Spring 1988

Literacy for living: What literacy means in the lives of three adults

Lorraine Ann Neilsen
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Literacy for living: What literacy means in the lives of three adults

Neilson, Lorraine Ann, Ph.D.

University of New Hampshire, 1988

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Literacy for Living: What Literacy Means in the Lives of Three Adults

BY

Lorraine Neilsen
Bachelor of Education, University of Saskatchewan, 1969
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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in

Reading/Writing Instruction

May, 1988
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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April 18, 1988
DEDICATION

For Allan, David, and Jesse.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the members of my dissertation committee for living what they teach: they encouraged me to discover, they asked tough questions, and they let me write. As committee head, Tom Newkirk not only patiently took care of the administrivia, but he always encouraged me to do what I believe in. Jane Hansen has worked tirelessly throughout my doctoral program to help me and others; Jane's learning and dedication are examples for us all. Don Murray gave me praise, nudges, and a model of intelligent prose to strive for; he always showed compassion and insight. Nodie Oja helped me make connections that broadened my perspectives on life and learning; she has been generous in her support. Jerry Harste understood and fostered my interest in a semiotic perspective on literacy, and he has always been candid with me. Joe Maxwell helped me learn to think and see as an ethnographer; his gently astute observations were always challenging. I was lucky to have a committee of scholars, people with diverse perspectives on literacy and learning, to guide my thinking and to keep me honest. They have been colleagues and friends.
The community at The University of New Hampshire has helped me learn. Dori Straiton has been a wonderful friend since the first day I walked into the writing lab. Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, Cindy Gannett, and Bob Connors have always provided fellowship and good conversation. When I moved back to Nova Scotia to begin my research, I missed the company of the other doctoral students in the program. I learned to trust my writing and to take chances during a seminar at Don Murray's house; and that community, including Donna Qualley, Tom Romano, Doug Fricke, and Bruce Ballenger, among others, will always stay with me when I write. Minnie Mae Murray has been a level-headed confidante. I was challenged by Don Graves' question "What does it mean to be literate?" and I learned much about writing and teaching from the students and teachers at Mast Way School.

This research was made possible through a four-year doctoral fellowship I received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. With that support, I was able to be as thorough in my work as the discipline of ethnography demands.
What I completed the manuscript, Sue Kearney worked her magic on the word processor to produce a professional document; she and the KTG Systems group have cheered me throughout.

It was the people of Hubbards, Nova Scotia who gave life to this research. Each community member I talked to was open and generous with their perceptions and information. Judy, Jim, Elizabeth and their families gave me their time, welcomed me to their homes, and told me their stories without a hint of hesitation. This research belongs to them; they have been patient, supportive, co-operative, and untiring. They taught me more than I ever expected to learn about literacy in life, and I know their stories will teach others. A simple thank you to them will never be enough.

And finally, I thank my colleague, friend, advisor, and advocate, Allan Neilsen. His faith and love are the heart of this enterprise.
Literacy has always been the province of the school. And since the days when being literate in an industrial society required more than the ability to sign one’s name, the educational community has debated not only the definition of literacy, but the best means for schooling young people to be literate. But, John Dewey believed that education came after a child left school; it was a process of growth, a continuous development of the mind through participating in society and interpreting experience. I hold that view of literacy education: it is a process that doesn’t end at the school door. Rather, our literacy grows as we do, continuously and throughout our lives.

But if we are to continue to teach reading and writing in schools, to take up the challenge of literacy education, we must understand more completely what it means to be literate. How are productive members of society literate, and what does the ability to read and write mean in their lives? To that end, I began this research project. I worked with people in the community of Hubbards, Nova
I learned quickly that I could not understand what being literate means until I understood the people with whom I was working. Looking at what they read and write would not be enough. Documenting the number of reports they read at work, or letters they wrote daily would not be enough. Standing outside their lives and tallying the frequency, amount, and variety of their literacy activities would not give me a clear understanding of them as literate members of society. I learned instead that I had to understand literacy from their perspective; I had to get inside their lives, inside the reading and writing that they do.

As an ethnographer, therefore, I had to be true to the way these people see the world. My task was to understand who these people are. I had to probe into the past to see the roots of their literacy, to track them daily to understand the stories of their lives, and to talk with them about their goals, their dreams, and their experiences. Because I believe literacy is not a skill that we acquire, but is a reflection and creation of who we are, my findings
show these people in the process of living.

I have described fully the community of Hubbards, Nova Scotia, not because the research is an ethnography of Hubbards, but because the community is the stage on which these people act out their lives. To represent who they are and what their literacy means, I believe it is necessary to see them at home and at work, to know what motivates them, to see the contexts that shape their view of the world.

Meaning is always in context, and so, too, is literacy. For that reason, I have given the reader as much information as possible to know these people fully. The prose sketches of biography, of literacy issues, of ways of knowing and being literate, are meant to provide a richly contextual understanding of these people. Every detail is meant as a brushstroke, part of an attempt to provide depth and dimension to the picture of their lives.

The definition of literacy that arose from this research is a definition that explains the literate behaviour of the three adults I
worked with. I don’t presume to extend this definition to the world beyond, but I do believe it can, to a degree, inform our understanding of literacy outside the lives of these people. I saw literacy as a process of learning to be at home in the world; most specifically, a process of learning to read the signs that are critical for participating in contexts important to the person. In many ways, I am describing a process of enculturation; in doing so, I am stretching a definition of literacy that normally refers only to the ability to read and write words on the page. I challenge this limited definition knowingly; and extend it to include the ways in which these people write and read their lives. The written word is one set of signs that they use, but those signs do not exist separately nor discretely from other signs that inform their knowing and participating in the world. The semiotic process of reading and writing the world is complex. As these people wrote notes or read documents, they were also reading people and contexts. The descriptions that follow are written to engage the reader in the process of reading the signs that give meaning to the lives and the literacy of these people.
Judy, Jim and Elizabeth read, discussed and edited what appears here. I invite the reader to participate in their lives through these descriptions: of their past, their families, their homes, their beliefs, and their experiences in reading and writing. I invite the reader to read, with them and with me, the signs of literacy, past and present, that shape their lives today.
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ABSTRACT

LITERACY FOR LIVING: WHAT LITERACY MEANS IN THE LIVES OF THREE ADULTS

by
Lorraine Neilsen
University of New Hampshire, May, 1988

This research is an ethnographic study of the meaning of literacy in the lives of three adults. The two-year study, which took place in the community of Hubbards, Nova Scotia, investigated the literacy background and current literacy activities of two women and one man. The data were collected using interactive methods, such as participant observation and interviews, and non-interactive methods, such as collecting reading and writing artifacts. The results of the study described the holistic process of learning and demonstrating literate behaviours at home and at work, and illustrated the role that literacy plays in shaping the contexts of the participants' lives. The findings suggest that literacy cannot be separated from the context in which it appears, nor can it be separated from the personality, history, goals, life issues, and problems of the people involved. The literate behaviours of the participants indicate that
each of them uses signs in the contexts of their lives to reflect and
create who they are.
1. HUBBARDS

1.1 A Summer Morning

It’s a good morning for a run. The air is cool but the sun through the trees is becoming hot and full. A squirrel darts over the woodpile and I can see across the way that Lenny and Lynne have already left for work in the city. Almost as soon as my feet hit the gravel, I hear the dogs in the neighborhood barking. Down the hill, a rooster crows.

At the corner, I look to see if Rachel Collier is waving to me from the deck. At three, she is the youngest of Rosalie and Norman’s four children – large families are common in rural Nova Scotia—and, like her sisters, is well-spoken and bright. Before school starts next month, Rosalie wants me to talk with their only son, David, whose speech is often indistinct and whose reading she considers weak for a six-year-old. She wants to know if David needs extra help from the resource teacher at the school and worries that the whole language curriculum, with its emphasis on journal writing, invented spelling, and trade books, will be too unstructured for
David's needs.

Rosalie has been working with David on his letter knowledge, reading to him every night, and sitting him in front of Sesame Street, but she says, "He just isn't interested in writing and reading the way the girls are. He would prefer to be with his dad and ride on the ATV through the woods." Norman, an electrician, spends much of his time away from the family at the Seabreeze pub or, in the fall, with his friends hunting. I try to reassure her by saying that, in spite of my husband's and my career of teaching writing and reading, our son is rather indifferent to these activities: he is also an outdoors child, one who would rather be playing baseball, swimming in the ocean, riding his bike in the gravel pit down the road, or catching frogs and salamanders in the bog.

No one is on the deck, but I hear Rosalie's distinct voice inside the house trying to create order. Rosalie and the community know each other well; if someone is putting their house up for sale, is pregnant, or in need of help, Rosalie will know.
Last winter, Rosalie found another voice. She came to a series of workshops for parents that a local teacher and I conducted. She wrote about Rachel’s response to the death of Mr. Phillips across the road. The night she read her piece to the group at the Rec Centre, she seemed nervous. “I couldn’t concentrate,” she said. “Norman had the kids down by the ball field where he was playing, and he’d been drinking. I had to keep one eye out the window watching them, and one eye on my writing.” The warm reaction she received when she read was surprising to her, and new. She has written another piece since about the children painting the couch. She’s going to walk up the hill some night, she says, so I can teach her how to use the word processor.

I turn left on Conrad’s road and run on the pavement. It’s quiet at Bernie Hughes’ house, the children have already left for sailing lessons, and no one is stirring at Brian Sweet’s house next door. The two men are high school drinking buddies from Halifax who built homes and families together on land they bought for a song from Baden Conrad. According to the neighbors, Bernie’s wife left several years ago to “live with a hippie out in Southwest Cove” and
Brian's wife left a couple of years later to move to the city and attend Dalhousie University. Brian is known for his love of the Beach Boys and for always having a beer in his pocket as he makes his social rounds on weekends.

On the right through the trees I can see Pam Dauphinee's house, but I only see Pam at Home and School meetings. She called for the vice-principal's resignation last year and threatened to send her children to a private school in the city - at least that's what Rosalie says. Pam was the most vocal of several parents who came to an information meeting for parents on the whole language curriculum. As the speaker, I was struck by her need for absolute proof and substantive research that "this method really works. If it works, how come my daughter can't spell."

Just before the road drops steeply down to the cottages near the beach, I look up and see beyond the trees to the water of St. Margaret's Bay. Today, the bay is silver and it sparkles, another postcard-perfect day for the tourists and the summer people. My memory of this spot, however, is of our first winter when the woods
were heavy with snow. We joined Brian, Bernie, Lenny, and Lynne and all our children here on Haggard’s Hill on Christmas day to go sledding. The walk through the woods was quiet and white.

At the bottom of the hill, I notice that work on the three run-down cottages by the beach is coming along well. Deserted and silent in winter, this area is now filled with dogs, flower pots, cars with roof racks, and towels hanging over the railing of the decks. Occasionally, I will see another runner, most likely a summer person.

In the open now, I see the beach and the sun is hot. The coast across the bay at Peggy’s Cove is powder blue. The beach is empty of people: the only sound is the water rustling on the sand as the tide moves out. I look forward to this part of the run, for the water, like the sky, has a different mood every day. Since we moved here, I have begun to learn to read the ocean the way one learns to read the sky.

By noon today, the road and the parking lot will be congested. The tan bodies will crowd on the sand and parade past the lifeguard
station. The day will be radios, coconut oil, sailboards, soft drinks, the fish and chip truck, and fast cars. Occasionally a sailboat will come close enough to the shore to take on or let off swimmers. From the hill, we will hear the shrieks and the cars, and if we decide to go into the city, we will take the other road to avoid the crowds.

No sign announces this is Queensland Beach. The favorite beach of city people, it's a reference point for most of us in the community when Haligonians ask where we live. The city's rock radio station brings out its Coke promotion van now and then. Signs for Coke, french fries, fish and chips, and pizza are usually the only print I see here. Rarely do I see anyone reading a book while they lie on the sand.

At the canteen, I turn up to the old highway and run along the pavement. A patch of Saskatoon berries grows by the side of the road, and I wonder if they are known by another name here. About a quarter mile down the road, at Jill Baxter's driveway, I see her husband's semi parked under a sign "No Turning," and I know that
he must be back off the road for a day or two. Jill, who works at the Shatford School library during the year, came to the writing group last year along with Rosalie. I was stunned to learn she has kept a journal since she was twelve. "I started to develop too early," she laughs, "and was teased a lot about that, so I wrote. I'm still writing." Jill's teenage daughter from her first marriage left Hubbards to return to live with her father. A warm, sensitive woman, Jill took the decision very hard. Jill says she's not ready yet to "go public" with her writing. "It's just for me. I need it."

The other day, she drove up our hill to pick up her certificate for the writing workshop. She wanted to include it with her application to take a course at Mount Saint Vincent University. "It's time to see what I can do," she said.

Past the many houses along No. 3 highway, I stop to walk for awhile. I need to get steam to make the long incline up to Donna Tobin's house. Since she is often home, and often on the deck, I don't want her to see me so red-faced I can't even yell out a greeting. The man in the tiny house on the left waves as he brings in the dog driven wild by my approaching footsteps.
Donna isn't on the deck, but the car is home. I think about stopping in for a glass of water but decide I will talk too long and won't get the day's writing started. Donna will be baking something, cookies for the church, cinnamon buns for the senior citizens' home, or a treat for friends. She and Dave built their house next to her father's years ago. Her father has since died, and with Scott now a busy teenager and Dave around less, Donna spends her time baking, helping others, and working part-time in the city. She looks after our infant son, Jesse, when neither Allan nor I will be home during the day. The baby loves her; Donna enjoys his every move, and is as caring and affectionate with him as we could hope for. A group of us went into Halifax several weeks ago to see the Everly Brothers. It was the first concert Donna had ever attended and she was disappointed they didn't sing her favorite song, "Devoted to You."

Up the way, I see the sign for the South Shore Regional Recreation Centre where the ball games are held. The Hubbards Lobster Claws team is now defunct, but occasionally the men in the community will
muster for an invitational tournament. Brian Sweet will bring his beer, cigarettes, and amble on to the field with his broad grin; Bernie Hughes will be tan and mysteriously fit and agile for a forty-three-year old; Jim Breeze, Andy Hare, Steve Gilbert, and Rhys Harnish, among others, will gather by the bleachers and joke about their bad backs and knees. Paul Hopkins and my husband Allan will be frustrated because no one seems to take the game very seriously.

The Rec Centre, as it's called, has tennis courts, and a two-story building that houses Brownies and Girl Guide meetings, the senior citizens card group, Junior Achievement meetings, the Winter Fair, and summer activities for children in the area. Several men in the community, including our next door neighbor, Lenny, have spent their winter evenings renovating the building and planning social events. Dave Tobin, Donna's husband, felt Lenny and Lynne ought to be given an award by the community for their work in planning a successful Beer Fest early in the summer. "People who plan great parties do a great service to the community," he said.

I am sweltering by the time I reach the school, so I walk again.
The caretaker’s jeep is the only vehicle in the parking lot, and the playground is silent. The grass around the swings is worn away by busy feet, the same sod we laid the last year Jim Breeze was president of the Shatford Home and School Association. Since then, Judy Hopkins has served her two-year term, and mine begins this fall.

The school, even more so than the Anglican and Catholic churches, is the focal point for many in the community. The hundred and forty-two children attending grades primary through six are children of community members in their most active and productive years. Because of their commitment to their family and the community, these twenty-five to forty-five year olds are Hubbards’ most visible residents. They organize soccer, baseball, Girl Guides and Scouts, work at the school library and the Shatford Library, drive or walk their children home from school, and organize fund-raising events for the Home and School Association. All the children know one another; they move up as a group from one grade to the next, and many of their parents party together.
By the bridge, I begin to run again, and my legs feel wooden in the heat. The sign for the Bayshore Inn down the Shore Club road sits high above the bridge. Several people have complained that the neon and plastic sign is ugly. It announces “lobster, pasta, fresh seafood” and many residents, not fond of “Bayshore Bob” will leave the patronage of the restaurant/hotel to tourists.

The road runs along the edge of the cove as far as the post office. Small sailboats and the occasional motor boat are still; no one is moving yet this morning. A new Audi races past me and stops suddenly a few yards away. I look at the Pennsylvania license plate and wonder if they need directions. I prepare for their greeting but, instead, the two men leave the car running, and jump out with their cameras, one of which is a video camera. They run across the road to face the cove, and aim their sights. As I run past, I want to ask them if they know where they are, and if they need information. These shots, I am sure, will be some of their pictures of “beautiful Nova Scotia.” To those of us in Hubbards – to Anne and Andy Hare, whose house they’re parked below, to Cathy O’Neil whose newly-built home sits across the bay, to all the residents
whose boats sit white against the blue of the sea and the sky – this picturesque cove is home.

The road rises steeply up to the Shatford Memorial Library and the Post Office, and by the time I reach the crest of the hill, the Audi has raced past. I take my key out at the Post Office, say hello to Richard behind the counter, and look at the day’s offerings. A bill from the Nova Scotia Power Corporation and a reminder from the veterinarian in Chester are the only two personal items. The rest is the usual Hubbards mail: the South Shore Herald, a regional weekly published by the Halifax Herald; flyers announcing a beef sale at Bailey’s Super Market, the grand opening of Chester Laundromat, a sale at Shopper’s Drug Mart; and the Lighthouse Log, another regional weekly published out of Bridgewater, thirty miles west of here.

I stuff the mail in my knapsack and leave the Post Office. Further down the highway are gas stations, the funeral home, the shopping center, the liquor store, craft stores, and a bake shop, but today I won’t run that far. I turn back down No. 3 highway from where I
The library isn't open this morning, and I remember that my son David has several overdue library books. Shatford Memorial library isn't as busy as the other county libraries are; Robin, the librarian, says the residents would rather have had a bowling alley. Of the county's seven branch libraries, Hubbards accounts for less than 10 percent of total circulation and patrons. In the summer, many of the school children belong to its summer reading program. Children who read one hundred books get gold medals, and all who participate are invited to a party at the end of August. The library, supported by the County, is part of a legacy left by J.D. Shatford.

Back to the bridge again, I turn right up to the fork in the road where The Shore Club Road, Schwartz Road, and Conrad's Road converge. Judy Hopkins, who lives a quarter mile down Schwartz Road, remembers when she lived on this corner and could walk across the road to Corkum's store for penny candy. In the past twenty-five years, the houses on this corner, once a central point in the community, have changed hands several times, and two are now
being renovated. I often think as I pass this corner of all the memories it must hold for someone like Judy, whose family has been here for four generations.

On Conrad’s Road, a mile away from home, I walk again until I reach Dennis and Anne Dore’s house, now twice as large as it was a year ago. Dennis, who runs a van pool into Halifax daily, has built an apartment to rent above their garage, causing some residents along the road, most of whom own about an acre of quiet residential property, to remark that the neighborhood will never be the same. Next door, at the Powers’, no car sits in front of the house, and I know that Sharon and the kids are likely at their camp at Mill Lake, where several Hubbards residents have bought property and spend the summer. I think about Todd, their ten year old, who is a “non-reader” according to Sharon, unlike his younger brother, who writes and reads with ease.

At Jim and Debbie Breeze’s house, the carpenters are busy on the addition. Jim changed jobs this year, and had so much to learn in the first week he said he felt illiterate. His wife, who used to work
at the library and is now considering going to university, is known for being well read. One of their daughters, Janis, read fluently very early, and her parents, worried about her boredom in the first year of school, asked that Janis be put ahead a grade.

Past the cemetery, I run the winding road past Dauphinees as far as Edgar Friedenberg's. A semi-retired sociology professor at Dalhousie University, Edgar is sometimes the butt of comments about his frequent young male visitors. He is seen on the road occasionally, and his health problems, which have made him emaciated and weak, cause many in the community to speculate about his having AIDS. I wonder if many in the community know how well-known he is internationally for his research, and that his name is spoken frequently by sociologists in schools such as Harvard.

On the quiet stretch of road before the Johnson Road turn-off, I see a new name on the mailbox by the big white house. Once the home of the Annand family – the son was well-known for his musical talent and often played at the variety show at the Shore Club every summer – the house now sits as a mystery, and I make a
note to ask Rosalie if she knows who lives there. On the right, the only sign on the winding road is hand-painted and reads "Watch for Children." It's a reminder of our constant discussions every summer about fast cars heading back and forth to the beach.

A quarter mile or so later, I reach Rosalie's house, and Rachel is on the deck. She runs across the lawn to the road to say "Hi, Lorri" and it's only seconds before she adds what I know she'll say, "Remember when you were a witch!" We laugh about it again - my frightening Hallowe'en disguise is a sight she has remembered for months. I remember it for another reason; a rural community where everyone visits one another on Hallowe'en - in disguise, old and young alike - is something I haven't been a part of for twenty-five years. Hallowe'en, Christmas, summer vacation, and winter snowstorms are the stuff of which family and community stories are made. In Hubbards, I have not only begun to learn everyone's stories, but to become part of them as well.

I remind myself to call Rosalie about starting on the word processor, and begin to make my way up the hill. At the top, I can see over the trees to Hubbards Cove, and I am home.
1.2 Literacy for Living

Literacy, beyond the rudimentary ability to encode and decode words in print, is a process of learning to participate fully in necessary and personally important social, intellectual, and political contexts. It is a lifelong process of learning to read and create contextual signs in print and in society. Literacy has many houses, each of which we can learn to make our home.

