to be blamed, then, if he is not capable of listening.(Levin, 1989, p.42)

Heidegger also commented on the inveterate tendency of the human being to lose itself in "publicness and idle talk", and consequently:

fails to hear its own Self in listening to the they-self [i.e. the Self socialized into a condition of conformity and self-alienation, out of touch with itself]. If *Dasein* is to be able to get brought back from this lostness of failing to hear itself, then it must first be able to find itself - to experience itself as something

which has *failed* to hear itself, and which fails to hear in that it listens away to the "they" [i.e. to what "others" hear, say, think].... This listening-away must be broken off; in other words, the possibility of another kind of hearing which will interrupt it must be retrieved by *Dasein* itself. (Levin, 1989, p.42)

Outbursts and fallings-out, stammerings and unfounded utterances, then, bring us back "from this lostness of failing to hear" ourselves and one another, drawing attention to that which has not been heard, pointing out disruptions of meaning. In those moments when it is difficult to contain the contraries, something breaks out unexpectedly. Something pushes us forward and outward, invites us to enter the testing ground of another kind of listening space. The one who quakes is, perhaps, asking to be witnessed with all his or her unresolved tensions and divisions in conversation. It may be an offering of another sort.

When we respond to these outbursts with deep listening, we may be surprised to find ourselves welcoming back outcasts and conflicts of our own thought. It may be quite valuable to respond to the provocations, especially if we engage in open and honest conversations afterwards about what it was that was at stake.

When we can't live with the contradictions, we may drive

ourselves towards craziness. The trap of the double bind consists of a logic which says: this and not this. Then the habituated mind is boggled, things break down, one knows not what to believe. Jardine tells us, " understanding is not produced by the dispelling of this tension, but by sustaining ourselves in it." ( Jardine, 1992, p. 3)

## 6.5 The Refusal of Inquiry

In my writing as well as my living the word has often been used to clutter, to call attention to the "I" who is interpreting rather than to the interpretation itself. In time I have come to recognise this as an obstruction in the relationship between the text and the reader, the client and his or her personal understanding. Holding my tongue, taking leave of my speaking to open space for the speaking of the other, pruning away the deadwood and clutter to provide clearings for what is fresh - these have gradually become more important to me as I recognize the inhibiting effects of my talk, which never is enough, as long as it wants to still stand out, which leads the reader on and wants to show off what it knows, rather than steal away and allow the narratives to speak directly for

themselves.

There have been times when, like Hemingway, I sought to cut away the personal interpretation completely and let the object speak for itself. And yet there was a refusal. Things would not hold together. Kinships were not revealing themselves. I was haunted by the image of the old man, Santiago, giving up his strength and vitality to haul in an immense, yet lifeless carcass, picked over too cleanly.

In the course of this project, I have had to struggle with my own lifelong anxiety; a fascination with death and the ontological anxiety of living with some consciousness of its obliterating powers, and my fear of losing composure. Writing about quaking, then, has probably brought me as close to this tension as I have ever been. The wild mind, free-flowing entries of my journal had to be confined to a location, in which their kinship would become apparent to others. Self-consciousness brought back the old impulse to stand back from the messiness and intensity of this chaos, to provide a voice of composure, which slips through in these pages, even while I am at the edge of quaking. Still, there is the urge to hold back from life.

And so this quest for order expresses itself through this form, as well. I will have to learn to live with what it is, as well as what it is not. It refuses to be defined, once and for all, because with each new situation something else comes close to my attention, reminding me of what escapes notice, still living at margins, calling out and speaking to me after these words have been recorded. "Experience is divided and deferred, already behind as something to be recovered yet still before as something to be produced."( Culler, 1982, p. 82). Levinas reminds us that the art of today "celebrates the ways in which essence and temporality pass...all representations of things are liquified." Everything must sing, demanding a continuous renewal."(cited in Peperzak, 1989, p.12). Nothing ever comes full circle, for the circular line is, itself, perforated and porous. Things slip in and out.

In the midst of these struggles, I have learned more about my relationship with chaos. There is a discipline to following the unconstrued experience/world; it doesn't necessarily mean chaos. The qualitative-quantitative debate, subject-object splits aren't so either-or. Without the pauses and standing back to reflect, these moments would not have spoken to me so poignantly. And yet, I could

still feel the loss of separation, each time I took leave of the heated body and moving action of the narratives to compose myself and paper. The calm, reflective voice of commentary drew me away from the immediacy of chaotic quaking. I am still not sure where I stand in the midst of this balancing-act between chaos and order, narrative and commentary. I have not become the parable itself.