One day, in an attempt to describe literacy in the abstract, I wrote those words. They came after two years of watching and participating in the daily comings and goings of Hubbards, Nova Scotia. The definition that arose from the data is abstract, but the people and their literacy are concrete and very much alive.

I saw literacy from early morning to late at night, literacy for a pay stub, literacy that makes budget projections for head office, creates notes for the teacher, causes overdue fines at the library, and signs of literacy that have peanut butter stains on them.

I began the study because I wanted to understand what it means in daily life to be literate. To understand literacy in context in this way, I had to become literate myself -- to learn to read, write, and see Hubbards in ways the adults who worked with me do. By showing me the signs that mark the contexts of
their lives, they helped me understand the literacy they live. In many ways, therefore, this work is about my literacy process as well.

The abstract definition remains; I believe it because the stories here show it to be true. Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth use their literacy for living in different ways. The stories that follow do not tell about their literacy scored or measured: they are meant to show literacy as a reflection and creation of who these people are.
1.3 Hubbards, Nova Scotia

Thirty miles west of Halifax
Along the South Shore.
Population: about seven hundred fifty
in the winter. Crowded and loud in the summer.

Off Exit 6. Drive into town.
Past the yards that meet the highway.
Old cars. Spare parts. "Clean fill wanted."
Over the tracks, past Junior
Britten's Irving station and the Shopping Centre,
and the bookstore that went out of business.

Propped-up signs and letter boards,
an old lady walking back from the Save Easy
with her plastic bag and rubber boots.

At Mother Hubbards Antiques "dirty Bob" is
sanding down a bureau by the door. Inside, the
old men at the card table around a red tin ashtray:
"Up home we had a young b'ye rode his truck
right into the ditch, them roads was some icy ..."

"Yuh.." Bob comes inside. Teases the kid at the
glass counter, slaps him five with his old brown hand,
takes the boy's money for the chips and drink.

Outside, the cars pass. No tourists now.
Up at the doctor's office the parking lot is filled,
family cars and family colds. By the Esso, the kids
smoke and hang on a car that's revving its engine.

Out on the point, the wind is cold.
The water, steel grey, is high and rough.
At the end of the road the horizon disappears
into mackerel sky.
HUBBARDS, NOVA SCOTIA
(population 750)

(The coast of Maine is to the southwest, Prince Edward Island straight north, and Newfoundland northeast)

1. Neilson house
2. Collier house
3. Queensland Beach
4. Donna Tobin's
5. Recreation Centre
6. Shatford School
7. Post Office
8. the bridge
9. Breeze house
10. Hopkins house
11. McNeil house
12. shopping centre
13. Shatford library
14. doctors' office
15. Catholic Church
16. Anglican Church
17. Shore Club Road
18. Shore Club
19. Hubbard's Beach
20. Schwartz Road
21. Conrad's Road
22. Johnson Road
23. Conrad's Branch Road
24. Baden Conrad's house
25. Baden Road
26. cemetery
27. Sawler's Lake
28. yacht club
29. Mother Hubbard's
We hadn’t planned to make our home in Hubbards; since our marriage we had been city people. But Allan was now pressing his nose up against the window of the A-frame chalet on a hill overlooking Hubbards Cove while the real estate agent and I waited by the car. Days of house-hunting had driven us further and further from Halifax; we drove along the bay where the prices were lower and the population less dense. Hubbards was just too far from the city and from the university, we thought, too great a distance from shops, theatres, and hospitals.

What would we do about swimming lessons, about winter driving? Wasn’t there a place in the St. Margaret’s Bay area that was quiet, near the ocean, and still an easy drive from the city?

“This is it,” said Allan from the deck. “This is the house.” Dave and I smiled. We had scouted out the property the day before and I had loved it immediately; I hoped Allan would feel the same way.
Yet, in many ways, the spot was the farthest I had ever been from anything I’d known before. I was a small-town prairie girl, who played on dusty roads that went straight through the middle of town to the railway station and the grain elevator. As a Westerner, I felt different from any Easterner I’d ever met. Since my teens, I had lived in Western cities, flat spots on a map on which miles of earth-tone suburban houses had been built, where people knew only their next door neighbors, where independence, enterprise, and money were marks of success. I often loved driving away from the city through the dry prairie heat toward a spot on the horizon; I loved the strength that came from solitude. And like many Westerners, I liked a challenge, a risk, a new frontier. I liked change.

Here in Hubbards, everything seemed different. The chalet, tucked in the woods overlooking the bay, felt like a nest. I had heard that the community was tightly-knit; everyone knew everyone else, and as we stood talking to the real estate agent, he joked that the neighbors would soon have their phone lines buzzing.
The coast road from Halifax winds past homes that have been in the family for generations: each community – Boutlier’s Point, Ingramport, Black Point – runs into the other with only a small green sign marking the next. Newer houses grow back from the road and from the shore; no fences or squared off property lines separate them. It is an area of handmade signs – Mackerel, Mussels, Antiques – of clotheslines and old cars in the front yard, of driveways full of potholes, of houses in any style, painted any colour. The shortest distance between any two points is a winding road through spruce and pine trees and rocky land. The only place to see the horizon is near the shore. Could we handle such a change in land and people?

We wanted to try. During a vacation in Nova Scotia the year before, we were attracted by the breathtaking scenery, the peaceful towns, the friendliness of the people, and most importantly, by the relaxed lifestyle. A spirit of co-operation rather than competition seemed to mark Maritime behaviour. The priorities seemed to be different: family, home, and people pursuits took precedence over a larger house, a bigger raise, the constant one-upmanship that was
evident in Calgary. Here was the place to raise children, we thought. Here, a child could grow with other children in a community where he was known by all, and protected by all. Concrete and suburbia, with day care centres and expensive birthday parties, seemed barren against the warmth and the safety of a place in the woods where a boy could run with friends, catch tadpoles in the spring, and attend a small school a mile down the road. Yes, we thought, here is where we will live.

We bought the house on Baden Road, and now, four years later, we continue to try to understand the differences between the life we knew before and our life in Hubbards. During our first year, there were obvious changes: instead of turning up the thermostat, we hauled in wood to keep the fire going. We had to learn about wet wood, green wood, and creosote build-up. Our son learned to take his sled out the moment he saw snow; it often didn’t last until the afternoon. We could relax about housekeeping, which suited us just fine; homeowners don’t aspire to a “Better Homes and Gardens” display. Instead, they keep homes to be lived in, cottage-like houses that often are filled with items that arrive on the Sears
truck Thursday mornings.

But we noticed other differences as well, ones we couldn’t seem to articulate. Were they East-west differences? Rural-urban? Professional class-working class? There were unstated rules of life in this region, signs we needed to read; but what were they? We worried constantly about offending, about being out of place, about accepting too many favours; and in turn, we were frustrated when our unstated rules – about privacy or social obligations – were violated. We began to understand that, as much as we loved the area where we chose to buy a house, we would have to learn how to make it our home.

We learned that social behaviour is different. People gather at each other’s houses for coffee and they drop in without notice. Social events sometimes aren’t planned; they happen on the spur of the moment. We have had to learn to live on short notice for a meeting or organized event. And, as academics who often work at home and around the clock, we have had to learn to adjust to unexpected callers and people whose schedules are more flexible.
We have learned how to play more. The community, like Maritimers in general, has a sense of proportion; no work or deadline is as important as having a beer with your buddy or playing with your children. Hallowe’en in Nova Scotia, for example, is one of the high points of the year. Thousands of party-goers in costume spill into the Halifax streets every October 31. Winter in Maritime communities is always celebrated with a carnival; summer is filled with fairs and festivals for all reasons. Everyone plays, not just the very young.

Families and home are the focus of Maritime life. Many Maritimers will leave – to try Toronto or Calgary for awhile – and most will return home to stay, bringing husbands and wives and settling in to raise a family near the place of their childhood. When we first moved to Hubbards, most residents assumed we were returning home from the West; so many others had returned from Calgary during the recession of 1983.

Communication patterns in Hubbards were new to us. The phone,
which we used primarily for work and rarely for socializing, is used to communicate the details of everyday life. When we answer it, the caller often starts the conversation in full stride, assuming we know who they are and what train of thought they are following. In the village, people seldom greet one another or use the other's name; they simply begin to talk, as though the other person has been with them all day. At first, it felt to us as though life in Hubbards was an on-going conversation, and breaks in time or place did not exist.

Neighbors help one another at the blink of an eye, and their resources are many. Most people in the area have built their own homes, and most know about submersible pumps, septic fields, electrical wiring, or plumbing. If they can't help, they know a guy who can, or a place to get it cheaper. Services paid for in the city - forty dollars for a washing machine repairman, or sixty dollars to rewire a light fixture - are odd jobs that the man down the road can do for a case of beer. We soon began to admire the resourcefulness of the community, and to be embarrassed by our own lack of self-sufficiency.
As the months passed, the differences seemed less apparent and we felt more at ease. To me, especially, having no roots and few family ties, Hubbards is becoming the place I am from. The community is my extended family. My house is becoming my home.
I came from a part of the country where only prairie farmers lived near their relatives, and where children always grow up and move away from home. In the west, any structure built more than twenty years ago is old.

In the east, where history and tradition are a part of life, residents can often trace their roots back four or five generations. The 1792 census of St. Margaret's Bay lists approximately fifty families populating the bay area west of Halifax. Of the names listed in the census, Dauphinee, Boutilier, Coulen, Harnish, Slaughenwhite, and Westhaver are names that are common in Hubbards today. These settlers, many of whom are listed as "Loyalist," "Foreign Protestant," "Irish," and "Scottish," were farmers, laborers, planters, or boatmasters. In 1790, John Arenberg of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia received a grant of 650 acres of land which he deeded a few years later to Gotlieb Harnish. This area, listed in the schoolhouse register of 1832 as "Hibbert's Cove", is now known as Hubbards.
Captain John Dauphinee sailed across the bay from French Village and settled Dauphinee's Point, which most Hubbards residents now know as the Shore Club area. Paying wages of approximately 38 cents a day, Dauphinee and his brother cleared the land and attracted settlers to the area. The Captain's brigantine, The Loyalist, made regular trips to the West Indies with cargoes of fish and lumber in return for rum, molasses, and tobacco. Stories about rum form part of the oral history of Hubbards, just as stories about drinking exploits form a part of the social fabric today. One story, passed down through the generations and told by A.W. Shatford in 1937, describes how Captain Dauphinee's men fastened puncheons of rum to the floor of the ship with a plug that drained below. In this way, a steady diet of rum kept the voyages tolerable for the men.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the sawmills and the wharves in the area helped to increase the population. The attractive scenery and the access to the large port of Halifax made the Hubbards area a place where the resort industry could thrive as well. Much later, tuna fishing became an active business in Hubbards.
More than any other name in the area, however, the Shatford name has captured the imagination of historians and local townspeople. Jefferson Davis Shatford, the son of the local storeowner, left the community as a young man to seek his fortune in the American oil business, and later turned Hubbards into what the media refer to as “Canada’s Cinderella community.” Stories about J.D. Shatford are sketchy and conflicting, but the myth holds that young Jefferson added a zero or two to the cheque he received from his father, went to work with an oil company in Chicago, and worked his way to the top. He eventually sold the company to Standard Oil, and went on to accumulate more wealth during the Florida land boom. When J.D. died in 1955 at the age of 93, he left 1.1 million dollars to the Hubbards community “exclusively for religious, charitable or educational purposes, including proper care for the poor and indigent who are unable to care for themselves, the crippled and blind, or others suffering from misfortune.” The money, still administered by a group of trustees, has since helped build a local library, and provided funds to the fire department and local churches. The Shatford fund is best known, however, for the educational support it
provides to students in the Hubbards area who attend university or post-secondary training programs. In fact, most real estate agents, including the one who sold us our house, use the Shatford fund as a selling point with prospective home buyers who have children.

The Shatford story, as well as the tales of large, grand tourist hotels and horse-drawn carriages are memories too old for most residents of Hubbards today. Only people like Albert Dorey or Baden Conrad keep the oral history alive. Every Christmas, Baden receives visitors from the old armchair in his house by the water’s edge. He drinks the watered-down rum Mummy gives him, teases the women, and tells stories late into the night. Every year, Baden is weaker, and every year, they say it will be his last.
Before I saw the signs of literacy in the community, I heard them.
I listened closely to the speech patterns new to my ear, and learned to recognize a South Shore, a Lunenburg, and a Cape Breton accent.
I learned new words: “ignorant” meant rude, “foolish” was crazy, “sledding” was tobogganning. “Right” was added to anything to intensify it: “that women is right foolish”; and “some good” was the best compliment you could pay to the cook. I began to wonder what words I said were strange to the ears of residents here; and I heard my five year old son pick up the broad ‘o’ sound that made “boat” sound like “baowt” to my ears.

Language was rich and interesting here, full of unusual expressions. It seemed to be a language with a history, not the bland, homogenized English we spoke in the West. But those who spoke colorfully didn’t find it as romantic as I did; one woman said her Lunenburg accent was ridiculed in the office towers of downtown Halifax. “You have a head start here if you’re a Maritimer,” she said, “but not if you sound like one.”
Not only was the sound of the language new to me, but the rules of talk were different as well. In Hubbards, conversation is propelled by stories and talk of everyday events. Personal knowledge is valued over book learning, and the best stories are the ones that capture most poignantly the experience of all. No one competes; conversation is marked by a spirit of community. I have wondered whether being literate in Hubbards is a process of knowing and having access to stories.

Some people in the community are openly scornful of book learning; they believe that practical life skills are the stuff of success. However, most of the community sees book learning as a necessary part of education itself, a way to increase a person's opportunities in the world. Book learning does not generally seem to play a large part in lifelong learning, however, once schooling is completed.

The absence of competition with facts and information – and the presence of stories – seems to reflect something deeper than the nature of literate behaviour. Life is to be lived; it is not a process
of acquiring knowledge to wear as a badge. Accustomed to having
to give a verbal resume in new social situations out West, I was
surprised to find that people seldom ask the "usual" questions:
"Where do you work? Where did you go to school?" The
conversation begins with the information at hand – the weather, the
food, the children. Initially, I was taken aback. Did the absence of
questions mean people weren't interested? Should I avoid asking
these questions in case they were rude?

Later, I began to understand the difference. As one resident said:
"Out West, it's what you are; here it's who you are." It would be
three years before I fully understood her comment. The external
validation so highly prized elsewhere – education, money, contacts,
possessions, among other things – is not prized in this small
Maritime community. We accept you for who you are, the message
seems to be, not for what you have or don't have.

This insight explained a great deal to me both about life and
literacy in Hubbards. Although people are traditional and sometimes
ethnocentric, they are very tolerant and accepting. "Christian"
principles, especially "do unto others," seem to motivate behaviour, and fairness and equality are values to strive for. If someone needs a helping hand, they receive it.

For that reason, "degree" of literacy – the reading and writing or cultural literacy so valued by North American academic institutions – is an irrelevant concept in Hubbards in many ways. Unless a person plans to attend college or pursue a career that requires competence in reading and writing; and unless a person wants to reach past the boundaries of the highway and the county line to the world beyond – he or she can live day-to-day quite successfully without being a skilled reader or writer (which is true, also in society as a whole). To participate in the work and play of the community, to contribute to the church, the school or the sports programs does not require much reading or writing; it requires commitment, participation, and generosity of spirit. Reading and writing ability is, therefore, no more or less valued in the daily goings-on than other abilities and skills: if you need carpentry work done, call this man – he's good at it; if you need a letter written, call this woman – she knows about those things.
For that segment of the Hubbards population who are interested in books, education, and learning about the culture beyond, reading and writing are promoted most directly in the school and the local library. A variety of library programs are offered throughout the year and many parents take advantage of these opportunities to introduce their small children to literacy activities before school.

Of the seven hundred and fifty residents, nearly forty percent are between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five, and over two-thirds of the population is under forty. As a result, the "baby boom" generation and their children play a large part in the community. The occupations are mixed; there are unskilled laborers, skilled workers, local business people, professionals such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and many who work for large corporations such as the telephone or power companies.

The competence in reading and writing varies, obviously, with the jobs and professions people are involved in. At home, literacy activities vary as well -- like most other populations, there are the
newspaper readers, the romance novel devotees, the mystery aficionados. Most people I have come in contact with in the community represent the segment of the population that reads and writes daily, however brief the activity. The newspaper circulation here is large; most people read the Halifax daily, and many professional people buy the national newspaper from Toronto.

Literacy in Hubbards is the province of women. Although men and women alike seem to use their ability to read and write equivalently, the promotion of literacy activities in the home is largely the responsibility of women. Most women of the twenty-five to forty-five age group are stay-at-home mothers; some have part-time jobs. It is the women who bring their children to library programs, nursery school, who attend Christmas concerts, volunteer to work in the school library, read to their children, and introduce them to paper and crayons. Of the Home and School attendance over the last two years, more than eighty percent who attended regularly were women. In their generation, the majority of those from the community who attended university were women. While the men in the community—particularly those with a university education or
those in supervisory or management positions in the city — are active readers and writers, only a handful are involved in such activities as the Home and School Association, teaching Sunday School, or other activities where reading and writing play a part.
"Wanna dance?" He cocks his head. Taking a last swig of beer, he stumbles up from the folding chair and heads toward the light and bobbing mass under the fishnet ceiling. It is five drinks past awareness on a Saturday night and good ole boy Terry Hattie and his band are punching a beat across the wooden floor. The smell of overheated bodies fueled by Keith's beer and rum, of salty hamburgers and popcorn, of close sea air - all are as strong as the pulse of the dance. Along the back, the waiting and the watching eyes are lined up like observers outside a fish tank. Mouths open, but no one can be heard over the sound.

On the dance floor tan bodies in cotton, denim, and wild beach colours are moving hard and fast, whooping when it's a Creedence Clearwater Revival song, clapping their hands, calling out to friends trying to swim through the crowd to the back. The bodies are 18 to 60 years old, but this time of night, all the eyes look older.

It's near closing time, last waltz time, and the kitchen help are moving from table to table gathering the dozens of beer bottles into large boxes. Some bodies are moving closer to others, and the watchers from the back seem a little more intent. It's last call at the bar, last call for those who live for Saturday night. After this beer, this dance, this rum-soaked proposition, Saturday night's possibilities turn a corner. The music will stop and the lights will go on.
### 2.0 JUDY

#### 2.1 Judith Ann Simms Hopkins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Judith Ann Simms Hopkins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status:</td>
<td>married 14 years to Paul, fireman at management level, Halifax Fire Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children:</td>
<td>Jeffrey, age 8; Jeremy, age 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Family:</td>
<td>mother Frances (widow), two brothers (one younger, one older) and their families live in Hubbards; two brothers live out of province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, Dalhousie University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Activities:</td>
<td>Part-time job at Shatford Public Library, Volunteer at Shatford School Library, President of Shatford Home and School Association, Regular substitute history and geography teacher for Halifax city high schools, Teaches Sunday School (Anglican Church), Takes aerobics class twice a week; 3 to 5 mile walks with friends, Drives boys to swimming lessons (Halifax) and skating lessons (Chester), Organizing a Block Parent group, Bakes rich desserts for friends and special occasions (cakes a specialty), Evenings: reading, sewing, editing Paul's papers for management courses, prep for substitute teaching, watching television, playing Rumoli with girlhood friends (monthly), Daily reading/writing 1 - 2 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 School Days

“Did you see the Bay News, Judy?” Mrs. Publicover was sitting in the den, the zucchini muffins and coffee steaming on the table in front of her. Her legs, dimpled from varicose veins, were on the table too and she apologized as I came in the room. “You’ll have to excuse me,” she said. “I have to keep these legs up all the time. And sometimes when I’m walking I have to stop and wait until I recover. If you see an old lady standing still in the middle of the road, it’s me, I’m not crazy.”

Judy called from the kitchen. “You mean the old photograph on the front page? Hubbards, around 1910. Isn’t that something? You could see the first school in that picture, and the chimney stack from the old saw mill. Here’s more coffee, Mrs. P – don’t worry, it’s decaf.” Judy joined us in the den and set the coffee down.

I listened to Judy and Mrs. P for several minutes, restraining the impulse to start asking my questions: How long did you teach in Hubbards, Mrs. Publicover? What was it like to teach every child in
the community, to know every family from birth to death? Tell me
about Judy as a student, as the daughter of your friend Frances.
Tell me about how you taught children in a two-room school. Tell
me your stories.

Judy, as usual, was skipping through conversation topics at top
speed, her quick mind fastforwarding to each memory before I could
stop her with a question. She was obviously, in spite of the years
that separated them, a good friend of Mrs. P's and yet, as I
watched and listened, I wondered if I sensed more than friendship.
Judy had often talked of Mrs. P's influence on her, as a student and
later as a teacher. It was in Mrs. P's class where Judy began to
love history, and where she began to form her own beliefs about
teaching and learning. It struck me, as I sat in the den with these
two women – whose combined years in the community totalled more
than one hundred – just how closely their lives as teacher, mother,
daughter, friend, mentor and student were intertwined. They had
shared so much in thirty-nine years. The most I could share on this
cold winter morning was their conversation, coffee, and a muffin.
In nineteen years of teaching in Hubbards, Isabel Publicover has seen the local school through several transformations. The first school was on the site of what is now the Anchorage cabins, next to Isabel's home; the second, a temporary location in the community hall where Judy attended kindergarten for a short time, was on Schwartz Road, not far from the plot of land where Judy and Paul would eventually build. The third location of the school, built in 1954 and named for J.D. Shatford, is where the school now stands, on the main road (No. 3 highway) near the end of the Conrad's Road loop. Since it was first built, the school has had a piece added on twice to accommodate the large families and the influx of young people making Hubbards a home.

Judy's first classroom in Shatford School was the room in which her son, Jeremy, started grade primary over thirty years later. During Heritage Week at the school this year, the hallway was decorated with old photographs of years and students gone by, the class registers filled with names we now see in the telephone book and on cemetery plots: Harnish, Publicover, Shatford, Coolen, Snair, Westhaver, Dorey, and Simms. Many students in the school can pick
out their aunt, their father, a second cousin, or a local merchant in
the class list or from among the smiling faces in the photographs.

When I walked the halls of the school that week, I was on a data
hunt, and I looked long and hard at the black and white images on
the wall. These young people with their hands folded and their hair
slicked or curled tightly were the same people I know now, thirty
years later, in well-worn bodies, with expanding waistlines and
greying temples. There was Judy, and Anne Hare. Rhys Harnish. I
wanted to walk inside the photograph, pull up a chair on the other
side of the camera, go back to the classroom after the picture was
taken, walk home with them after school. What did Judy remember
of those days?

“The only thing I can remember clearly about my grade one teacher,
Chauncey Publicover, was that she was very strict and she pulled my
ear,” recalls Judy. “And in grade two and three – our classroom was
where the library is now – I won prizes for spelling. That was
Esther Dorey’s class, Anne’s mother. We did flashcards in math and
I was always the first to yell out the answer.
“Gracie Conrad was our teacher in grade four and five – she was a riot. She was Baden’s spinster sister, and she spoke in a real low voice and wore silk slips and see-through blouses with no bra. Can you imagine? That’s the kind of thing that kids remember.

“I can’t remember grade six. Grade seven through eleven I had Isabel Publicover for English and History. And Elmer Brownell, we called him Elmer Fudd, who taught French so badly, I failed it when I got to university. There was the science teacher with psoriasis, and the principal who got some high school girl in Mahone Bay pregnant.”

A copy of Mrs. P’s favorite history book, *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*, is in Judy’s bookshelf in the den. It was the copy owned by Judy’s mother, Frances Homans, who has been Isabel’s friend for over fifty years.

“See up there?” Judy is pointing at the top of the bookshelf. “I keep my old school books up there. Do you remember Bunga of the
“I remember Pedro of the Andes,” said Mrs. P. “That was a great way to teach a country, I thought – to follow around a child in his own land. It made it real for students. When I taught geography I drove the janitor crazy because I’d have the students make paper mache relief maps. That was the best way to learn geography, and the messiest. I remember doing a theme on pioneers and making a saw mill in the classroom. When I went to school, I had teachers who held up a book and read from it and expected you to regurgitate it. I didn’t want to teach that way. I loved history and geography.”

“Well, it rubbed off on me,” said Judy. Later, she commented that Mrs. P. was probably responsible for her love of travelling, her interest in people and history. “She’s probably the reason why I became a history teacher.” When she was in high school, Judy spent a lot of time in her room reading. A friend of Judy’s mother remarked, “I laughed because Frances was determined to find out just what kind of books her daughter had her nose into. She was
surprised to find out they were historical novels.”

"You were always a good student, Judy," said Mrs. P. "You had an excellent memory, almost photographic, but you always blurted out the answer before I even finished asking the question. You always finished your work faster than anyone."

"I did have a good memory. I never thought I had a good imagination but I could remember everything – where the words were on the page, what picture was there. I memorized everything. I was always in the top three of my class. It was always a race–Susan Harnish, Christine Doull and me. I probably would have been at the top of my class but I always talked, and I don’t think my writing was very good."

Ruth Publicover, Isabel’s daughter, has been Judy’s friend since high school. I asked Judy what became of all the good students from the area. Seven students, including Judy, were the first grade twelve graduating class from Shatford. Most of the students who went to university from high school were women, and most of them,
including Ruth and Judy, became teachers. I wondered about Mrs. P.'s influence on them all.

"She was a good teacher, and like a mother to me in many ways. She made history come alive and I think that she may have influenced how I believe kids should be taught. When our babysitter Megan was assigned a twenty page essay on the causes of World War I, I was really ticked off. That kind of assignment just makes kids go to the library and plagiarize. I always give the kids a statement they have to agree or disagree with. They have to do some reading so they can form an opinion. They have to collect facts to support what they believe. They have to get involved. I think that's what made Mrs. P. such a good teacher. She got us involved."

The muffins and the coffee were gone, and Judy and I walked Mrs. P. to the door. She and Frances were leaving at the end of the week on a bus trip to Florida and she had many things to do. The distance to her house, just behind Judy's facing the cove, would take her several slow minutes of walking.
As she inched down the steps in the snow, I thought that I have never known one of my teachers as well as Judy knows Mrs. P. Nor has any teacher known me as well. There must be a warmth, a comfort, in so many years of shared stories, of so much mutual history. I wondered if Judy always found it a comfort, or whether she ever felt it was a cage.

Judy put more coffee on, and we sat at the table and talked.
2.3 At Home

Around the House

We are having a coffee, Judy, Paul and I, as we sit around their wooden dining room table in the house they built over twelve years ago. Home is the centre of Judy’s life; her family and friends gather around this table often to share her coffee and conversation. But for Judy, home is more than this multi-level structure on Schwartz Road; it is Hubbards itself – children, friends, the daily stuff of life in the small community where she grew up.

The house has the feel of a large summer cottage, with high wooden ceilings and several levels, and to me, it is becoming as comfortable as my own home. It is filled with the clutter I see in homes where children and activity are priorities, not tidiness and order. The dining room wall is covered with the boys’ artwork and school projects – Jeremy’s worksheet with a star on it, his line drawing of a cat, Jeffrey’s pictures of Jeremy’s puppet, one of Jeffrey’s felt pen drawings. From the table, I can see the drawings and reminders on the refrigerator door, the record of “Jeffrey’s Alowens” in Jeffrey’s
own printing, a list of Paul's bird carvings. The telephone area is
piled high with bills, notices, telephone messages, order forms, and
coupons. On the corkboard is a birthday card, Ruth's address, two
recipes, and a milk price list. Snapshots of family and friends are
taped on the cupboard doors above. The calendar is marked with
reminders of outings, library dates, and school activities.

The kitchen, like mine, seems as filled with words and paper as it is
with dishes; because of this, when I first visited the Hopkins'
kitchen, I found it more immediately appealing to me than any
others in the neighborhood. I've always wondered what other people
did with all their paper, and Paul and Judy's home made me ask the
same questions again; were tidy, paperless people more in control of
their lives, less reverent of, or reliant on, print? Or did they
simply have more time to maintain order? Does the evidence of a
literate life always spill out on to the counter, spread over the
couch, creep along the bedroom floor?

In the living room area, a newspaper and several magazines are on
the coffee table and the couch. The den beyond has bookshelves to
the ceiling and the hearth of the fireplace is usually stacked with Parents magazine, Good Housekeeping, MacLean's, and wildlife publications, which Judy tries to clear away regularly. "I have so much clutter in my life. I'm good at clutter," she says.

Paul's wood carvings, mostly ducks, are displayed around the house. Each year, he adds more birds to his repertoire, and because of the quality of the workmanship, the demand for them continues to increase at craft shows and in the community. Judy claims that she has no creativity at all; the boys' interest in art and wildlife spring from their father. Together, the family watches wildlife programs on television, reads magazines and books about nature, and often attends museums and displays.

Evidence of this interest in nature is everywhere in the house, from the artwork on the walls to the brochures and catalogues on the table. Every year, Paul goes deer and rabbit hunting with his brother, and Judy looks forward to rabbit pie over the Christmas season. During the summer, Paul and Judy raise chickens in a coop behind the house; they slaughter them in August and freeze them
for winter meals.

Around the Community

Paul is reading a letter from the craft show organizers as we sit over Judy’s ever-present pot of decaffeinated coffee. The conversation is in snippets – I am used to both of them talking to me at once, picking up on each other’s words, changing topic in mid-stream, coming back to make another point. We are talking about people in Hubbards and I am trying to understand how they see the community.

For the last ten or fifteen years, Hubbards has been a growth area, attracting young people wanting to raise a family away from the city. Land was cheaper here than it was in suburban Halifax, and couples could build their own home in an acre of woods only five minutes away from a bank, a post office, a clinic, and a library. In a part of Canada where history goes back over three hundred and fifty years, Hubbards was a safe frontier, a place to homestead not far from home.
Many people were sons and daughters of established Hubbards families: Judy's parents, the Simms, raised five children here; there are the Dores, the Pickrems, the Publicovers, the Conrads, the Corkums and the Harnishes whose children stayed to make their homes nearby. Other young people came from Halifax or from places along the South Shore such as Boutilier's Point or Tantallon. Some knew each other from high school in the city, graduated, married, and bought land in the Hubbards area. Others, like us, were truly outsiders, moving in from the west, from Scotland, Montreal, or distant parts of the province. They, too, chose an acre or more of land and began to raise their families.

Judy has seen the growth and the change over the last fifteen years, and believes that the children have been the glue to bring these incoming groups together. Like most of the baby boom generation who have become parents, these families are concerned with the quality of life for their children. Hubbards, with access to city activities and amenities, and yet with the rural sense of community, affords families a haven, a place to create a home and a
sense of belonging.

The community was built as the children grew; Judy and Paul helped start a nursery school, someone started the first Home and School Association, a Cub and Brownie pack, a baseball team. Children played together and parents worked, sharing tips for digging a well, getting the most efficient wood stove, buying lumber at the best price. Many of the men hunted together and drank, the women held cookie parties, and baby showers, and helped each other with child care. Judy participated as fully as she could in the family and community activities during those years, but unlike most of the women in the neighborhood, she had a full-time job in the city.

Now that a decade has passed, the children are growing, attending elementary and junior high school, and as their parents, the young couples of fifteen years ago are approaching middle age.

The sense of the community that Judy and Paul have - and I have as a relatively new resident - is one of consolidation. The lawns are now established, the shrubbery is thicker, and the foundations
dug into the rocky soil have become roots. Everyone knows most everyone else, their habits and their foibles. They have fifteen years of stories they have written together, of shared meanings and understanding. As newcomers join the community, they are welcomed, but the invitation is more to join a play in progress, rather than to help set the stage. Many of the roles have already been cast.

"There are two groups of people in this community," says Paul. "When you drop into their home during the day, one group will offer you a coffee and the other group will offer you a beer." When he was younger, Paul used to drink with many of the men in the community. "But some of them never grew up. They're still drinking, running around at night on their ATV's, or sitting in the Seabreeze pub. Most of them are alcoholics of one sort or another. In many ways, they never left high school."

As Paul spoke, I remembered that three years ago, when I moved to Hubbards, partying seemed to be the main form of adult entertainment. Parties weren't necessarily gatherings to celebrate a
birthday or a season; they were bashes, reminiscent of those in university days, when dozens of people trucked cases of beer down the basement steps of someone's home, to dance and drink until the ashtrays were full, the potato chips were overturned, and someone passed out in a corner of the laundry room. Drinking seemed, especially in the summer, to be a way to pass the weekend in Hubbards: soak up the heat on the beach in the afternoon, work off the heat at Saturday night's party – before or after the dance at The Shore Club – and spend Sunday sharing hang-over stories and sampling "the hair of the dog." Although parties are fewer and more restrained now, the alcohol problems in Hubbards remain; Judy knows many stories of troubled marriages and abuse.

Many of the young people who started homes in Hubbards fifteen years ago have settled into what Judy and Paul call "more responsible lives." They are serving as trustees on the school board, organizing activities for children, and settling into making a good life for their families. "You'll notice that the drinkers aren't the ones involved in education or schooling," said Paul. "Generally, I'd say that the more literate members of the community aren't in this
drinking crowd. They’re social drinkers."

Judy agrees with Paul’s perceptions of the men in the community, but sees the women in the community as falling into two different categories. There are those who talk and complain (about the church, the school, community activities, etc.), who are generally undependable; and those who “put their money where their mouth is,” and are dependable, active, and constructive. As president of the Home and School Association, a library worker, and a Sunday school teacher, Judy has heard many women in the community criticize everything from the church minister, to schoolground supervision, to the way local activities are organized. As she sees it, most of the women in the community “sit back and complain and wait for someone else to do it.” A rare few will show initiative, see a project to its conclusion, or participate for the benefit of the children or the community. Most women, according to Judy, are just as happy to see someone else do the work. “And then they still complain.” We discussed several women whom we both perceived as the “doers” of the community, and Judy and I agreed that their lives were more active, and their attitude more
constructive than many others in the neighborhood.

In fact, as Paul, Judy and I discussed the neighborhood further, and as I pooled information from conversations elsewhere in the community, it seemed that the active, constructive members of Hubbards were the men and women who were least likely to have an alcohol problem, most likely to be involved in school, church, and children's activities, and least likely to complain without also offering help or suggestions for improvement. It would be too simple, we agreed, to divide Hubbards in half by these categories, but there were differences in the population: there was the segment who believed that problems were caused by (and meant to be solved) by other people; and there was the group that took work into its own hands. Hubbards was probably no different from most societies in that way; and Paul and Judy's perceptions, of males and females separately, seemed to pivot on one word: responsibility. My observations confirmed Paul's comment; those who contributed to the quality of life in the area were not only the most responsible, they had established homes where schooling (and perhaps reading and writing) played a large part.
Occasionally, Judy is subdued, tired, or unhappy and has moments when she is, in her words "not with it." Those moments are few and far between. For the most part, Judy Hopkins is an explosion of energy and talk, a dynamo of activity, someone who can inject life in a dying social event and wake up the bored and the boring. The twinkle in her eye, combined with her rapid fire delivery of straight talk and good humour, draws people to her. She is an attractive woman, more handsome than pretty, with short, dark hair and a dark complexion. Like many Maritime women, she is practical and "no nonsense" in nature. Her lack of interest in vanities and superficial matters appealed to me; she is not the kind of woman, for example, who would ever organize a Mary Kay cosmetics party. She likes to look good, however, and dresses smartly, without frills or affectation. She worries about her weight, both for reasons of health and for her feelings of well-being. Because of her love of high calorie foods, especially chocolate, and her gift for making gourmet desserts, Judy constantly battles to be fit and slim; she walks, takes aerobics classes, and collects information on healthy diets.
Judy is well-known in the community, and well-liked. During the months of observation, I kept my eyes and ears open for information about her; whenever her name was mentioned, it was with affection or regard ("bad-mouthing" is not a common practice in the community, however, especially to newcomers such as me). People use phrases such as "heart of gold," "salt of the earth," to describe Judy, and comment on her whirlwind energy level.

Our friendship developed as the research continued, and I began to see a side of Judy I hadn’t seen before. Underneath the high energy and the straight talk was a sensitive, caring person, who was both fragile and compassionate. Her compassion poured out several times to me: when our youngest was born, a tiny, malnourished infant with birth difficulties, she told stories of her sons’ births, her second baby’s death, her hope – all to comfort me and encourage me. When the second floor of our house was destroyed by fire, she was at the site an hour later, with suitcases full of clean clothes, and laundry baskets to take away the childrens’ clothing to be washed. Throughout the following months of
reconstruction, she continued her offers of help. I began to see her compassion and understanding appear elsewhere, in her comments about other women’s situations or about children, for example. She is not a publicly sentimental or emotional person; everything is hidden behind the straight talk and off-hand humour.

Paul describes his wife as “soft-hearted, sensitive, caring, a good mother, and financially practical.” Paul’s quiet, relaxed manner is a foil to Judy’s dynamic activity and the two have developed a strong bond in fourteen years. Judy, who has two Bachelor’s degrees, and Paul, a high school drop out three years her junior, married in spite of her mother’s refusal to attend the wedding.

“We gave her the option right up to the last minute,” said Paul. “We even sent her flowers to the house on the day of the wedding. But she stayed away, and (Judy’s father) Roddie had to stay away too, or he would have been in real trouble with his wife. Isabel Publicover was like a mother to Judy throughout everything. Frances thought that Judy was wasting her life, marrying someone who didn’t have high school and who wore a moustache and faded jeans. She didn’t speak to us for three years.”

During our discussions over coffee, Judy and I often compared notes
about our mothers. We both had critical, unaffectionate mothers who wanted us to succeed, to attend university, to make something of ourselves. When we did, we were impaled on our own achievements: the reality of our succeeding made them more critical, and created a greater chasm.

For Judy, the chasm is difficult to bridge. Her mother lives a quarter mile down the road, and in such a small community, theirs is a public estrangement.

Paul claims that Frances is simply jealous of her daughter. Frances was pregnant when she married, stayed home with five children, and saw her daughter do things she had always wanted to do – travel to Europe, take a summer job at a mountain resort, make a decent wage. The topic of mothers is one that Judy and I return to often; it has established a bond between us. As I gathered information about Judy’s reading and writing, her attitudes toward schooling and life, I began to see that Judy’s estrangement from her mother explained a great deal about her personality and her approach to life. I was certain the connection to her literacy was there as well.
2.4 Daily Literacy

Perspectives on Literacy

Judy defines literacy as "learning for the sake of learning, having a general interest in people, places, new ideas. A literate person reads and writes beyond what is required to maintain their lifestyle."

Illiterate people can still function and maintain their lives, Judy believes, but they can't do much else; their options are restricted. Literate people, on the other hand, have opportunities open to them. There are degrees of literacy, Judy says; the more we use our reading and writing to improve our lives, the more literate we are.

Judy distinguishes between academic sense and common sense, and believes that literacy should include some common sense, or it is meaningless. Paul agrees. "You don't have to have a lot of education to be literate. There are people with university degrees who are pretty stupid. My grandfather was literate, as far as I'm concerned, and he never went to school. He was probably the smartest man I knew, and he was self-taught."
Judy's family was as literate as any family in Hubbards during the Fifties and Sixties. The newspaper from Halifax came every day. Their mail consisted of bills, letters, and a regular selection from the Book of the Month Club. Frances didn't have much time to read – she was a telephone operator and was active in the Home and School Association and the Catholic women's organization. Judy's father, Roddie, read westerns, but of his five children, only his daughter was interested in reading. Judy read the usual – Nancy Drew, Cherry Ames, Tarzan, Annette Funicello, and L.M. Montgomery books. She also read the historical novels from the Book of the Month collection in the house. "I loved to read," she said. "My mother would have liked me to be interested in knitting and sewing, but I never was."

Like many young girls, Judy kept a diary and an autograph book in junior high. Occasionally she wrote to her cousin in Montreal or to her friend Tannis, but for the most part, she never wrote for the sake of writing. "Probably my only writing outside of school assignments was the notes we passed back and forth in school. I
don't remember writing any original pieces and having them put up on the wall at school. I was an excellent speller, but not a creative writer. When I was older, I used writing to study; I wrote and rewrote my notes, condensing them each time — I was very methodical — and I got good grades. I was always among the top three in my class. I used writing to study because the more you write something down, the more you remember it."

Anne Hare, a woman Judy went to school with and the daughter of another of Judy's teachers, was surprised that Judy couldn't remember doing weekly compositions in high school. They were frustrating for Anne, but "obviously made no impression on me," says Judy, "because I didn't even remember doing them."

"I hated writing," says Paul. After they were married, Paul went to university as a mature student to do a Bachelor's degree in physical education. He claims he was never good at writing, and Judy was, so she made corrections or re-wrote the papers to help him finish school. "You should have seen some of the stuff he wrote," Judy teases him. Over the last year or so, since Paul has taken
management courses through the Fire Department, Judy has proofread Paul's papers and reports and made suggestions for improvement.

"I always ask 'what are you trying to say?' or 'isn't there something missing here?' and then he does the rewriting himself." Recently, Paul completed a major report on his own which earned him an A; the professor has incorporated it in his course materials. "Paul's going to have it bronzed," Judy jokes. Both, however, are pleased with Paul's success in the management program. Both believe education and literacy can be tools for success and both knew, in spite of his mother-in-law's lack of faith, that Paul was capable all along.

Although both Paul and Judy believe education is important for self-growth and career advancement, it is Judy who most actively promotes education and literacy in the home. She frequently helps the boys with their schoolwork to extend the learning that is taking place in the classroom. Her conversation with the boys is sometimes metacognitive; that is, she talks not only about the subject matter
itself, but about its organization and strategies for learning and understanding it.

The boys frequently write lists and notes at her encouragement, and papers, pens, and crayons are always available for spontaneous art and craft projects. Reading is part of the day; the boys regularly take books from the library and attend library programs. Judy has read bedtime stories to both Jeffrey and Jeremy since they were babies; Jeremy, as the youngest and Judy's "buddy," is especially fond of this daily event. Book characters become part of the conversation between Judy and the boys; and, in turn, their toys—Jeremy's stuffed cat, for example—have become characters in the story life of their daily conversation.

Like many teachers, and especially those who consider literacy to be important, Judy is a language watchdog. Many of our conversations have been exchanges of literacy horror stories—the young resource teacher's note riddled with spelling errors, the ungrammatical notices printed on the local cable channel, the principal's wordy and awkward notices home to parents, the proliferation of misspelled
signs in the community. Accuracy and clear, grammatical writing is important to Judy and she will notice a spelling error where others don't.