## 6.6 Not Just A Cry in the Dark

We need to distinguish quaking from other forms of expression. It may offer release to the suppressed, the threatened, and the unspeakable voices. Yet it is not simply a wanton breaking-out without limits, although, in the course of its unfolding it may move temporarily in that direction. It needs a community of one other or more to witness and embrace it in a "moral space" ( Kitwood, 1990, p. 3-6), where there is the safety of established boundaries, mutuality, and support for feeling-talk and embodied expression. It occurs when things are allowed to go astray, yet that which is dangerous or unruly is identified and invited to share its longing. It is held firm by a willingness to let others know how we are affected

presence, informing them, in the process, that their existence has impact, and they are not alone. It offers the message that we are all in on this together and we will persist until what seeks acknowledgement finds suitable expression. It may stumble through hostile protest and projection onto the other as enemy, but it moves toward loving engagement and ownership of ill-will, so that what we reduced to an object re-emerges with a human face and a unique story. It is more than just a cry in the dark seeking help from outside authority, for it ultimately implies the acceptance of oneself as the receiver and messenger of wisdom. We have to stick with it and follow it through its natural course, however, in order to be moved along to its destinations.

## 6.7 A Wedding Speech

***At my niece's wedding in Montreal I wanted to speak. It seemed significant that two rival branches of Judaic tradition – Ashkenazi and Sephardic – were meeting through the union of Joanne and Charlie. In addition, Charlie's family were Arabic Jews who had emigrated from Morocco. Their mother tongue***

*was French, whereas my side of the family spoke English. The music, dietary preferences, and dialect of the prayers were also different. To accommodate both families, rabbis from each denomination were invited to preside at the ceremony. In spite of the plans for elaborate decor and feasting after the ceremony, there seemed to be an unspoken uneasiness between members of either side.*

*As the bride and groom stood under the chuppah to be joined in holy matrimony, the rabbi began to speak about the canopy which they stood under, representative not only of the community of living souls united by Judaic practice, but also the presence of the departed ones, who would also bring their blessings and love. The rabbi noticed the tears flowing down Joanne's cheeks. He paused, put away his notes, and spoke softly:*

*There are tears on the cheeks of Joanne now, reminding us of our kinship through feeling for one another. This goes back to biblical times, when people would go to the wells to receive the water of life with a sense of gratitude. We are moved and purified by the water, which reminds us of God's blessings.*

*After the ceremony we shared in a lavish reception feast.*

*There were speeches with lots of humour and teasing about Joanne and Charlie's difficult idiosyncrasies and their relationship with parents and family from both sides. As I sat amongst this gathering, I could feel how swiftly time had swept me along to this moment. I wanted to acknowledge the significance of this union of different heritages and the richness it could bring. But there seemed to be no opportunity to do so publically. Perhaps I was too intimidated by the idea of standing up to name what it was that I believed was holding us at a distance.*

*That night the words of a speech I might have shared formed themselves in a dream. I recorded them in my journal the next day. Still, I felt dissatisfied, obsessing for weeks afterward about what had not been spoken, each time I talked about the wedding to friends. One morning I was sharing this experince with Antoinette Oberg, my thesis advisor. I wondered what it was that had kept me from speaking. I wanted to focus on the restrictive conditions at the synagogue - my familiar concern with finding the opening to slip through the walls of appropriateness.*

***"Why dont you share it now ?," she asked.***

***As I transcribed the speech and mailed it off to Joanne and Charlie, I could feel great relief. Somehow, in my struggle to say things then and there, I had forgotten about the vastness of knowing which requires us to hold the contraries within us long enough for words to form themselves. Sometimes it takes time for the quaking to develop. Here is what was spoken:***

***I would like to add a few words of prayer tonight. We are gathered here tonight not only as a community under Jewish law, but also to celebrate our common humanity. For whenever a union takes place, there is a new vision created. Two worlds begin to meet, two realities with all their differences have the opportunity to learn to love and respect and support one another with so many strange and unfamiliar ways. At a wedding the unfamiliar meets with the familiar. So my prayer is that we open our hearts and minds to all that is strange in one another, learning to value what we cannot understand, and appreciating what is different – English and French, Arab and Jew, man and woman, rich and poor.***

## 6.8 Labors of Gratitude

In his book, The Gift, Lewis Hyde explores the transformative nature of gift-giving. He describes the rigour and labor required to receive what is given, citing the example of spiritual conversion,

where the Word is received, the soul suffers a change, and the convert feels moved to testify, to give the Word away again. In the same spirit, we may wish to pass on what was given to us - as a student or apprentice or recovering alcoholic or aspiring poet perhaps - after we have matured enough to incorporate what was given. Hyde goes on to suggest that, once we reach this state, we will feel a generalized gratitude that doesn't have the urgency of indebtedness. He describes the process:

I would like to speak of gratitude as a labor undertaken by the soul to effect the transformation after a gift has been received. Between the time a gift comes to us and the time we pass it along, we suffer gratitude. Moreover, with gifts that are agents of change, it is only when the gift has worked in us, only when we have come up to its level, as it were, that we can give it away again. Passing the gift along is the act of gratitude that finishes the labor. The transformation is not accomplished until we have the power to give the gift on our own terms. Therefore, the end of the labor of gratitude is similarity with the gift or with its donor. (cited in Hyde, 1983, p.47)

## 6.9 A Reunion

A few weeks after her wedding, Joanne called to express her gratitude for the letter I had sent. She told me about how my words

had brought tears to her eyes. I remembered the rabbi's words about tears; the wedding came back to me again. The speech which had been offered to me on the night of her wedding had taken some labor to be delivered.

I thought about a story told by Pablo Neruda about his childhood. He was playing behind his house and discovered a hole in the fence board:

I looked through the hole and saw a landscape like that behind our house, uncared for, and wild. I moved back a few steps, because I sensed vaguely that something was about to happen. All of a sudden a hand appeared - a tiny hand of a boy about my age. By the time I came close again, the hand was gone, and in its place there was a marvelous white toy sheep.

The sheep's wool was faded. Its wheels had escaped. All of this only made it more authentic. I had never seen such a wonderful sheep. I looked back through the hole but the boy had disappeared. I went into the house and brought out a treasure of my own: a pine cone, opened, full of odor and resin, which I adored. I set it down in the same spot and went off with the sheep. (cited in Hyde, 1983, p. 281-282).

Neruda commented on this incident several times, associating this exchange with his poetry:

That exchange brought home to me for the first time a precious idea: that all humanity is somehow together....It won't surprise you then that I have

attempted to give something resinous, earthlike, and fragrant in exchange for human brotherhood....

This is the great lesson I learned in my childhood, in the backyard of a lonely house. Maybe it was nothing but a game two boys played who didn't know each other and wanted to pass to the other some good things of life. Yet maybe this small and mysterious exchange of gifts remained inside me also, deep and indestructible, giving my poetry light.(cited in Hyde,1983, p. 281-281)

## Chapter 7

## Adorning the Mystery

### 7.1 A Day of Shabbos

The root of our English word "mystery" is a Greek verb, *muein*, which means to close the mouth. Dictionaries tend to point out that initiates to ancient mysteries were sworn to silence. The root may also suggest that what the initiate learns *cannot* be talked about. It can be shown, witnessed, or revealed, but it cannot be explained. (Hyde, 1983, p. 280). We can also tell stories.

Arthur Waskow has spoken about the dangers of living in a world aggressively pursuing total understanding of all living things. In our neglect of taking time out to pause and reflect on the movement of our lives, we have lost the ability to make Shabbos-honor the Sabbath. In ignoring Shabbos, we have also flattened our time and abolished any sense of holiness in time. We have turned time into a commodity instead. Waskow tells us:

The concept of *Tikkun Olam* has long provided the traditional spiritual roots of Jewish social activism. The Hebrew words *Tikkun Olam* are usually understood as

Repairing the World, but these words are used in other senses elsewhere in the Torah. *Olam* can mean the hidden or the mysterious; thus in some ways *olam* is the mysterious eternity beyond space and time. *Tikkun* is *the adornment*, as of the bride in the traditional Cabala. So *Tikkun Olam* can mean to adorn the mystery. ( Waskow, 1988, p.174)

Waskow refers to the repairwork necessary to restore a sense of the sacred on Earth:

But the human race has gotten so good at making and learning that we have come to think that rolling back the frontiers of ignorance means that there is no mystery. Mystery is what we dont know, cant know, and can, if we choose, *celebrate* not knowing.

In our generation, we have begun to see that we are moving rapidly to an abyss. We are coming to understand that if we establish total control, what we'll do is total the planet ( to use an image that comes not accidentally from Detroit). (Waskow,1988, p. 174)

Waskow's suggestion points to another possibility, to a way of restoring sacredness to our planet. The day of Shabbos was a day of not working, and it arose from great fear. People didnt know what to do next and it scared them. So they went home, inside, and they avoided doing anything. They took the sense of mystery in the world and paused, turned it emotionally and spiritually upside down.They were saying: Its all right - there is a mystery in the world. We dont

know what to do next, and that's wonderful ! We'll celebrate, and sing, and we'll dance. We'll study the ultimate teachings, not to control but simply to search. (Waskow, p.175)

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