**Daily Literacy**

On a typical day, Judy is up by seven to prepare breakfast and make lunches for the boys and has sent them off to school by eight. She gets dressed and takes the dog for a walk down Schwartz Road to the No. 3 highway and then up to the Post Office where she picks up the daily mail. Home again, she makes a cup of coffee and looks at the mail. After throwing out the advertisements and the junk mail, she may pay one of the bills if it is due, and leave the others in the pile by the telephone.

If it's a Monday or a Wednesday, Judy will get ready to drive to the aerobics class at the old Black Point School. If it's a Friday, she will likely work a morning shift as a volunteer in the school library. She works two afternoons a week in the Shatford Public Library, teaches Sunday School on Sunday mornings in the Anglican Church,
and, as President of the organization this year, meets with the Home and School Association at the school once a month.

Each of these activities require some reading and writing but none of it, Judy says, "is concentrated." Since she quit full-time teaching over two years ago, Judy has become involved in a number of community and family activities; her daily writing and reading now, she says, "aren't things I really have to be accountable for." Occasionally, she will read a novel – usually historical fiction – but that will be when the day's work is done, never mid-day. "I feel guilty for sitting and reading when there's so much to do around the house. Doing nothing, to me, means not using my hands."

During the day, however, she finds a few minutes now and then to reads articles, especially about child-raising, in one of the many magazines she subscribes to or borrows from the library. She reads recipes during the day as well "because I love food," and often reads the recipe "right through, to see whether I'd like it and if I have the ingredients." During her work at the library, she will read card catalogue information, and other library material necessary to do her work; she often browses through books as she sorts and stacks them
to find out what's new or different on the shelves. When she is
called to substitute teach in high school history, she must read the
material left by the teacher in order to plan and teach the material
that day. In the evening, she will read the paper—headline stories,
some ads, comics, and short articles of interest—and bed-time
stories to the boys. If Paul has a paper due, she may read his work
so far and offer suggestions.

Judy's daily writing consists mostly of lists—of things that must be
done that day, of groceries, of items to order—because "I don't use
my brain as well as I used to." It is common for her to have a
dozen items to complete in her daily activities for home and
community and she finds lists essential because "when I'm really
busy, my mind diverges—I need to stay focussed." She writes
recipes frequently, either those she is copying for her own use, or
those she is passing along to a friend.

Notes to the teacher or to herself are just "tossed off. But
anything that's going to the public—such as for the Home and
School or the Block Parent program—and anything that's more than
one line long, I write it and then rewrite it to make sure that it’s
in half decent English.” Occasionally, Judy has letters to friends
that she must write, but, for the most part, her daily writing
requirements are very little. Her public writing is usually clear and
direct, and, typical of most adults her generation, often written in
the passive voice to sound “more businesslike.” The notices she has
written for the Home and School are concise and straightforward,
and all the samples of her writing I collected, including a letter to
an old friend upon his decision to enter the priesthood, were clear
and direct. Occasionally, like many adults whose writing demands
are few, her writing shifts in tone or doesn’t equal the fluency of
her speech. Of all the adults in the community whose writing I
have read, however, Judy’s is among the most articulate. “I can’t
stand it when people can’t even write a sentence,” Judy says.

One winter morning Judy was up early, as usual, to get the boys off
to school. She made Jello Lite so it would be ready later in the
day, and read the box to see if Aspartame was the ingredient that
made it “lite.” As the boys dressed and had breakfast, she wrote
notes to their teachers to let them know that the boys would be
picked up by another parent. After the boys left, she sat at the table with her cup of coffee and wrote a list of things to do for the day as well as a grocery list. She browsed through Shape magazine and read an article on kitchen appliances; she and Paul were considering buying a food processor. Before she got ready to leave for exercise class, Judy put a load of laundry in and read the instructions on the Fleecy bottle.

At exercise class at the old Black Point school, Judy read the notice board for any interesting items. When class was over, she went to Nancy's, as she often does, for a coffee and some conversation. While drinking her coffee, she read an article on the dangers of caffeine: "That obviously didn't stop me," she said.

When she left Nancy's she picked up the mail at the post office, looked at the Save-Easy ad and the junk mail, and then added two items to her grocery list before she went shopping.

That evening, Judy relaxed with the newspaper for a half-hour, then read Creatures of the Night to Jeremy, as well as Inside Out.
Outside In and A Visit with the Reptile Man. Together they read instructions on how to make a crawl-along alligator and planned how they would go about it. When Jeremy was asleep, Judy wrote a list of things to do for the rest of the evening, one of which was to bake muffins. She read the index in the recipe book to find a recipe for banana muffins and while she was making them, read the clock, the measuring cup, and other usual indicators for baking. About the same time, Paul was measuring the dining room for wallpaper and she recorded the figures as he called them out. Jeff's rough draft of a story for school was to be typed by the secretary the next day, and so Judy took a few minutes to edit it for mechanical errors.

With the household duties complete for the day, Judy read the schedule for substitute teaching the next morning. She read and took notes on an article entitled "Liberal Interlude" about Canadian government in the 1870's, skimmed one on industries in Canada for geography class and read a chapter from a job search guide for the careers course. Once her reading was done, she made an outline for the students and herself on the material that needed to be covered.
By the time Judy finished, it was close to midnight. There was no
time for reading in bed; morning would come soon enough and
tomorrow would be another busy day.
2.5 Whole Language

"Don't you start. I'm telling you, lady, if you stir up trouble again this year, I'm going to be furious. You never say anything positive. Teachers are people, too; they make mistakes, just like all of us. Give them a chance. I'm tired of your complaints."

The Rumoli group fell silent. Normally the conversation centred on the card game at hand, local news, children and community activities, but tonight they had begun to talk about the new approaches to teaching reading and writing. Judy was angry, and Rosalie was the target.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education recently implemented what has become known as a "whole language" curriculum for the language arts, a curriculum which promotes "student-centred," individualized work in the writing and reading processes. The curriculum is a departure from the lecture, basal, and worksheet approach, and its concepts were new to the parents in Hubbards. Parents - especially the mothers - of children at Shatford School suddenly had to come
face to face with their beliefs about language and learning. What was this “new” way of teaching? What was wrong with the “old” way?

Judy’s Monday night Rumoli group included friends such as Anne Hare and Donna Tobin whom she grew up with, Charlene and her sister, Candy, whom Judy has known for years, and Rosalie, who moved to Hubbards from Boutilier’s Point about fifteen years ago. Rosalie has, by her own admission, “the gift of the gab.” No one can tease Rosalie about her computer memory for gossip or her “smart mouth” – she will describe herself that way. But people in Hubbards have been known to get angry at Rosalie when she oversteps her bounds; when she “bad mouths” someone on little information, for example. Tonight was one of those times that Rosalie had gone too far.

Whole language in Hubbards was turning into one of the most contentious issues ever faced by Shatford School and, as president of the Home and School Association, Judy felt as though she was in the centre of a storm of controversy. She was getting heat from all
sides and was frustrated. At one point, she said, "I don't know why we can't all get along."

Bill, the principal, became angry at Judy one day in the school library because she had sent the teachers a list of long overdue books to collect from the students. Judy thought her request was reasonable ("kids have to learn to be responsible"); Bill, whose understanding of the philosophy underlying whole language was still developing, ranted at Judy because he believed that Judy's request for immediate return of the books would create a negative attitude about reading. Under pressure from the school board to promote reading and writing, Bill was striking out at everything.

The vice-principal, a woman who has also taught whole language courses through a university in Halifax, was going through a divorce at the time. Known as a "radical" whole language promoter, she was battling teachers reluctant to change, a principal who was opposed to her undiplomatic approaches, and parents, who came to her regularly with questions about her teaching and about whole language in general. She was often blunt and impatient, and parents
became alarmed and angry. Judy heard their complaints about her
regularly. Rosalie's complaint was the last straw.

"I've had it with her trouble-making,' she said to me the week of
the Rumoli game. But I also wondered as I heard louder and more
frequent complaints from community members about whole language
whether Judy was equally frustrated with the situation as she was
with Rosalie.

As a former full-time teacher and now a substitute teacher, Judy
knew the pressures faced daily by teachers, the push from the
school board to implement new policies and curricula, the watchful
and unforgiving eyes of parents and colleagues, the forces that take
a teacher's attention away from the most important task of all:
teaching the children. As a parent and one who excelled in school
- especially in reading, writing, and spelling - Judy understood
parents' concerns about "invented spelling," first draft journals, and
noisy classrooms; and, equally, understood their questions about
language as process, not content.
As a life-long resident of the community and a friend of many of the parents, Judy couldn’t ignore the concerns of people she saw daily, at the store, on the road, in church. Anne Hare had “had it” with both the principal and the caretaker, and vowed never to set foot in the school again. Judy’s sister-in-law, whose daughter had entered junior high “with an inferior education from Shatford School” worried that the whole language philosophy, and the vice-principal’s teaching, was the cause of her daughter’s poor performance in junior high English. Pam Dauphinee, a woman known for her irrational behaviour, threatened to mortgage her house to send her children to a private school in the city.

As Home and School President, Judy frequently heard complaints about the vice-principal, other teachers, the whole language curriculum, playground supervision, and the principal. Whole language, however, seemed to be the issue that served to unite everyone in disagreement. Judy suggested that the Home and School provide information meetings about whole language so that parents could learn more about the curriculum and could have a forum for discussion. She invited me to hold a workshop for interested
parents one winter evening; and invited the curriculum supervisor for the school board to attend one month later, to field questions about the curriculum itself.

Judy's vision in the eye of the storm seemed clear; she wanted to get everyone together, have them learn something, share concerns, and turn what was a negative feeling in the community to a positive, forward-looking attitude about teachers and curriculum. She wanted to see constructive action, not destructive back-biting.

Throughout it all, Judy was learning, too. She read about whole language, talked with a number of people, and had several brief chats with me about whole language teaching. As I observed her in the ensuing months, I wondered whether the whole language issue in Hubbards, however upsetting, had been good for her. It seemed to help her crystallize her beliefs, and to take strength from them, enough strength to withstand the stress of seeing the school under fire, and friends at each other's throats.

"A couple of years ago, I quit teaching because it was affecting my
health. And I decided then I had to do a job on my mind. I had to learn to relax about things. I’ve decided also that I’m not going to panic about every little thing like some people do. It’s not worth it. Teachers are all different, and people are different, and we can’t all agree all the time. Before Rosalie knows it, her kids will have graduated and turned out just fine.”
2.6 Learning and Teaching

Shortly after the whole language issue became somewhat less contentious in the community, Judy and I talked about children and schooling. In her day, and in mine, the emphasis in the language arts classroom was on correct spelling and on correct grammar. Nowadays, as Judy says, "the emphasis is not so much on correctness, but on the story, or what they have learned in their reading, or what they've done in the process." While Judy recalls "Tom and Betty" and "about fifty million worksheets" as being the core of her reading and writing education, she sees Jeremy, her youngest, learning from "big books," writing and drawing regularly in a journal, and talking about what they write.

Several hallmarks of the new curriculum, she thinks, serve her children well. An emphasis on writing allows Jeffrey to use his active imagination, and an emphasis on reading a variety of books, not just basals, is more consistent with the boys' reading habits. "When you read different books," she claims, "you can't memorize like you could with Tom and Betty - you really have to learn to
read. And let's face it, that's eventually what they'll have to learn to do in life, to read real books."

It had taken her a year or two, however, to see the benefits of this program with her children. At first, she was concerned about both Jeffrey's and Jeremy's penmanship. She remembered how important neatness, precision, and repetition were in her schooling and was initially alarmed when those qualities did not seem to receive the same attention in her children's classroom. "When Jeffrey first went to school, I really had to chew my tongue; but it all came together. He's improved one hundred percent."

Judy sees current literacy instruction as focusing on what children can do, rather than focusing on their errors. For Jeremy, who likes telling stories, this approach encourages his writing. "He wrote just a couple of letters and he thought it was super-dooper."

The new curriculum can make teaching more difficult, however. With each child working on his or her own piece of writing and reading different books, the teacher must focus on the individual:
one lesson won’t do for all. As a result, many whole language
classrooms include parent volunteers as part of the program. We
speculated how well volunteers would work at Shatford School. With
a history of critical parents, and with some staff members resistant
to change, the idea did not seem promising.

Judy is pleased with her boys’ progress, and believes that the new
program will foster independent thinking in children. She wants
them to be well-rounded people, to enjoy learning, and to find
reading and writing interesting pursuits.

“When they’re older, I want them to be able to use their minds. I
don’t think we were capable of thinking things through very well,
which accounts for why so many people our age have difficulty
writing. We couldn’t even discuss in a university seminar class
because our minds weren’t helped to mature in thinking skills. All
we did in school was memorize and regurgitate.” The schools, Judy
believes, can play a part in making children adaptable and capable
of making their own decisions.
We talked about other forces that made our lives and schooling different from those of our children. Our parents, for example, mirrored many of the attitudes of the school while we were growing up. Our parents were concerned about our physical well-being; they ensured that we were neat, clean, and orderly, but not that we understood the reasons for the events around us. As Judy says, “We always had clean sheets and good meals and clean clothes, but there wasn’t any of this ‘let’s sit down and talk about this’ or ‘what’s bothering you?’, at least not in my house.” Judy and I agreed that once our children are grown, we hope they will want to talk with us as easily as they do now. “Many of us don’t have good memories of our childhood. I want my children to remember how we discussed cartoons or nature programs or the times we went to the museum or camping. I also want them to know that I can respect them.”

Judy recalls a recent incident with Jeffrey. He had bought a GI Joe toy with his own money, a small figure with a little gun attached. “We’re not too crazy about GI Joe but it was his money.” Jeffrey quickly lost the little gun.
"And man, wasn't he dirty," Judy recalls. "When Jeremy ran by and accidentally bumped into him, he hauled off and kicked him. So we had to have a talk about understanding why he was angry and not taking it out on his little brother. He had to learn to accept the consequences of his actions.

"Our parents never let us make those mistakes. They would have told us what we could buy. No arguments. And they never would have tried to get into my mind to find out why I had kicked my brother, and to help me understand how to control my behaviour. They would have punished me, no questions asked."

The same change in attitude appears in the classroom. Teachers today, Judy believes, tend to take the whole child into consideration, not just isolated behaviour. "When we went to school, we were pupils." We were treated, she thinks, as if we had no life outside the classroom. Both parents and teachers in our day were afraid to take risks, especially, as Judy says, with our minds. "And that's what you have to take risks with." The previous generation felt more pressure to maintain the norm. They couldn't make mistakes
because the neighbors, or parents, would talk and pass judgement. Nowadays, it's not as important to be seen as right and perfect all the time."

We talked about discipline, both inside and outside the classroom. Judy claims "you can keep control and get respect and still show some flexibility." Then what makes a good teacher? I ask her.

"Someone who loves kids. Has a good sense of humour. Can accept people for who they are – strong or weak. Someone who can count to ten – a lot. Someone who is willing to get down on their hands and knees on the floor and to participate. Someone who has enough knowledge to interest the student in whatever the area being studied and inspire them to go on for more. But someone who is able to keep just that much difference between student and teacher so that they know that he or she is to be respected. If the teacher doesn't like the kids, and doesn't respect them and doesn't allow them to be individuals, then he or she will have a problem. And if you can't be flexible, you can't be a teacher."
Judy also believes that children can learn from each other, and that teachers can learn to relax more about their own role as the person who must know everything. “Take five kids who are fairly good at one thing. Put them in a group and let them help each other with a problem. That’s where we do most of our learning anyway, from other people. You can get academic learning from books and from teachers but a lot of the important things in life are learned from other people. Kids can share their knowledge.”

Where being parents and teachers is concerned, “we have to learn to let go, to be more flexible.”

“I have a favorite saying that describes teaching for me – and I guess being a parent as well. It’s by Voltaire or Montesquieu, I think: ‘He who is merely just is severe.’”

“My favorite,” I add, “is ‘Argue for your limitations and they’re yours’.”

“Ain’t that the truth.” Judy laughs.
2.7 A Literate Life

It’s nine-thirty on another cold winter night, and we have returned to Judy’s after the Home and School meeting. We are having another three-way conversation about a dozen topics and I feel restless. I have thought about Judy for weeks and decide that I must ask her some very personal questions. I know a great deal about her literacy now, but I still feel something is missing.

Judy’s literacy is rooted in home and community and the boundary between those areas, in many ways, does not exist. Her home is her community; the four walls of their house do not separate Judy from thirty-nine years of ties with the lives of the people around her. She knows the people here, their history, their daily joys and sorrows, their comings and goings. Hubbards is as familiar to her as her own kitchen. She reads the lives of people here like a book, and as an active member of the community, helps to write their lives as well. Judy is in stark contrast to me; she understands the significance of an event or a comment. I am still learning why people here do what they do and say what they say.
Judy uses talk and action more than reading and writing to make and sustain the important connections in her life. She is highly intelligent, but seldom reflective. Her quick mind and integrative powers enable her to use and to make connections with information she gathers, especially by talking and listening, and to remember facts and events with surprising accuracy.

To maintain the life she has chosen, therefore, Judy is highly literate. What reading and writing she does is accomplished with relative ease. She is able to communicate information to others in writing with no difficulty; the writing tasks are usually short and pragmatic. Her daily reading enables her to keep up with news and articles of interest, to prepare for her substitute teaching, and to promote the boys' interest in reading. Her reading and writing abilities far exceed the demand made upon them.

As we talk about the Home and School meeting, I listen to her comments and realize they are motivated by her attitude about life. She is always active and constructive, attempting to "accomplish
something" that will benefit her family or her community. Most of her daily writing and reading helps her gain knowledge about others and for others. Her literacy activities tie her to the people she cares about most.

We compare perceptions about some of the teachers, whose tendency to "work to rule" runs counter to what we want for our children. In literacy, as in life, Judy has sought perfection in an imperfect world; she can become as upset, as I do, with perceived faults, and they can range from a teacher's poor command of English to the priorities of the school board. Lately, she has begun to relax about things. Issues Judy dealt with during the period of the research tested the vow she made to herself when she quit fulltime teaching. She is learning to be more accepting of differences, relativity, and ambiguity, both in literacy in life.

I'm lost in thought. I hear Paul say. "I was told today they want to sell some of my birds in Cape Cod."

They are both excited. Judy is proud and relieved. Since she quit
full-time teaching, money is tight. "Maybe I never should have quit. But I wanted more time with my kids, my husband. Of course, my mother wasn't happy. All that money."

We talk again about her mother. About my mother. I tell another grim tale of my mother's alcoholism. Judy listens, closely. She is one of the few people I can talk to about this. We laugh about our oral habits — eating, food, recipes, nail-biting. They come from being rejected by our mothers, right?

Judy says: "I would probably be a different person if my mother didn't live in this community."

I say: "I tried to please my mother and then finally had to learn to please myself. I had to stand up to her. But my mother is thousands of miles away, so it was easier for me."

Paul lights his pipe. "If Judy stood up to her mother, Frances would make her life very difficult." He gets up from the table.
I tell Judy what's on my mind. “I’ve been looking at all the information I have about your reading and writing. I need help pulling it together, analyzing the kind of person you are and how that shapes your literacy.” I tell her how I see her reading and writing making connections to the people around her. Where is Judy in the literacy activities?

“I don’t know. I’m not sure what kind of person I am. I’m caught between being what everyone wants me to be and being what I want to be … but I’m not sure what that is, either. I want to travel some day, see the world. I want to raise my kids well. I’d like to lose weight, once and for all … I’d like to get to the point where I don’t worry about what everyone else thinks … I don’t know. There isn’t much time for my own reading and writing or for reflection – only when Paul is working and the kids are in bed. I’m so busy all the time.”

“You are,” I say. “And this is supposed to be a woman without a full-time job? You’re always doing something for somebody.” As I said this, it struck me that Judy lives the traditional vows espoused
by the community: the good daughter, the good mother and wife. I wondered if she would reach a crisis point where she needed to stand up to her mother, and if she did, what effect it would have on her activities.

"I know. I know. Maybe I do it on purpose ... maybe I keep busy so I don’t have time to think ... maybe, since I could never please her, I try to please everyone else.”
Christmas Concert

It's only a few minutes before the school Christmas concert will begin. We arrive at Shatford School, our newborn son wrapped warmly in a blanket against the cold, and our eight-year-old dressed in his blazer for his role as narrator. The auditorium is filled with about a hundred parents, toddlers, and grandparents. At the door, Yvonne Hilton asks to see the baby and hands us a concert program which the teachers have mimeographed, and the primary students have signed and coloured. Our program is signed by Kathryn Coolen, the next door neighbour's daughter. Judy has saved seats for us. Several people, including Jim and Debbie Breeze and Carol and Greg Conrad, come over to look at our tiny son and congratulate us.

The local cable company has set up their video equipment to tape the concert. Children pass back and forth near the stage in last minute preparation. The music teacher, whose creation this concert is, looks striking in a white dress and make-up; she looks around, checks her watch, and arranges the music at the piano. Above the conversation and the start-up sounds of the children's band, the principal calls for everyone's attention. I look around at the audience - Norm Collier is dressed in a good shirt, the Simms' little girl is in a frilly dress and many of the mothers are wearing their good sweaters and pants - and realize that I know most of these people. A year ago, I didn't. Several of them sent cards of congratulation when Jesse was born and many said they read the birth announcement in the Halifax paper. David was proud to see his name in print as Jesse's brother.

The principal begins to talk. "We are appreciative of the parental involvement and interest and appreciate your supportive participation of the children's efforts." He continues for several minutes, then introduces Mrs. Fougere, the music teacher. One of the grade six students presents her with bouquet of roses, and she blushes, smiles, and sets the roses on the piano. The noise in the room subsides as Mrs. Fougere sits down on the bench, signals to the stage, and plays the opening chord.
3.0 JIM

3.1 James Gordon Breeze

Age: Thirty-four
Marital Status: married sixteen years to Debbie, a part-time librarian and full-time mother and volunteer
Children: Heather, age sixteen
Janis, age eleven
Jason, age ten
Other Family: brother Richard (three years younger), parents deceased
Education: Business Administration Certificate, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Accounting, Management, and Systems Design courses, McGill and Sir George Williams Universities of Montreal
Daily Activities: Vice-President, in charge of Finance for a small gold exploration company near Halifax
Attends Anglican Church once a month
Coaches children's soccer, volunteers for community service
Former president of Shatford Home and School, former treasurer of Anglican parish, and of local recreation association
Plays baseball, curling, goes camping, sailing, canoeing
Evenings: community work, plays piano, works and plays on the computer, reads, does some beer and wine-making, sometimes brings work home
Often stays at office late and goes in on weekends.
Daily reading/writing 3 - 4 hours
3.2 Life with Father

Two black and white photographs of a man – front views of a dirty face and a clean one – are on the wall of Jim and Debbie’s new family room. The man is wearing a railway engineer’s cap; the pictures represent the steam era and the modern railway. The face looks open, pleasant, and intelligent.

“Outside the home, my father was very friendly. In fact, he used to embarrass me by talking to people on the street, sometimes strangers. My father and I met an elderly Australian at a look-out in Montreal and, much to my surprise, my father invited him back to our house for tea, and they exchanged addresses. Mr. James and my father were pen pals for years after that.

“My father also liked to party, and to have a good time. But at home he ran a tight ship. He was a responsible father, a good provider, but he was incredibly strict. There was little laughter in our house when he was alone with the family. However, he was a great joker when his friends were around. We used to have the
most horrible meal times. Terrible arguments. Everything in the house had to be done his way -- the clothes we wore, when we were to take a shower. He couldn't let go. As a result, I tried to stay away from the house when he was around. I only brought my friends in when my mother was home. My father often complained about the way the neighbors did things, or about the way a store treated customers — anything. It was as though he couldn't control the behaviour of everyone else in the world and so he made sure he controlled every move we made at home. We didn't have much of a relationship, at least not until after my mother died and Debbie and I moved away from Montreal. In a way, my father and I became closer by being further apart."

I look at the photographs again, and try to imagine Jim's father in the flesh. Like the photographs from the past that hung in Shatford School, these images are memories, rich with associations. I want to know more, to see — if only glimpse — the way Jim sees them.

On the bookshelf by the television is a high school photograph of
Jim. When he showed me the picture, I immediately laughed, but not because it was funny. It is a soft-looking picture, developed in pastel tones so common in colour photography fifteen or twenty years ago. It is a picture of innocence. At first glance, it does not look like the Jim I know now – no grey, distinguished beard, no thinning hair, no tiny lines around his eyes. But it is Jim; the open, kind expression hasn’t changed in all these years. Jim makes us tea, pours a liqueur, finds his package of MacDonald’s cigarettes, and settles in to talk.

Jim grew up in Montreal, the elder of two boys. His father started with the Canadian National Railways as a call-boy, then worked as a fireman, an engineer, a rule instructor, and a test engineer for the ill-fated “Turbo Train.” Jim remembers annual family vacations in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont when they travelled with his father in a private railway car for three weeks at a time while he instructed employees of the Grand Trunk and Central Vermont Railways.

“I’m painting a negative picture of my father, and it’s true, he often
made me furious. But there was another side to him as well, a side he didn’t always show to us. Do you know he kept a diary for about thirty years — things in it about work and family. He wrote something very touching when my mother died. They were good for each other, I think. She ran interference for us sometimes and she could set him straight when she had to. I think he was quite sensitive even though he was so firm and so obsessed with our doing things his way. My father always remembered his parents. Although they both died before I was born, he still made annual trips to Joliet, a seventy-five mile drive, to visit their graves. I admired his dedication and loyalty."

Jim was closer to his mother than his father, and recalls how reasonable a parent she was. He was kicked out of a high school dance for drinking and the next day his mother, without accusations or anger, suggested he go to the school administration the first thing Monday morning and apologize. To apologize for his behaviour, she felt, was the only decent and responsible thing to do. Jim did it and, as a result, he believes he probably escaped suspension.
A high school teacher once told Jim to stop "hiding behind his mother's skirt." He remembers his anger and hurt at that remark, and thinks now the incident may have been a turning point; he determined then to be self-sufficient and responsible.

Jim’s mother died when he was in his early twenties. His brother, Richard, had completely different interests and values from Jim’s. However, they both openly flouted their father’s control. While Jim became a family man, Richard’s job as a railroad electrician led to a position which sent him on long assignments in places such as Pakistan, Iran, and Africa.

Jim recalls the part literacy played in their household. “My father was a reader. He read every night in bed – westerns, best sellers, the Reader's Digest condensed books, the Reader’s Digest magazine. We always took the morning Gazette and the evening Star. I remember my father’s writing as being very neat.”

Like many Canadian boys of his generation, Jim read the entire set of the Hardy Boys series (“I asked for the ones I was missing at
Christmas”) as well as the current comic book favorites, Archie, Superman, Richie Rich, and Casper. He checked out the National Geographic publication for children from the school library on occasion, and often asked his mother to pick up Life magazine from the grocery store. Like most children in Canada, he looked forward to the national weekly inserts to the newspaper, The Star Weekly and The Canadian. He seldom went to the local library.

“I had everything I wanted to read at home. We didn’t have a car so it was a pain in the neck to walk to the library just to get books for pleasure. I’d only go if I had to do a research project.

“I seldom wrote outside of school. Since all my relatives lived in Montreal, I never had to write thank-you notes. I didn’t have any pen pals, although I remember my parents writing a lot to friends. We moved into a new house when I was ten, and I distinctly remember a wall phone with note paper for messages hanging beside it.

“My parents were often involved in my school activities. My mother
was on the executive of the Home and School and I recall my father selling cartons of canned peanuts for our high school band booster club.”

Jim and I compare memories. My father, too, had worked as a rule instructor for the Canadian National Railways, and I, too, recall the Star Weekly, Anglican church service on Sunday morning and Ed Sullivan on Sunday nights. As we talk, I realize Jim is sitting in the same chair he always does; I wonder if it’s known in their house as Dad’s chair. I learn later that it isn’t.

Although his grey beard and composed look give Jim the air of someone older, he is not yet thirty-five. He and Debbie married seven months after they finished high school. One month before he turned eighteen, his daughter Heather was born. Knowing this and knowing about his father, I cannot picture him as ever having a childhood.

Like his father, Jim is a responsible family man, and a good provider. His home is pleasant and comfortable. A copy of Reader’s
Digest sits on the coffee table. Jim reads most nights when he goes to bed. And like his father, his views on child-raising are conservative.

"I think I'm different from most people nowadays. I'm quite strict with my children. When they were younger, I smacked them on the bottom on occasion. I haven't laid a hand on them for years, but I do have certain expectations. When I ask them to do something, they have to do it. No questions asked.

"I think I carried some of my father's views with me when I had children. But I also realized that he and I weren't very close—we were never friends—and I don't want that to happen in our family. I have unwritten rules, but I'm pretty flexible, too. We joke around a lot, the kids tease me and call me "Jimbo," and I don't make all their decisions for them. We can have a lot of fun at the dinner table. We can laugh. I keep control, but I have a sense of humour, and I believe I'm very reasonable."

Debbie agrees. "Jim tries to be different from his father because
his father was so inflexible. But I think he is more like his dad than he wants to be. Last week, Heather dyed the front part of her hair pink, just to see if people would behave differently toward her. Jim was upset. He wasn’t sure how to react. He wanted to sit her down and tell her she had to dye it back, but he didn’t. I can see his father in him, whether that’s good or bad.”

For half his life, Jim has been a father, responsible for providing a stable income and a home for Debbie, then Heather, Janis and Jason. He started evening courses when he was eighteen and worked as a clerk, an accountant, a controller, and a financial manager in a number of companies in Quebec, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia. Five years ago, he and Debbie decided to settle in Hubbards and built a large, four-bedroom home. I ask how he feels about having to be so responsible for so many years.

“I think there’s a part of me that wants to let go. There are times when I’d like someone else to make all these decisions.”

Is that Jim, I ask, the man who had to be responsible and to be in
control so early in life? Or is that reaction typical of most men who are obliged to meet society's expectations of the good father and husband?

"I don't know. I like having control. And I like being in a responsible position. But it would be nice to take a breather now and then."

In most areas of his life, Jim is a paragon of responsibility. He is a frequent church-goer, has served on church committees, offers his services to the community as an accountant, is a trustee of Shatford School, has been Home and School president, works with the recreation centre, and is always ready to offer assistance in community activities. He coaches soccer, and helps supervise children's baseball. More than most fathers in the community, he works and plays with his children and supports their activities. He is aware of their goings-on in school, and watches their progress. However, he admits that he spends too much time at the office and could be spending more time with his family. He relies on Debbie to take care of the children and counts on her funneling important information to him.
His efforts have helped to establish Jim as a community leader. He does not shirk duties or obligations. Within the community camps Judy Hopkins has described - the complainers and the doers - Jim is one of the active, constructive residents of Hubbards. He works hard.

But he also plays hard. Every now and then, after a few drinks at a party or a dance, Jim lets his guard down. On Canada Day weekend last summer, my son David and I walked down to the beach to see if the summer people had organized their usual fireworks display. As we walked along the sand, I noticed Jim and his friend, Andy, drive up, arms waving out the window. Debbie and Andy’s wife were away with their children at Guide Camp that week and Jim and Andy were enjoying their freedom. "Sometimes I think I’m a little immature. I let go. I get a little silly."

As someone who finds Hubbards appealing, in part, because adults here know how to play -- to have an impromptu party, to dress up on Hallowe’en (Jim did a good Vincent Price impersonation last
year), to rally a game of baseball or mixed curling — I wonder about Jim’s description of himself as immature. As Judy and I found connections with each other’s lives, sharing common perceptions and problems, I am beginning to make connections with Jim. I too work hard and play hard. I, too, need to let go sometimes. But is Jim’s need to play a result of years of responsibility, a result of his childhood being cut short?

And how does that affect Jim’s literacy? His children see him reading and writing regularly. He reads the newspaper and several magazines including *Your Money* and *The Atlantic*. When he has a complaint about junk mail or a concern with the school, Jim writes a letter. He reads to keep up with the world and to advance his career. He tends to avoid reading about issues beyond his control; he became frustrated when he read about the politics behind the KLM disaster, for example, or when he reads extremist views about any social or moral issue. His reading tastes are conservative. He uses his reading and writing to be a responsible citizen and a good father.
As I drive away from the Breeze’s home, I think of my own father, a good provider, a distant but responsible man. He didn’t play as great a part in our lives as my mother did, at least not for my sister and me. The photographs on Jim’s wall reside over a stable home, the home of a man who is establishing a successful career. Perhaps the legacy of Jim’s father extends beyond an inheritance in his will.
3.3 Water Without the Glass

My son David and his friend Chris were sitting in the back seat of the car. I wasn’t tuned in to the conversation about the latest superhero until I heard one of them say to the other “Do you believe in God?”

“Yes,” came the answer, “Who could have made all these things?”

“I know. It couldn’t have just happened, the universe and everything.” Then Chris said, “But what I want to know is, who made God?”

As a member of a community where many of the women and some of the men attend church and most children attend Sunday School, I am sensitive about these discussions, feeling sometimes that I have thwarted my child’s religious literacy by not taking him or sending him to church. Baptized in the Catholic Church, and confirmed in the Anglican Church, I wrestled with my beliefs in God and religion until my late teens. I chose finally to live my life according to
humanitarian principles and to teach my children generosity of spirit, compassion, and honesty – with themselves and others. My beliefs in moral relativity, self-determinism, and my questions about institutional authority prevented me from embracing the teachings of the church. As I listened to David and his friend, I wondered if I had violated his freedom of choice by giving him no choice at all.

Soon after hearing that conversation, I heard Jim and Allan talking over drinks at a local dance. Jim had just read an article by Cullen Murphy in *The Atlantic* entitled “Who Do Men Say That I Am?” The article reviewed the findings of current theological scholars on the life and significance of Jesus. Murphy describes the lack of consensus among scholars about facts surrounding Jesus’ life, the accuracy of the Gospel accounts, and the events that have formed the basis of orthodoxy for a millennium and a half.

Because biblical exegetes have developed new tools to study the Bible, what once were “facts” are newly debated. I talked to Jim one evening about his reaction to the article.
"I was pissed off. I was quite surprised to find out that a lot of the things I was led to believe weren't true.

"I know that the New Testament was written two or three generations after Jesus died, and I know that a lot can get lost in the translation, and I know that many of the beliefs of the Anglican Church came from the Catholic Church and were changed. But what disturbed me was these people at this conference (the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451) got together and decided that this is what we are going to believe. I mean, they made a lot of wild guesses, assumptions based on convenience. And they didn't know any more than we do. They made their own interpretations. And those interpretations have formed the structure of belief for millions of people for generations.

"Take women, for example. It appears that Jesus had a great deal of respect for women and probably considered them his equal. And yet the Catholic Church chose to suppress that. It appears that one of the gospels was written by a woman and yet, according to that article, a man's name was used because it wouldn't have been
acceptable at that time to use a woman's name.

"Mary's virginity, the details of the resurrection, the number of kings that visited at the birth – all these are a matter of conjecture."

When I asked Jim if, as a child, he would have been able to accept the ambiguity of this information, he said that he would have. But, he argued, these stories, spoken as the truth, were meant not only for children, but for adults. He objected to the misrepresentation, and to the Council's seemingly arbitrary decision to call this information "truth."

"I believe that Jesus existed. I also know that to establish itself the Catholic Church declared Jesus as the son of God. Perhaps he was just a messenger. Why it is so fundamental to the faith to establish Jesus as the son of God, I don't know. The Catholic Church made their rules based on establishing certain assumptions and forcing these assumptions on the people. People have been breaking away from this church or that church for hundreds of
years, starting their own beliefs and another church structure. This can go on an infinitum. You have to stop somewhere."

"If that's the case," I argued, "then can you stop somewhere yourself and decide on what to believe. Why can't you simply decide to believe that Jesus was the son of God?"

"Because I read this stupid article and the guy is convincing. He's done his research. And I believe in facts. We just don't know if he was the son of God; Jesus himself never said he was."

I told Jim the story of two Indian tribes who visited each other regularly for ceremonial story-telling. The best stories were always the ones they collectively believed could have happened. Actual truth or fact was not considered. The criterion for a good story was not fact, but believability. Didn't Jim think there was some value in that?

"Not when you're leading people down the garden path," he replied. "I know that men of the cloth don't agree on the facts, that they
base what they believe on conjecture too. I'd like to believe that the Council decided these things because they themselves believed that's what God wanted them to do. I have to believe that. If I didn't, that would really destroy everything. As a Christian, you should be basing your decisions – your purpose in life should be – on doing what you believe God wants you to do. Everyone is just going on faith. Maybe, given what people needed to believe at the time, given that they wanted to convert people ... well, you can't give them water without the glass. You have to give people something to hold on to."

What Jim holds on to is his faith in God. That has not wavered. He prays regularly and now says that he doesn't include Jesus in his prayers as much as he used to. He holds his faith at arm's length, he says, because God is something that none of us can prove. For most things in life, he wants and needs facts to believe. God is not one of his beliefs for which he needs proof. If he questioned the existence of God, he would have a hard time figuring out why we're here.
Would he read more on this issue again? He says he might, but he wouldn't spend much time or thought on it now. "If I were really interested in this, I could spend the rest of my life researching it and never come up with an answer. I'm actually a very skeptical person. If you tell me black, I tend to think white. That's why I think I succeed at work. I never accept things just because someone tells me. I'm not cynical about people, I'm cynical about facts, about accepting them at face value. If you work through things, if you find the facts from both sides, you can always come up with a right answer. With God, you have to decide for yourself. Take it or leave it, believe or don't believe. I believe. I want to believe. I've always been lucky; I think God has been taking care of me."

I asked Jim if he thought truth was a relative thing. He believes it is. When he reads a biography, he knows that the author has made certain choices, and another author might have made different ones. "It's hard to determine what reality is; you just have to decide for yourself." Jim prefers to open doors he wants to open, areas where he can find the information he needs and can gain some control.
Other doors he prefers to keep closed. “That’s the only way to survive. Either you’re going to get totally involved and do something, or you’re going to do nothing. It’s the in-between where you get all the frustration.”

Reading the article on Jesus annoyed and frustrated Jim. It caused him to reassess the glass holding the water in his life. Being literate has, in some way, caused him to change his views on the church as an institution. His faith, however, remains constant.

“There are no facts to prove God exists. I won’t have an answer until I die. Then, I’ll either know God exists, or ... well, ... that’s all he wrote.”
3.4 Whose Words Are They, Anyway?

Straight literacy to me means the ability to read something, comprehend the message, process it, and I guess, to be able to reverse that process, to put down your thoughts in writing so that someone else can understand it. Some people are more literate than others and that means perhaps they are more skillful, or they have a larger vocabulary. They have more words they can use to better express themselves.

Reading and writing are two different skills, although they're related certainly. You can have a terrific ability to read, to comprehend everything, to read quickly, and have an excellent vocabulary, and not necessarily be able to write, or write clearly. But obviously, the more vocabulary you have, the more words you can use when you're writing.

You can read and read well without being conscious of other people. In other words, reading is just based on you. You can become a good reader without having to worry about anyone else. But to write clearly and to write well, you have to consider who your audience is, you have to be considerate of other people. You have to learn to be conscious-sympathetic maybe - of who's reading this: Am I writing this clearly? This means something to me but does it mean anything to anybody else?

Writing is a more difficult skill to learn than reading is. Reading is just basically going in and interpreting and writing is thinking, interpreting, rewriting, rethinking, reinterpreting. There are a lot of choices involved in writing. In reading, there are no choices. You choose by what you
select, but once you've selected the material, you don't have any more choices. You can't change the words that are coming into your head; they're just coming in. In writing, there's a whole decision-making process - what's my next paragraph, my next sentence? What word am I going to use? Where does this fit in? You're thinking about tense, about proper grammar. When you're reading, you're not thinking about proper grammar, you're just taking it at face value.

I suppose you can improve your writing skills by reading, getting more experience with words. What you read and how you read is going to influence what you write and how you write. If I have to define literacy, though, I look at it more as the ability to read than to write.

- Jim Breeze
Jim remembers very little about reading and writing in the early grades. He was good at spelling bees, liked to be called upon to read aloud, but his penmanship was never good.

In high school, he learned to dislike English. He didn't mind reading and writing for history class because he enjoyed the topics; he remembers a paper he wrote on the 1967 war in the Middle East. But he detested poetry: his interpretation of the poems was always different from the teacher's: "I didn't have the code," he says.

For that reason he disliked reading novels and Shakespearean plays as well. The teacher's answer was always the "right" answer and it usually differed from his own. "You always had to figure out what the writer meant by everything he wrote; you had to crack the meaning. And I never felt you could find that out. How can you possibly speak for the writer?"

"I remember one incident in a novel. A nurse came in and said to a patient (whose name was Jack or something), 'Hi, Joey'. Now, we
were supposed to explain why that was so significant. The ‘right’ answer was that her statement indicated she didn’t care about her patients enough to get their names right.

“That really ticked me off. I always thought there were other equally plausible explanations for her calling him Joey, other explanations for a lot of those so-called ‘right’ answers.

“Miss Silverman thought I was a terrible writer. I entered a writing competition once without her knowing – I wrote an essay on ‘Why I Play Football’. I got a 95. Miss Silverman was flabbergasted. I loved it.”

In 1970, after he left high school, Jim began twelve years of evening courses in accounting, administration, and systems design. In 1979, he completed a business administration certificate at Memorial University in Newfoundland. One of the courses he enjoyed most was a business communication course at McGill in Montreal in 1971. For the first time, he felt some control over writing.
"I was ready for that course. I was a systems analyst and I felt a need to make letters as correct as possible. The course was ongoing for three months, so I was constantly applying what I learned to different types of letters, memos, and reports I was writing at the time. I was never taught conciseness at school, but in that course I learned how to eliminate extra words, how to organize and how to pay attention to the reader. I learned a discipline I have been applying ever since."

Through evening courses and experience at work, Jim learned programming languages such as BASIC, COBOL, and FORTRAN and took naturally to the logical, problem-solving nature of computer applications. "I love working with the computer. It's logical. You learn what you can get away with simply by using a problem-solving approach. With writing, there is no right answer. You're never 100% satisfied with the result, and there is too much room for error. You're always subject to someone else's judgement. With a computer, you know yourself whether you've got is right. Writing isn't black and white. It's always grey."
When he was 24 and working with Churchill Falls Corporation, Jim was asked to write a report for the directors, analyzing their financial problem. For Jim, it was a major writing event; rather than straight information-giving, this report required synopsis and recommendations. The President and Vice-President of Finance read over his report and accepted it without changes. Jim remembers that report as a turning point in his attitude to writing.

"I still don't love writing, but I believe I can do it well. I think I'm clear and logical."

Jim has saved most of the reports he has written over the years, and when I asked for some examples of his writing, he presented them all to me. He has kept these for reference and as artifacts of a successful career; he has moved from the position of account payable clerk at 17 to Vice-President of Finance at 34. I wonder if these reports serve to erase memories of Miss Silverman and the days when the right answer always came from someone else.
I read his reports and several letters; they cover areas from accounts receivable to financial analysis, systems planning and marketing. By most standards, they are clear, articulate, and very well-organized. Like many writers in business and industry, Jim tends to overuse the passive voice and to add cliches such as “please be advised” or “as per.” More than most business writers with whom I have worked, however, Jim has a writing voice. He sounds like himself, and he obviously thinks clearly.

Does he consider himself literate? “Yes, I guess I am. I think I can write pretty well. And I can comprehend most things I read. But literate? Debbie is more literate than I am.”

Jim’s wife is an avid reader, consuming more library books in one month than some people do in a lifetime. As a long-time library volunteer at Shatford School and a part-time librarian with the county’s public library system, Debbie is well-versed not only in children’s literature, but current North American literature as well. She reads widely — from biographies, to essays, to novels in most genres — and has instilled in the children the habit of regular
library borrowing and a love of reading. Jim credits Debbie with the children's excellent taste in books and with introducing him to reading he otherwise wouldn't choose.

"Debbie is one of the most intelligent people I know. She thinks more deeply than I do, and she knows more. I often read a book after she's finished it. I don't think Debbie thinks of me as a reader. I read some, but not nearly the amount or the kind of reading she prefers.

"I like non-fiction. I like knowledge, facts. I like to read about things that actually happen. Novels don't interest me much.

"When I do read a novel, I almost believe it's really happening. It's as if I have a hard time separating reality from the novel. I say to myself 'why am I getting so absorbed in this - it's only a book. The author is going to end this the way he wants'. I feel as if I am wasting my energies getting wrapped up in something fictitious."

Compared to most men in the community, Jim is a reader. He
enjoys magazines and short articles in Reader's Digest. A few times a year, Jim will read a sustained piece of work such as John MacPhee's *Pieces of the Frame*. He picked up Jan McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* after Debbie had finished reading it and "hated it. I didn't like the use of the second person as the narrator and I thought the guy was pretty screwed up."

Jim and I compared reading tastes and found we both preferred reading about what actually happened or is happening in the world. "Information is power," Jim believes. "I can learn something from non-fiction." When I asked him if he thought he could learn something about himself by reading fiction, he paused and then replied, "I'm not sure I know what you mean."

I suggested we can learn about ourselves by what interests us in reading, by what we choose, and by our reactions to the text, whether it's non-fiction or a novel. "I don't think of it that way," he says. "You just take in information. Maybe Debbie thinks of it that way. She's much more reflective and philosophical that I am."
While Jim is literate, he defers to Debbie as being more literate. His children see both of them as readers and writers, and yet Debbie is the dominant force for literacy in the household. Their daughter, Janis, was put ahead a grade at their request; she read at a very early age and was soon by-passing her peers. Heather, the eldest of the three, reads widely and has excelled academically. Their youngest, Jason, does not read as much as the girls do, but nevertheless reads more than most 10-year-old boys. Every summer, both Janis and Jason have participated in the county's summer reading program, picking up ribbons for reading a number of novels over the school break. Janis has written to favorite authors, and Heather, who will soon finish high school, has had a story published and plans to become a writer. When she read my inscribed copy of Kevin Major's latest novel, _Dear Bruce Springsteen_, Heather joked, "Maybe I will give my friends copies of my book when they have a birthday."

The Breeze home always has books and magazines on the coffee table, notes on the refrigerator, and a steady stream of library books coming in and out over the week. Books and literate
activities are often part of dinnertime conversation. More than
most in the community, theirs is a literate household.

Jim is proud of his children's accomplishments and of their interest
in books and in writing. He is especially proud of his wife's
intellect and vast knowledge through reading. But he thinks of
"real" writers as those who write books, and literate readers as
those with wide reading tastes that go beyond steamy best sellers.
In the back of his mind, perhaps, he is still in high school English
class where literate people read important books and have the code
to interpret their meaning.
3.5 Writing a Life

Jim was working as a controller for a software development company when it folded. At thirty-three, he found himself out of work.

The job had been a good one. Most recently, as controller, he was the company’s financial watchdog. The position gave him both autonomy and control, and an opportunity to hone some of his management skills. Before that, he had been marketing manager for the company, a position which required knowledge of a variety of systems software and afforded the chance to travel across Canada and the United States. When the company went out of business—its specialized systems software was limited to too small a market—Jim was left with skills and experience both in marketing and financial operations that few people acquire by his age. The company eased the shock of leaving its management stranded by offering a good severance package that included career counselling. The psychologist Jim went to see asked him to write his autobiography.
Jim was given a format to follow as he wrote, approximately forty questions about his childhood, his family, his high school years, and his relationships with his sibling and friends.

"Writing that caused me to think about things I hadn't thought about for a long time. I'm sure it helped the psychologist – it gave him information about Jim Breeze so he knew where I was coming from – but it helped me to stand back, figure out where I'd been and where I wanted to go. Let's face it. I was thirty-three years old, my parents had both died, I had a family, a house, a place in the community, a lot of good work experience – many people aren't in that position until they're in their forties."

Writing his autobiography made Jim feel more confident, more positive about himself. By analyzing his social, family and professional objectives, he realized he was quite satisfied with his lot in life, with one exception: he wanted to be the vice-president of a company.

"I realized that I wanted the authority and the power of being a
senior person in a company. The positions that I didn’t like in the past were ones in which I didn’t have the control I seem to need. I realized that I really have a strong desire to succeed at whatever I do."

Jim knew he could probably land a job in a large organization such as the telephone company, but, to him, such organizations are "elephants," too large and slow-moving for rapid promotion, and too bureaucratic for one person to have the influence or control he wanted. He was in a bind: his wide experience had prepared him for senior management, but how many smaller organizations had head offices in Halifax?

He and Debbie wanted to stay in Hubbards. They had established themselves in the community and to start over would be difficult, especially for the children. When he heard through a friend that a small gold exploration company was looking for a financial person, he approached the president and got the job. Less than two months after being controller of one company, he was vice-president, in charge of finance, of another.
The process of writing about his life, and reassessing his goals helped Jim make a transition from one stage of his life to the next. He had been gathering experience, readying himself to occupy a senior position – he's not sure whether such preparation was by accident, his unconscious design, or the hand of God – and he achieved it. Writing about his objectives and discussing them with the psychologist helped to bring his life into focus.

Although the counselling was not directly responsible for Jim’s successful move, it did help him to learn to clarify what he wanted. He encouraged Debbie to do the same. For years, Debbie had raised the children, done volunteer work in the school library, worked extensively with the Girl Guide organization and with the church. She had taken university courses years before, but the time was never right to return to academic pursuits. She is a quiet woman, well-spoken, very intelligent, with strong opinions, and Jim had always hoped she would gain the confidence she needed to pursue any goal she set for herself. About the same time Jim was seeing the counsellor, Debbie and Jim discussed her plans. It became
important to them both that she return to school.

During the time he spent in reflection with the psychologist, Jim learned other things as well. "I don't speak as assertively as I should; I come across as wishy-washy. The counsellor would get fed up with me because he would ask me a direct question and I always had a "maybe" answer. The way I answer mirrors the way I think. I mean, I always leave the door open a crack. At work, I say 'well, I guess we should do this' and 'maybe we should do that' rather than saying 'this is what we should do'. I hardly ever give a positive answer on anything. He asked me directly why I do that. And you know what I said? I said, 'I don't know. I'm not sure!'

"Somehow I've got myself believing that I can't be 100% right, that no matter what I decide or what I do, it can always be improved upon. I don't mind admitting I'm wrong. I'm not always convinced of my views myself."

Jim sees his manner of speaking as part of his management style. Even though he likes power, he says, he likes to be a nice guy. He
wants people to believe they have a say in decisions, and to see him as flexible and open to suggestions. He tries to steer people in the direction he wants them to go – a gentle push rather than a harsh shove. He believes this approach has worked well for him.

"For the people who have drive and initiative, who are creative, my management style allows them to challenge me, and I like being challenged. For people who are defensive, who need a simple answer, my approach isn’t very effective. They see me as being soft. I prefer people working together as a team – I don’t always want to be telling people what to do – because in the long run, when they have input, they feel better about themselves."

I asked Debbie about Jim’s perception of his management style. She pointed out that, aside from one superior whom Jim disliked, no others had made a strong impression on him. His father was a role model for social and family situations, but he had no management role model. Perhaps, she suggested, Jim was not as wishy-washy as he thought he was.
The psychologist challenged Jim on his indecisive speech, claiming that Jim really knew what he wanted people to do, and that sounding as though he were open to suggestion was not being straightforward. Jim disagreed. He is capable of making a decision, he doesn’t fear or shirk the responsibility of doing so, and believes his approach does more for office relations than an autocratic style.

For issues less close to home or work, however, Jim agreed he doesn’t have very strong opinions. On a questionnaire the psychologist gave him, which included questions that involved opinions on general topics, Jim found himself in the middle.

"I had to answer on a scale with 'agree, strongly agree,' and so on – and on virtually everything I answered in the questionnaire, I was middle of the road. I always take the path of least resistance. I think I’m pretty conservative.

"I’m on the fence about just about everything. Other than moral beliefs – I believe in honesty, following the ten commandments, the golden rule, and so on – I have lived my whole life on leanings,
slightly this way or that way. Who knows what's right about anything?“

At times, Jim sees a conflict between his need for control, to have the business of life run efficiently, and his desire to be seen as open and flexible. He says he is impatient, his problem-solving approach to life allows him to see paths that should be taken, and he often organizes situations to achieve his goals. At home or in community activities, he is often more controlling than he wants to be “because I often see the way I want things to go and I usually get my way.”

Debbie and the children often challenge Jim when he comes on too strong, and he accepts the challenge. He likes a good argument. In fact, he will often play devil’s advocate to encourage debate on an issue.

“Sometimes I’m arrogant. I know that. But I still like to hear all sides.”
Over the course of my research in the community, Allan and I began to see Debbie and Jim socially. We quickly became friends, finding that we shared an interest in books, family games, and conversations about issues such as education. Among the four of us, however, the most heated debates have always been between Jim and me.

One day, when I called to speak to Debbie, Jim called her to the phone saying that a girl named Lorri Neilsen wanted to talk to her. I teased him about his sexist language and later, his daughter Janis informed him that people no longer refer to women as girls.

Some time later, at a birthday party the Breezes held for two of us in the community, Jim challenged me. It was a baby boomer party, held near Hallowe’en, and the guests had dressed in costumes such as MASH army outfits, prom dresses, and Beverly Hillbillies garb. Jim held me hostage on the dance floor; he wanted to argue. He was dressed in rolled-up blue jeans, a white t-shirt, and his hair was greased back, and in his Fifties outfit, a debate about whether his use of the word ‘girl’ constituted sexism, seemed both amusing and incongruent. As people continued to dance, Jim stood firm, his
face close to mine, waving his hands. I recall telling him that part of being literate today is knowing what words connote, especially words about women. He insisted that his words did not reflect his attitude. I believed him – his behaviour towards women seems to indicate respect – and yet I, too, wasn’t going to let it go. I wondered at the time whether he felt unjustly accused, whether I had touched a nerve, or whether he was beginning to put into practice his recent insights about taking a stand on issues. Whatever the reason, this aging greaser raising his voice at me over the rock n’ roll music was certainly not being wishy-washy.

Jim thinks of himself as pragmatic, and logical, someone who thinks in black and white and likes to solve problems in a straightforward way. Although he thinks of Debbie as the more reflective of the two, which she seems to be, he has never avoided discussions about his beliefs or his behaviour. Our discussions about faith, families, marriage and children have been open and, at times, quite philosophical. For someone who sees himself as no-nonsense and logical, I wonder if he knows how others see him – a thoughtful, sincere person who not only cares about others but cares enough
about himself to take on new challenges and grow from them.

Jim wrote about his life during his career counselling, and I told him, before we began the research process, that I would be writing about him. Like Judy, he was not frightened by the prospect. When I asked him personal questions, he did not flinch or side-step the topic. The man who does not take a stand on issues has, by commission, at least, agreed not only to write his life, but keep it open to revision.
Jim approaches a piece of paper the way he approaches people; he is focussed and intense. When he speaks to a person, he moves closer and looks directly at them, as though he were blocking any distraction in the room. When he sits at a desk with papers before him, his nose moves closer to the page and he must reach forward, not down, for his cigarette.

We are sitting at the kitchen table in his home, and he has offered me his home-made wine while we talk about the papers he has brought home from work. The house is quiet and orderly, as it always is; the only sound is the gurgling of the water in the aquarium. It is a spring evening in Hubbards and Jim is in his last month with the systems software development company. His work as controller requires that he approve cheques and oversee the financial direction of the company. The company is folding; nevertheless he must keep the financial affairs in order.

We talk about what he reads and how he read it. He moves quickly
through the paperwork and I am curious about his speed and efficiency. He seems to read paperwork the way we read the environment when we drive. Certain indicators cause him to pause, stop, or look back; but he knows where he's going and what signs to watch for.

He's not reading continuous text, but words and numbers; he looks at cheque amounts, looks for the account code, notes whether the invoice has been keyed correctly, and whether the back-up for the cheques is in order. When all signs indicate a go-ahead, he signs the cheque, replaces the information attached to it, and moves on. Was he always this efficient, this facile at processing the signs in the paperwork?

"When I first started this job, signing cheques used to take me about five or six hours a week instead of an hour or two. We were busier then, so that made a difference, but I also wasn't familiar with what we were paying for, so I spent more time reviewing the documentation attached to the cheque, familiarizing myself with what we were paying, and sometimes putting the cheque aside so I could
find out more about the circumstances. When I first started the job, whenever there was a lease payment, I'd have to get out the darn lease and read parts of it to get the highlights. Now, because I'm familiar with most everything we're paying for, I can move much more quickly through the paperwork."

Jim's facility with reading numbers, balance sheets, contracts, software manuals, and bank statements has come with years of practice as an accountant, a financial planner and a systems designer. He is familiar with reading a variety of financial and systems documents. For the most part, he knows what to look for, and his reading only slows down when the context is unfamiliar and the signs in the environment are new. Once he became familiar with his duties as controller in the company, he introduced innovations that better organized the company's financial affairs and improved internal checks for invoice processing.

He looks up from the page, and we talk about literacy. I tell him about the proliferation of literacies today, including mathematical and computer literacy, both of which he has. Jim's view of literacy
remains that of reading and writing continuous text. I suggest that basic reading, writing, and mathematics are in-roads to further literacy.

Much later, early in the fall, we pick up the conversation again. This time, the invoice-checking for the failing company is behind Jim. He is in his new position as Vice-President of the gold exploration company and when he started, he says, "I felt illiterate."

The company is small, less than thirty people, and most personnel work at the exploration site in another part of the province. Only six people work in the building in Halifax, a house on Bedford highway where bedrooms have been converted to private offices, and the living room houses the reception area and clerical people. It started as a family-run company; and with greater interest in metals world-wide, as well as government incentives programs to develop the industry, the company began to grow. Jim believes the number of employees could triple in a couple of years. The president, who is also a large shareholder, has always run the company himself. With Jim hired to take care of financial affairs, the company began
to grow out of its awkward adolescence toward maturity.

Jim's first few weeks were frustrating. The day he began work he had no desk, chair, or office equipment, so the president sent him out to buy what he needed. The office manager, who has been with the company for about ten years, blanched at his buying a filing cabinet that was twenty-five dollars more than she believed he ought to spend. She encouraged him to buy a small calculator at a discount price, but Jim, who uses a calculator as though it were an extension of his hand, bought a better quality one.

"As I was buying this thing, I'm thinking 'what have I got myself into here? We're spending millions of dollars on exploration programs and she's worried about the price of the calculator'. No one was prepared for me, and no one knew what to do with me. The president didn't even send out a memo welcoming me aboard."

As a young company, the group had been used to running the business, as Jim says, "by the seat of their pants." The president made all decisions and there were few routines, procedures, or
guidelines. At first, Jim didn't feel a part of the family; he wasn't sure how well people accepted him, especially those who normally handled the finances, and their awkwardness made his first weeks long and lonely.

The president is an autocratic man, whose abruptness often borders on rudeness. He doesn't have the human relations skills that Jim feels he ought to. "I'm the only one who makes a point of saying good morning to everyone. Everyone else just comes in and starts to work."

Jim had to tread carefully during those first few weeks. He wanted to see the president regularly, but the president resisted arranging a regular meeting time; he felt the company was too small for that kind of formality. The office people were used to reporting directly to the president, and Jim's attempts to persuade them to run all financial decisions through him met, at first, with a certain skepticism - no one wanted to do anything the president wasn't aware of.
Jim found he had to educate some of the staff members in the procedures and practices of efficient companies. "We needed to get organized, to have better control of some of these procedures, so that when we do have a staff of forty or fifty, the procedures will be in place." At first, they were wary of him – he was the new kid on the block and they were an established family.

"The first week on the job, I just did a lot of reading, went down to the bank, looked at all our financial statements, read a lot of reports, and that was it. It was really slow and boring, and although I knew how to read all this information, I didn't have enough background to understand everything."

The more acquainted he became with the people and with the company business, however, the more his reading changed. "At first, I would read property reports and not understand the significance of certain figures. I was frustrated with what I saw as inconsistencies, such as one report referring to grams per tonne, and another referring to ounces per ton. I'd read about a grading of 2.8 ounces of gold per ton and let it pass; now I know that's a high grading
and I can question it. I mean, I didn’t even know what AU meant, 
and if I’d remembered my chemistry, I would have known, obviously, 
that’s the symbol for gold. My reading was slow; I had to look up 
geological terms in the dictionary for the first while. I attended a 
meeting of the Mining and Geologists Association of Nova Scotia and 
I didn’t understand half of the conversation. It was new language 
to me.”

As the weeks went on, Jim and the president talked more, the staff 
began to respond to his suggestions, and Jim began to understand 
more about the mining industry and more specifically, the company’s 
exploration business. Reading became easier; he became more 
literate about the context in which he was working.

Once he began to understand the business better, Jim was able to 
apply his knowledge of finance to shape company direction. He was 
able to see where he could assert control, make changes, and move 
from day-to-day survival to more long-term thinking and planning. 
He began to be more positive and to see how he could contribute to 
the company’s growth.
“I still leave the door open a crack; I always do. The career counsellor said I have trouble committing myself to anything and perhaps he’s right. For the most part, though, I feel good about this job. I think I made the right decision. I think I’ll stay.”

Aside from helping to direct the company’s growth, Jim’s goal is to have everyone work as a team. He believes that has begun to happen, now that the other employees trust him more. His management style, which is more collaborative than the president’s, is not going to change. He wants to be seen as a nice guy, but someone who has control and can give direction.

He has already started to make changes. He has written several policies and developed forms for personnel record-keeping. When the company brought out a new stock issue, he was instrumental in working with the investment firm whose commitment wavered when the stock market took a dive. He was responsible for overseeing the construction of a new office building and for arranging the move from the old house to more professional-looking quarters. He
even picked out the furniture and helped to design the office space.

In a few months, Jim has moved from being the "new guy in finance" who had to find his own corner of the house, to someone who is now beginning to make the company a home.

I recently received an invitation to the company's shareholders' meeting to be held at the Sheraton. With continued interest in gold exploration, the meeting promises to be an interesting one. Jim says, "We have some important announcements to make." I note how comfortably he uses the word "we." When he talked a few months back about his first days at work, the words he used were "I" and "they."
3.7 A Morning's Work

The new location of the gold exploration company is at the end of a dirt road in a growing industrial area ten minutes outside Halifax. Jim is pleased with the new building; he has overseen its construction and the relocation of the staff. We drive into the parking lot about 8:45 a.m. and Jim gives me a tour of the offices.

It is a small, well-constructed building, functional and comfortable, with an open area for the drafting personnel and enclosed offices for the president, two vice-presidents, and the corporate secretary. It has a lunch room, washrooms, a conference room, and an area for the clerical staff. Jim chose light blue paint for the interior walls because "beige is boring." The offices all have wood-like desks and shelves, a computer and a printer.

After we pour ourselves a coffee in the lunchroom, we return to Jim's office. The only window looks out on the open field that will soon be the location of the new Halifax Herald building. Jim's desk is tidy; there are perhaps a dozen pieces of paper set aside in an
orderly pile. His in-basket contains very few items.

Jim takes off his suit jacket, turns on the computer, and lights a cigarette. He keys in commands on the computer to call up a previous memo, erases the body of it, and keeps the format to use to begin his writing today. The mining supervisor at the exploration site in Tangier, Nova Scotia has asked Jim to implement a regulation from head office that will clarify the policy on the use of the kitchen facilities at the mine site.

Only company employees who board at the Tangier camp are entitled to company-paid meals; but apparently non-boarding employees are availing themselves of the facilities as well. Jim must write an internal memo to deal with the situation.

He writes the subject line “Charge for Meals” then erases it and changes the line to read “Policy on use of kitchen facilities.” As the vice-president in charge of finance and administration in a young company that will expand, he is thinking ahead: they need more than a reaction to a particular situation; they need a policy to
cover future use of the facilities. He writes another line, pauses, takes a puff of his cigarette, writes a few more words, and pauses again.

"I understand there is some misunderstanding about the use of the kitchen facilities." He adds "that is, which employees are entitled to use the facilities and to what extent." He pauses again, puffs on his cigarette, and looks at the screen for a few seconds. By this opening sentence, he has set the stage for what he needs to say. He writes: "the intent of the kitchen is to provide meals to those employees who are living at the Tangier camp facilities." He stops again, re-reads what he has written, mumbling the words. He sits back in the chair, then lunges forward to add something, then stops again and reads the screen while he takes a drink from his coffee cup. He deletes the word "those" and says aloud "employees who live," takes a puff of his cigarette and says "no, employees who are boarding at the Tangier camp." He types in his revision of the sentence, and adds "along with occasional visitors." He pauses and changes the sentence to read "along with occasional company authorized visitors."
The next sentence comes easily: “It was not intended that the company should provide meals to employees not boarding at the camp; these employees are expected to bring their own meals or…” As he re-reads the sentence, he realizes that to finish the sentence after the “or” is not the way he wants to go. He changes the sentence to read “these employees are expected to provide their own meals.”

The first paragraph is finished. He re-reads it in its entirety and changes the opening from “I understand there is some misunderstanding about the use of the kitchen facilities” to “I believe there is some misunderstanding.” He reads aloud the remainder of the paragraph, then pauses. He starts a new paragraph with the words “Effective immediately, non-boarding employees using the kitchen,” sighs, and stops writing. He adds “having a meal,” and pauses again. He types more on the screen, mumbling “consuming a meal.” He types “consuming a meal provided by the company shall be charged $5.00 per meal.” He pauses again.
I ask him if this writing is more difficult than other writing he normally does. He says, "because this is a policy, it's important that it be read correctly, and it will potentially be read by a number of employees. So it has to be clear. And the reason has to be clear because there is probably going to be some discussion out there about it.

"You have to come across as assertive and not wishy-washy in a policy. I often think and talk in a non-assertive way. I've been watching that I don't sound wishy-washy in this." I asked him if that was the reason he changed "I understand there is some misunderstanding" to read "I believe there is some misunderstanding," and he says no; he changed that wording because he was repeating the word "understand." I ask him about his use of the passive voice; is there a reason he uses it so frequently? He says that policies are often written that way, and he believes he should write policies with a certain amount of detachment. I ask him about his reason for leading up to the policy statement with an introductory paragraph that explains the situation.
“I do kind of back into things all the time. I try to give a rationale, an explanation first. I prefer that style because it gives the reader a reason for what I’m going to say. I also avoid using ‘I’ in a policy statement, because I’m not writing for me; I’m writing on behalf of the company.”

The writing of the remainder of the memo comes easier for Jim than the opening paragraph did. He continues: “The kitchen staff should have a list of all employees entitled to eat in the kitchen. The kitchen staff should collect $5.00 from any person having a meal who is not on the list.” He pauses again, drinks more coffee, and adds “Exceptions to this procedure must be authorized by you or your designate.” He explains that the mining supervisor has asked Jim to write the policy memo to him so that he can handle the situation at the mine site by referring to a policy memo from head office. In fact, Jim and the mining supervisor have already discussed the issue and reached an agreement.

Jim closes with a short paragraph. “Please call me once you have had a chance to review this memo and we can discuss the controls
you will need to safeguard the cash and subsequent depositing of same." He reads the words aloud, types the last word with a flourish, and returns again to the beginning. He reads the memo in full aloud, changes a couple of words, and saves what he has written. He sits back in his chair and prepares to print out a copy of the finished piece. The writing has taken a half-hour. He prints out a copy and takes it to the clerical staff in the front office area. We both go to the lunch room for a second cup of coffee.

In the lunchroom, two men are climbing a ladder to remove ceiling tiles. “How’s she goin’ there?” one of them greets me as I come in the room. “Do you know where I can find someone named Jim Breeze? We need to find out where you keep more of these tiles.” “Right behind me,” I say, and Jim walks in to speak to the men.

While he helps the man, I wait for Jim back in his office and note how tidy and orderly everything is. It is also very quiet, and with only a view of an open field from the window, the office seems remote, almost isolated. The few people I have met so far have been friendly, but quiet. The atmosphere in the office is reserved.
I reflect on what Jim has written this morning. He has mentioned that it is important for a new company to establish procedures and policies and he assumes that responsibility well. He likes being in on the ground floor of company growth and direction. He enjoys the control and the authority, and says that the president recently gave him an indirect compliment when he referred to Jim as the most practical person in the company.

When Jim returns to his office, I ask him if his life here is always so quiet. He says this is unusual; he normally is interrupted about ten times a morning, usually by the corporate secretary or Jim's assistant accountant, Mich. This morning he was lucky to get his writing done without being disturbed.

Jim takes a piece of correspondence from the pile of papers on his desk and reads its contents. It is a memo from an oxygen supply company with a form attached which they are asking Jim's company to sign. Just as writing a policy for use of the kitchen at the mine calls forth for Jim a host of considerations – the need to sound
assertive and authoritative on paper, the need to add to a growing body of policies and procedures, among other things – signing this form calls forth the whole issue of sales tax. I ask Jim about the context surrounding this piece of correspondence. It is an issue he is eager to explain because it has been plaguing him the past couple of weeks.

Almost everything the company buys is subject to provincial sales tax. The building and equipment at the head office near Halifax are taxed at ten percent. The building and the trailers at the mine site are taxed at ten percent also. But survey instruments or equipment used by the company at the mine for exploration purposes are eligible for a reduced rate of taxation from ten percent to four percent. Production equipment, on the other hand, is fully exempt from sales tax. Last week, Jim had the provincial sales tax people down at the mine site in Tangier, and it seems that the company has not been paying the correct rate of tax for certain equipment and facilities. The regulations the government uses are difficult to interpret. Electrical wiring in the mill, for example, where production of the ore begins, is taxed at ten percent except for that
wiring that goes to equipment used specifically for production, which is exempt from tax. Safety equipment is normally exempt; but by a caveat on the regulation that protects the Nova Scotia Power Corporation, the back-up generator for air into the mine is subject to ten percent tax instead of no tax at all.

"What a joke this is," Jim shakes his head. "Now I know why other companies mining for non-renewable resources have a preliminary crusher in the mine. They can then classify that area as a production area and be exempt from tax. The guy from the government is going to send me a colour-coded map that shows which parts of the mine buildings and equipment are taxable at ten percent, four percent, and no tax at all. And what I have to do then is go back through the records of all our transactions over the last two years and re-calculate what we owe the government in tax for everything we've bought from suppliers for exploration and production. We have about two hundred suppliers. Do you know how many transactions that is?

"This form here from the oxygen supply company is asking me to
certify that what we are buying from them is indeed exempt from tax. But here – see – they’ve put in the wrong regulation, so I’m going to have to cross it out and put the correct one in. And then sign it.”

As Jim signs the form, I am grateful not to have to be dealing with such issues. From what he has explained – and that was the simple version – the whole issue of tax is a rat’s nest of interpretation. Signing that form was a simple task; but his understanding of the context for the memo is complex. He sets it aside to pass along to Mich.

The next item on his desk is a power bill from the Nova Scotia Power Corporation. Jim looks at it for a few seconds; he is not pleased. Somehow, the company or the bank missed the payment deadline and they are being charged interest on their account. “I hate paying interest,” says Jim. I pay all my bills at the last minute; I even do my credit cards that way. It’s part of the game. But here we’re being hit for interest and I don’t know how it happened. Someone missed the deadline. I’ll have to talk to Mich.
and see what she knows about it. When it’s over twenty thousand dollars, you worry about the interest.” He signs the cheque and sets it aside.

The phone rings; it’s Brenda, the corporate secretary, who informs Jim that the auditor from the Worker’s Compensation Board is here to see them. Brenda brings the woman in, Jim introduces us all, and the woman explains they should be paying for officers of the company if they’re active. They discuss one of the employees, she explains the procedure their department needs the company to follow, and shows how to fill in the form. For this form, numbers aren’t rounded off, as they are in most financial forms; they must be exact to the penny. Jim and the auditor refer to the form, and clarify what Jim must do. When they finish a few minutes later, Brenda says “Thank you, JB,” and Jim says, “So we have a clean bill of health then, do we?”

As they leave, Jim picks up the telephone and tries to reach the man he is supposed to be meeting for lunch in downtown Halifax. He can’t reach him, so he turns to more paperwork. I ask him how
much reading he does is largely numbers and figures. He estimates about fifty percent. Along with figures in financial statements, cash flow, and projections, he must also read regulations that refer to the use of these figures.

The day before, Jim spent the afternoon with their tax auditor working on the income tax statements for the company. As he explains to me what they were doing, he pulls from his shelf a book about two inches thick, printed in small typeface. It is the income tax act, and Jim says that reading through it is complicated and difficult.

"They write using a lot of double negatives, which is difficult at the best of times, but all the regulations refer to other sections and you can't read any regulation straight through without having to locate the other related section or regulation. Section 66, which is on principal business corporations, that's us, has about a hundred pages alone on exploration. You have to try to figure out what heading you need and then hope that the topic you want falls under that heading. Then you have to find all the related sections."
Jim shows me another manual, which is smaller. "I find it easier to read books such as this one which are just synopses of the rules for a particular business. But here, there's still a fair bit of interpretation. I highlight the area that pertains to us with yellow pen. I use my yellow pen a lot."

The telephone rings again. It's the broker whose company handled the recent issue of new shares in the company. He wants exact numbers on outstanding shares, and as Jim talks to him, he turns to his filing cabinet and pulls the necessary file. Without skipping a beat, he reads the figures the broker wants, and leafs through the pages to find more information. He lights a cigarette as he is talking.

When he hangs up the telephone, he reaches for the next item on his desk. It is something from the Nova Scotia Department of Mines and Energy, a form the company must fill out once a year to provide information to the provincial and federal government on their exploration activities. The information goes to Statistics
Canada. Jim looks through the four-page form.

"These things are a pain in the ass. They ask for things in a particular way and the way they ask for it is not necessarily the way we are capturing the information for our purposes. So we end up plugging in numbers to fit these blanks. Now this figure here on this page on expenditures has to tie in with this figure on this page ... and ... it does. 5423096. So I've already added this one up, and I'm not going to do it again. You really have to read these headings carefully, because they aren't very descriptive. They have one here called "General Exploration Expenditures," so you look at that and this one says "Minesite Exploration Expenditures." And there's another called "Minesite Development Expenditures." Now I would have thought that had something to do with Tangier but no, it doesn't. They have a different interpretation of those headings than we do. So I have to come up with some figures. Now I'm just checking the monthly breakdown of company employees by month to see if the figures look reasonable, and they appear to look reasonable. So, now I'll check this report. This one is for the feds; the other for the province ... This job, and it's true for all
my years in finance, has always required the ability to use and to understand forms. And I've found that a number of people have trouble understanding forms. But I think most forms could be improved drastically."

He talks to himself as he checks figures and erases and adds numbers. "Unfortunately, some of these numbers have been changed and the person who did the draft of this for me has not changed the resulting totals. So here, one has to decide whether it's worth taking it back and complaining or just make the changes yourself. And I'm just going to make them myself." Jim uses his pocket calculator, then gets up from his desk to go to the work station where the larger electric calculator sits. He sits down with the page beside him, and without looking at the number pad on the calculator, clicks in the figures in a rapid steady beat. His fingers work as quickly as those of a good piano player. I remember then that Jim does play the piano, but I have only heard him a couple of times. He usually plays for his own pleasure, seldom when there are visitors.
“Okay, this looks good,” he says, and he gets up. He mutters as he fills in the final few blanks on the form. “This is all set to be typed now. They’ve asked us for a breakdown of geochemical work, geology work, and geophysical work and we just haven’t captured costs that way, so I’ve just put asterisks here and told them those costs are included in other field costs. Now they might not like that, but for the time being that’s what I’m doing. They can get back to us later if they really want those numbers.”

The last item on Jim’s desk is a form for the insurance company. The Tangier property was robbed last week of a large supply of food. Jim sets that item in his basket so that he can remind himself to call the insurance company to ask for more information. He picks up the phone and dials a number. He is calling the supplier about the reception desk in the front entrance to the building. It was an expensive unit to buy and the people who installed it didn’t do a professional job. Jim is calling to arrange for someone to come out and redo the work. The woman he is trying to reach is not in, and so he leaves his number.
A few items remain in the basket and Jim says he is waiting for calls back from these people before he can process the paper. He has another form for the government which he has to fill in but he needs to hear from their tax auditor with the correct information. The auditor had used last year’s figure. He sighs, “you know you have to check everything. No matter what the source, how good or reliable they are. I always have to double check all the figures because there’s always something that will be screwed up.”

Jim takes out a clean pad of paper. “Well, let’s work on vacation days for the year. The company’s official holidays.” He pulls out a book of payroll regulations that includes information on statutory holidays. “I’m going to come up with a list now of statutory holidays. There are some that we have to give under law and others that are optional. Last year, our employees worked one day that no one else in the area worked, and they were not happy.”

Together Jim and I make up the list. He looks at the regulation book while I look up the week days and the dates of the holidays on the calendar. It is the only work this morning that I could
possibly have participated in. When Jim writes the dates down on
the paper, he immediately uses a matrix form to organize the
information: holidays listed down the side, day and date; and across
the top, the columns “mandatory,” “optional,” and “recommended.” It
seems his logical mind, his ease with forms, and his penchant for
order makes him able to sort information in a way that is not only
visibly logical, but that sets out the problem to be solved. The
goal, of course, is to fill in the recommended column and establish a
standard practice.

He turns to the computer and calls up the Lotus 1-2-3 software
because it is an easy way to create a matrix. He types in all the
information he has from his draft and prints out the sheet. He sets
it aside on his desk, because this is an issue he must discuss with
Mike, the president. Jim can fill in the column with recommended
holidays, but the final decision will be with the president. Because
holidays are always a subject of great interest to employees, and
because the company must pay expensive overtime wages for those
employees working on a holiday, Jim wants to make sure that he and
the president agree on the decision. The company is still young
enough not to have established a tradition. Deciding with the president on the holidays the company will observe is another in a long list of ground-breaking or foundation building activities that Jim has been involved with since he started with the company. This seems to be one of the activities that Jim enjoys most; he likes to shape company regulations and practice.

Jim tries again to reach the man he is meeting for lunch and finally gets through to the personal secretary who will reach the man for him. He chats with her for a few minutes, and I leave to wash out my coffee cup. The president looks up from his desk as he sees me pass by his door, but doesn’t acknowledge me or smile. By the time I have returned to Jim’s office, Jim has reached his potential lunch partner. Mich, the assistant accountant, pops her head in Jim’s door and sees he is on the phone. She says to me “tell him the truck is here” and I guess she must mean a lunch wagon, so common in industrial parks such as these. The area is new; there likely won’t be a good sandwich shop or greasy spoon around here for awhile.

Jim is finished his conversation and his morning’s work. I ask him
if he would have accomplished more if I hadn’t been there. We did, after all, have a number of conversations in which he explained to me the context surrounding the writing and reading he was doing. He reassures me that I didn’t interfere with his work. As we leave, he shows me the part of the receptionist’s desk that was poorly installed and I agree that something should be done. Outside, it is sunny and the roads are getting muddy and slushy. Springtime is here, and Jim has completed another morning as Vice-President of Finance. A year ago, he was out of a job and writing about his goals in life. Already, he has achieved one of them.
Sunday Morning

The spring sun comes through the stained glass window as we sing, "All Things Bright and Beautiful." St. Luke's Anglican is crowded this morning; Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs, Brownies and Beavers have filled the pews to celebrate Scout Week. I am here only to bring my son David. I see Judy and Rosalie with the Beavers. Rosalie looks subdued today; she has had a trying time with Jennifer, her eldest, and Norman is at home a lot now, which doesn't help. Nancy Penney looks bright and bubbly in her new leader outfit; years of single parenthood, and an operation for cancer are behind her now. Rick, the milkman, is next to me and I don't recognize him out of uniform until he says hello. Several people wave to Mrs. P. in the pew ahead. Andy and Anne Hare are two rows behind; that must be her mother, Esther, who has been recovering from double by-pass surgery.

David is several rows ahead on the other side; I'm sure he is talking and jiggling in his seat waiting for the lecture on Baden-Powell to be over. Cookies and juice wait in the church hall below, and few of these words or songs are familiar to him. I read the words for the Eucharist service in the prayer book with the congregation. Some of the words come as rote phrases from my mouth, reviving a chant thirty years gone. This next hymn will be the collection one - how did I remember that? - and then we will pray. Jim Breeze and Andy Hare bring the collection plates to the front. These men are fathers, like mine was, shaved, cologned, wearing a tie, Sunday morning responsible, and we were these children once, and we have all said the same words on a Sunday morning at church in the springtime.
4.0 Elizabeth McNeil

4.1 Elizabeth McNeil

Age: Thirty-one
Marital Status: married two and a half years to Bill, Systems Consultant at Information Systems Company
Children: None
Other Family: mother (Rosemary), father (Mac), two sisters (Forty, and Thirty-Three), one brother (Thirty-six); all siblings married and live in province
Education: Masters of Business Administration; Dalhousie University
Bachelor of Science, Mathematics; Dalhousie University

Daily Activities: Weekday morning aerobics at YMCA
General Manager, KTG Systems, Atlantic Region, responsible for forty people
Weekends: reading, watching movies, grocery shopping
Cleaning lady cleans house weekly
Painting (artwork)
Often stays at office late and goes in on weekends
Beekeeper of two hives
Member of Opium Society (wine-tasting group)
Daily reading/writing 2 - 3 hours
4.2 House and Home

A couple of years ago, Elizabeth MacNeil called to ask me to do a writing workshop. As general manager of the Halifax Branch of KTG Systems, Elizabeth oversees a staff of approximately forty systems integrators, each of whom plays a part in delivering data processing systems for government and private corporations. The company's business is systems integration; one of the staff's main activities is writing.

Writing takes many forms at KTG Systems: system analysts and designers use their knowledge of computer languages to create programs that help their clients process monthly cheques, for example, or maintain files on children in foster homes or records for worker compensation. Using design criteria, the programmers translate the plans into programs which the client can use to process data. From initial contact with the client to final development and implementation, everyone in KTG Systems is responsible for a "deliverable," a written document that describes what can and will be done with a computer system to meet the
client's particular needs. With a resource bank of a variety of systems software and hardware at its disposal, the company is a "one-stop shop" for any group, government or private, that wants to computerize any part of its business.

When Elizabeth called me, she had just been promoted to Business Center Manager of the branch, and realized she had been spending more time than she could afford in helping her staff write clear and readable documents, or deliverables, for each other and for clients. First, she wanted to provide her management team with some guidelines for better writing, and then offer similar help to staff at all levels. When I arrived to give the first workshop in the company, I felt as if I had come home.

I had recently completed a study of high-performing, or transformative, organizations in which I documented shifts in attitude about work over the last decade or so. The traditional hierarchy – in companies such as General Motors, for example – is slowly breaking down. Organizations, particularly in the private sector, are finding that they must be fit and lean in order to turn a
profit and to adapt to changing market demands. The industrial age has shifted to the information age, and some business watchers claim that up to seventy percent of private enterprise nowadays is in the service and/or information business. What this means is that process (the "how to") is as important, perhaps more important, than the product (the "what").

Such a shift has implications for the role of management and the employee. Many organizations are giving employees more say in company policy and direction; more incentive to work with the company through profit-sharing, perquisites ("perks"), and greater autonomy; and more opportunity to grow and to move within the organization. No companies exemplify this transformation better than the computer development companies of the Seventies and Eighties, many of which started with an idea, or vision, and gathered people around them to realize their goals. Unlike the hierarchical dinosaurs, these companies are agile and dynamic; they have learned how to move in a whimsical market, and if they don't, they risk collapse.
KTG Systems is such an organization, and when I stepped off the elevator to the penthouse offices to begin work, I could tell immediately that the philosophy of the company was different from that of the traditional hierarchy. The people in these offices discussed plans in the hallway, argued and joked with each other, responded to each other’s writing, and showed no evidence of a chain of command. Although the penthouse quarters had offices with doors, I saw no doors closed. Meetings seem impromptu and few; business was an on-going energetic conversation that often extended well into the night.

Further, I soon realized that my philosophy of working with writers was the teaching analogue to the management philosophy at work in these offices. As a consultant, I have promoted writer’s autonomy in decision-making, replacing external rules with guidelines that arise from context, and an emphasis on process and constant revision. As I worked with the management team in the conference room, I knew I wouldn’t have to explain my “non-traditional” approach as I often do in more hierarchical companies. Much of the philosophy was tacit: but they work with systems and I work with
The company visionary is Ian McLeod, a dynamic entrepreneur in his mid forties, who owns several companies and has a controlling interest in KTG Systems. In the early 1980's McLeod took the flagging company, sold its money-sapping subsidiaries, streamlined its operations, and orchestrated an Iacocca-like turnaround. The company now ranks third across North America in systems integration. Although McLeod is based in Ottawa where the head office is located, his presence is felt in Halifax; employees talk of his agile mind, his brilliant management, and his articulate speaking and writing.

Elizabeth considers McLeod amazing, "a genius," and yet, as the general manager in Halifax, she too acts as a visionary to motivate and empower employees. She is dynamic and articulate, with strong perceptive powers. She is young, almost thirty-two, and is one of only five women branch managers across North America. Her branch, however, is unlike all others; half of her staff is female.
The company’s vision – to provide the best systems for the user cost effectively – is realized through a methodology it has developed that has since been bought by some systems developers and stolen by others. Known as the “Systems Development Life Cycle,” it shapes company activity and explains company organization. Its nine phases include long range planning, initiating the project, studying system architecture, analyzing the system, designing the system, developing it, getting the facilities, and finally implementing the system and evaluating it once it is in place. Every project the company takes on is developed through this life cycle process. Each project has a manager, or P.M., who oversees all stages, keeps the project within budget and ensures that it is delivered on time.

There are no rigid roles or lock-step procedures in seeing a project to its successful conclusion. People work together in the process, exchanging ideas and hammering out solutions; an analyst, for example, steps in at any or all points along the way. The process is often recursive, and the approach collaborative. As employees gain experience, they take on new roles in project development; generally, the more experience he or she acquires, the more
responsibility they are given, and the more say they have in conceiving and planning a system for a client.

Virtually everyone in the branch office in Halifax is under forty. Many work twelve and fourteen-hour days. When I work with a group on writing, we meet after four o'clock, so that most people can put in almost a full day's work before our session begins. The first time I met with the group, we shared coffee, sandwiches, and writing problems long after most downtown Halifax workers had gone home to their families and the evening news. I marvelled at their energy and enthusiasm, their willingness to work through problems when most peoples' minds would have shut down for the day.

The spirit of collaboration and the sense of community is fostered in a number of ways. Because several people must work together in a team to complete a project and are then reassigned to another team, people learn to be flexible and adaptable. They are given regular opportunities to grow. But, as the general manager, Elizabeth has built on the nature of the organization and promoted community
solidarity through her leadership. The management team has gathered at the Blomidon Inn, a grand old home-turned-country inn in the Annapolis Valley, for a weekend retreat. At the end of every month, on a Friday at five o'clock, employees gather for wine and cheese at what Elizabeth has called a “Town Hall” meeting, an opportunity for everyone to bring issues of concern or innovative ideas to the whole group.

But, most importantly, Elizabeth has re-organized the branch CEM (Career and Education Management) program, the mechanism for performance appraisal in the corporation. Four years ago, she took on the task of reorganizing the CEM program while she was still a project manager. Up to then, she says, it “was a dud, a joke. Most people thought of it as two free lunches a year. Reviews were often late and usually superficial.” Elizabeth revamped it, calling for peer, subordinate, and even client reviews of an employee’s performance. For the first time in the Halifax office, everyone’s effectiveness would be evaluated by all available sources. No other branch across the county had done this, and it proved to be highly effective. “If you can count employee turnover as a measure of
success, our rate is outstanding, approaching zero." Each employee, or CEMee, is assigned a partner who regularly gathers reviews about his or her work performance, and communicates that information in regular meetings. Elizabeth has since assigned the administration of parts of the program to senior members of the staff, but she remains the overall monitor. And, in keeping with her commitment to professional growth, she demands – and receives – a review of her own performance from all the people in the branch and from clients.

The flattening of the company hierarchy and the emphasis on performance has seemed to create an atmosphere in which risks are encouraged and mistakes forgiven, but failure to learn or to grow is not. The atmosphere is positive. Conversations are usually upbeat and open; the people, relaxed, yet enthusiastic. Perhaps the most revealing indicator of company attitude is their use of language.

During my first days in KTG Systems, I was overwhelmed by the jargon and the acronyms. Familiar only with word processing terminology, and only vaguely aware of the nature of systems
integration, I felt as though I had slipped into a parallel universe. The lexicon of the computer industry has grown immense in the last ten years. Employees in the penthouse were not only using the terms familiar to most programmers and systems analysts across North America - terms for various processes, strategies, software, and hardware - but they had a word bank unique to the company as well. Meetings I observed were filled with acronyms such as P.M., P.A., S.P.A, C.I., and SDLC. Like most people new to a specialized community, I did not have access to understanding the most simple concepts because I did not have the code. Once I got past the simple abbreviations for Project Manager, Programming Analyst, Senior Programming Analyst, Client Index, and Systems Development Life Cycle, I was able to tackle the next level of code-breaking, understanding the meaning of terms such as batch, configuration, access paths, and stress test. After reading a number of documents, giving writing workshops, and observing and talking with Elizabeth, I now understand most processes generally, but I still lack the fully integrated understanding that would allow me to speak fluently with any employee in the language of their workplace. I am no longer the outsider who hears a cryptic form of English, but
I am not yet living inside the words. From the outset, however, I
have been at home with the language play in the environment.

It is difficult to tell whether Elizabeth's quick mind, her energy,
and her playfulness have encouraged language play in the company;
or whether the intelligence and wit of the employees in general
make them natural wordsmiths on paper and in speech. Perhaps it
is both. The language of the computer industry is dynamic, in flux,
and quickness of mind and humour seem natural by-products. At the
site of one of the KTG Systems projects, employees post a "word of
the week" and make a game of using the word as frequently as they
can. Projects are given pet names: Department of National Defence
is called "subs" (for submarines) and CBC's two PDP computers are
named Peter and Paula." When Elizabeth learned to use the Project
Management Workbench software, she called the process "playing
PMW," and others followed suit. Elizabeth talks of "adrenalizing"
stress (high energy behaviour to work through stress), uses "hoppy-
do" as a general term for "hurry up," and creates light-hearted titles
for processes and strategies. Some of the language would be
considered irreverent in a traditional organization. Talking on the
phone to a man in head office, she commented, "if you have any hot poop on what’s happening in the GM shuffle in Ottawa, let me know. I certainly hope it’s not jerk face." The banter in the hallways is always witty and competitive. Once initiated into the community, new employees layer their computer lexicon with KTG Systems terms, project nick-names, and then learn to become fluent enough in the environment to coin their own phrases for projects, people, and processes.

During the last writing workshop I conducted in KTG Systems, I realized how much of the language had become tacit knowledge to me, and how greater my ability had become to talk with people about their writing. My literacy in this context had developed to the point where I could move beyond responding to format, presentation, and style, and respond with understanding to the more critical issues of organization and content. And, like the student of a second language who begins to master the idiom, I began to feel the freedom and power that comes from not only understanding jokes in the language, but making them as well. KTG Systems is not home to me, as it is to Elizabeth, but it is familiar and inviting.
4.3 Hideaway

My car has just slid a quarter turn on the icy driveway up to Elizabeth’s house. It’s a dark night near the end of a long winter and I am cursing the roads again. I maneuver the car down to the driveway by the main road and walk the quarter mile up the hill. Like our house on the other side of Hubbards Cove, Elizabeth’s rests high above Hubbards in the woods. The barn door slaps in the wind and I am glad to see the porch light on. These woods aren’t my woods, and I don’t like finding my way in the dark.

I’ve wanted to visit for a long time now, but haven’t invited myself over. Elizabeth is often in the city for fourteen hours a day or more, and I’m sure she needs the solitude at the end of a long day. But I’ve been curious about her home surroundings, as I am curious about anyone’s house. A home reveals priorities, expresses who we are.

Elizabeth is in cotton pants and a black t-shirt, and she looks tired and subdued. She is an attractive woman with thick dark hair and
bright eyes, and she is always pleasant and gracious, even in her more silly moments. I enjoy her explosive laughter and the lively way she speaks. Like Judy, she fills up the room with her intensity and draws people to her. She is quiet tonight, she says, because she had a long heart-to-heart with her father over Courvoisier until three in the morning.

As she is making the tea, I note that her home is what I would expect. It is a refurbished Cape Cod; the ceiling beams are painted white and the walls are filled with art. It is inviting and comfortable, but lived in. Elizabeth, like me, must like to collect older furniture and knick-knacks. But, I wonder if, like me, she won’t keep or buy anything for the house that isn’t consistent with who she is. I feel relaxed here; I could bring my children to this home and not have to hold my breath. Two cats appear, and then a third. One of them enjoys my lap and crawls on my tape-recorder. I can hear CBC radio in the background.

Elizabeth’s husband, Bill, moved in with her two years ago when they were married. Tonight he has already left for Toronto. He
spends three days a week there – and will for the foreseeable future – which seems to suit them fine, given their busy professional life. Bill worked for KTG Systems for nine years before Elizabeth became general manager, and left to work with another systems company. Hubbards was familiar to him; his grandmother lives down the road in Fox Point and, as a Coolen, is related to dozens of families in the area. Bill is a friendly man with a good sense of humour and a quick smile. He seems comfortable with himself and is not as intense as Elizabeth. She says he has really come into his own in his new job, and is doing very well.

Bill has been good for Elizabeth. Since they married, they typically spend their weekends together winding down from their stressful schedule. They may rent movies from Mo’s, or clean house. They will go down to the post office for the mail and go to Jackie Dunsworth’s bakery to chat and buy goodies. During soccer season, Bill goes into Halifax on Saturdays for a game. Sometimes they putter in the garden, or clean the pool. Bill will usually cook “something really good and healthy” for dinner. “He spoils me,” says Elizabeth. They both enjoy wines and international foods and Bill’s
cooking, Elizabeth says, is good for the soul.

Sometimes they will watch Star Trek and Gunsmoke or read in bed for hours. Elizabeth avoids bringing work home and prefers to catch up with magazine reading on the weekends. She will often read work-related journals, however, such as Information Systems Management or Information Strategy: The Executive Journal. She also reads Atlantic Business, Business Week, MacLean's and recently has been reading Financial Post from cover to cover. The weekend pace is markedly different from the Monday to Friday schedule. During the week, Elizabeth is usually up at 5:45, drives to Halifax in her aerobics clothes, goes to exercise class and then to work. Often, she returns to Hubbards long after dark, and is in bed before 10:00 pm.

This is Sunday evening, the end of the weekend, and as we begin to chat I make a note to try to cut our interview short so Elizabeth can get an early night.

A few magazines and a hard cover book on management are sitting
on the coffee table. Elizabeth says she has been reading Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and thinks it's weird. She is a slow reader, she says, and was diagnosed dyslexic as a child. She is left-handed and can read upside down and backwards; we talk about left-handed females and brain hemisphere dominance. In grade two, Elizabeth was taken out of class Tuesday and Thursday mornings for help in speech and reading. She used to stutter, and couldn't pronounce "r"s properly. But now, as an adult, her reading is slow for reasons other than ability. She likes to savour a story.

"Sometimes I get right into it and have to stop. I can't go any farther because I get too excited. My heart will start to beat faster and I'll think of all sorts of things and my imagination will explode - and I just can't get through it. Atwood's book is really awful; it's just a terrible, horrible environment, and I'm just sucked right into it, feeling for this poor woman who's in this situation.

"My sister Kathy reads a book a day, and I'm just fascinated by that because it sometimes takes me a month to read a book. She eats up mysteries, sometimes skipping whole pages, just scanning
them. I could never do that. My brother Robin and my mother and father are all voracious readers.

"Rosemary, my mother, is an expert on art history and has a lot of art books. She has probably read everybody's biography in the world; she knows all kinds of things about people's lives. She also reads all the classics. My father, who was a naval officer, read anything to do with the CIA or politics, and has probably read everything on the wars, the sea, warships, animals – he's into things like strategies and economics and things like that."

"They have every magazine going in the house. You walk into their living room and it's obvious that both couches have been laid down in, and there are piles of open magazines on the floor beside them, and open books laying around. They spend their life reading – it's always been that way since I can remember – magazines and newspapers all over the place. But I didn't read much as a child.

"As the youngest, I always had someone read stories to me at night. I had twelve volumes of "My Bookhouse," very old, late 1800's, early
1900's stories, one book for two to three year olds, books for kids all the way up to age fourteen. My family took turns reading to me and I practically memorized every story.

"When I was little we belonged to the bookmobile and I would pick out books but not necessarily read them. I always chose a lot of animal books; I loved animals, and loved the pictures."

As a beginning reader in school, Elizabeth didn't like to read silently or in private, but she did enjoy reading aloud. "I liked to enunciate and get up in front of the class. We had a little work group and we sat on little benches, three on each side, and we could each read a page. We would go round robin with this little group, and I just didn't give a damn if anybody else was reading, I was just looking ahead to get mine right so that when it was time for me to read my paragraphs, I'd read perfectly. I got a lot of pleasure out of speaking the words, out of inflection.

"I always wanted to be the first and the best. I got stars for neatness in my writing and was the first one to go from printing to
writing. I practiced the alphabet over and over and over. I loved handwriting; I liked to make it pretty. I looked up in the books to find the most interesting handwriting that would make me the type of person I wanted to be. The one I settled on— I mean if you sit down and analyzed it, I would be very interesting— finally dissolved over the years and what emerged was the real handwriting, the real me, which ended up to be not far off from the one I had first patterned my writing after. I liked the artistic side of reading and writing, the tactile."

As Elizabeth spoke of her pleasure of forming letters and reading aloud, my mind wandered to childhood days when I stood in front of the mirror reciting poetry I had memorized, acting out the drama behind my closed bedroom door. There was a power to be gained by making the words mine, a sensual pleasure in the sound of words in my mouth. It was the same pleasure I felt when I tried on a cursive writing style—the tiny “o” to dot an i, which I later dropped because it looked silly and simple-minded; the self-crossed “t,” which took too much effort to adopt; and most importantly, the upright slant, which was necessary to learn so that my readers
would not identify me as a “lefty.” Over the years, I learned that handwriting analysis books were credible, to a point. After twenty years of teaching writing to people of all ages, I am still amused at how closely I can predict the introverted personality, the control junkie, the creative spirit. As a ten year old, I had thought finding my handwriting style and learning to enunciate new, wonderful words were important steps in becoming a reader and writer. As Elizabeth spoke about trying on interesting forms, I felt as though I could come out of the closet.

Elizabeth remembers one teacher, Sister Cathleen Dunn, a writer who taught her English in the convent for grades nine and ten. She encouraged Elizabeth’s poetry writing, and Elizabeth became very close to her. Writing is part of the family tradition, and as a budding poet, Elizabeth was in the company of her cousins, her aunt and her uncle who have all published books. Her grandparents were genealogists, and wrote as well.

“I am related to a number of Jesuits – a real academic flavour, very research-oriented. A lot of pseudo-intellectuals in my family.”
I raise my eyebrows at that comment because it sounds pejorative. I ask Elizabeth what she means.

"I think of intellectuals as being very boring and pedantic, and my family isn't. They are intellectual for learning's sake. Intellectuals are very conscious of being well-read - they quote the latest editorial they read in the New York Times, or an article from the New Yorker or Harvard Business Review. It's the name-dropping that angers me. I used to go to parties in Ottawa with an old boyfriend, Byron, and it was so tiresome. He made me read all these magazines and I'd study them so that I recognized what people were talking about, but always wondered if anybody had any ideas of their own. It's as if they had a checklist of things to talk about to see if X read Y this week. My family would never name-drop; they would say 'I read this wonderful book, or there's this neat concept or theory', but it would never be 'So-and-so's paper of 1923 first posited that...' I always called my family pseudo-intellectuals, but maybe the others are the pseudos.
"The real people are all sticky with interest and as they go through life all the things they like stick on them, become part of their life, and because they live with the knowledge, they use it. Name-droppers don't have any true interest. They walk around with a frame in front of them and they pick things up and put them on the frame and hold that in front of themselves and say "this is what I am." It's not the truth so what they end up with is a nice framework that is internally consistent but not very flexible and not really part of themselves. I believe in my heart that it is more important to understand what the dynamics of a model are, and then that becomes a sticky-glue thing and everything that truly applies will shape the model. When you live inside an idea or theory, you focus on that for the reading. If you're reading to quote at the next dinner party, then you're not really reading, because you're not reading for a real purpose, to apply it. And what a waste of bloody time.

"Maybe that's why I don't read a lot, because when I do, it will take me off my path. It will awaken in me some desire to do that, and I'll visualize myself as the handmaid or a stock broker on Wall
Street. Perhaps I’m too impressionable. Which doesn’t mean I’m running away from things, just that I’m focussed.”

We’ve emptied the teapot, and Elizabeth gets up to put the kettle on. As we wait for the water to boil, she shows me the pool off the back of the house. From outside, the house looks immense, but from the inside, I can see that the pool area is larger than the house itself. A garden area is beside the door, and Elizabeth says she can grow vegetables there until well into the fall season. The pool is covered with algae now, and around its edge are toolboxes and the general clutter most people keep in a garage. In the summer, they seldom use the pool – perhaps twice a week. For a time, Elizabeth says, there were up to seventeen motorcycles stored around the pool area.

Off the kitchen area, in the porch where I came in, there are large cupboards with doors that connect to the outdoors. The house once belonged to a doctor who kept Dobermans, and the wood frames were kennel areas that led to runs outside. After Elizabeth bought the house and before she renovated it, she used the area to work
on her motorcycles.

"You wouldn't recognize this house now," she says. "It used to be a going concern. In the old days there were motorcycles everywhere and goats in the house and a wood floor. The house was always dirty and very noisy. At eight in the morning the bikes would start up."

Knowing how everyone at our end of Hubbards, including me, can complain about chainsaws or the noise of gravel trucks on Baden Road, I ask her what her neighbors thought of all the activity. "I heard no complaints. Never. There could be dozens of people here, and we'd go for long walks in the woods, or work on bikes, and we were left alone. I'm really glad I had this time here. I had things that I wanted to do and I did them."

As we sat over our last cup of tea, I told Elizabeth that Allan and I had been attracted to Hubbards because of the sense of community. After years of living in Winnipeg, Minneapolis, and Calgary, we were tired of the urban life, of never knowing the
neighbors. We came to Hubbards to raise a family, and to find an extended family in the people around us.

Elizabeth came here to get away. "I was anonymous here and I wanted that. I didn’t want my parents or my family around; I wanted my solitude. Hubbards was a perfect place for that—a hideaway in the woods." I tell Elizabeth about a friend in the community who had asked whether Elizabeth was the "motorcycle lady". Knowing her professionally, and never having been to her house, I had laughed at his incredulous question.

"I was able to hide away here very well. I didn’t get to know very many of the people in the community at all. I knew Jackie Dunsworth from the bakery because I grew up with her. I go shopping at the Save-Easy if I have to, go to the post office or to Mother Hubbard’s. I never go to the Shore Club or to the beach. I’ve gone to a couple of antique shows at the Shopping Centre, but that’s about it."

Elizabeth is already talking about Hubbards as a chapter that is
coming to a close, which it is. The five years she has been here were years she needed to grow through a stage in her life. Now that she and Bill are married, and they both commute daily to the city, a move to Halifax would cut out travelling time, make it easier for Bill to get to the airport, and move them closer to the center of their social and family lives. Elizabeth would like to start a family soon, to start a new chapter. She is ready to move.

It's already ten thirty, long past the time I said I would leave. The cat sniffs at the tape recorder even though the tape has stopped running. Outside the cold wind is blowing, and as we say our good-byes, I pick my way over the ice through the trees down to the car. From the road, Elizabeth’s house can't be seen.
4.4 Dear Diary

Elizabeth and I are in stitches as she reads aloud some of the poetry she wrote as an adolescent. "Listen to all these 'shall's' and 'shan't's' and 'thous'" she laughs, "and all the sing-songy verse." I think her poems are good, as teenage heart-pouring goes, certainly no worse than the idealistic and mushy odes to love I created on the grassy common at the University of Saskatchewan over two decades ago. Her reading brings back those rushes of emotion gone amuck, those days when an eight a.m. coffee over the meaning of life was more urgent than the deadline for a history paper. We can laugh now, but, years ago, this was serious stuff.

Elizabeth pulls out book after book, mostly black hardcover journals filled with her writing from age twelve to twenty-two. "This was a very important time of my life; I talked and wrote about how I felt all the time. I was prolific."

Elizabeth read all the major Canadian poets when she was twelve. "They were my heroes," she says. She began writing in her diaries
regularly then, and for the next several years, she often wrote almost an hour a day.

As a child, she says, she grew up in a "wild and wonderful" environment. She was the youngest of four children, her father was at sea for up to six months at a time, and her mother, who is an artist, gave her free rein. “She had this little experiment going with me. She would never inhibit me. I was pretty bossy, and very organized, very meticulous. By the time I was ten, I was at the top of my class, was a corny poet, a perfectionist, and really good at being naughty behind people’s back. I was pretty brazen.”

She was also unconventional. When she was in grade school, Elizabeth wore crinolines under her kilt, and seldom wore matching socks. Her mother, Rosemary, considered Elizabeth to be an original, creative personality, and was delighted with her behaviour. By the time she was fourteen, Elizabeth had decided to surround herself with black; her walls were painted black, she wore black clothing, used a black hairbrush and toothbrush, and would take a fit if gifts she received at Christmas weren’t black.
Rosemary’s family was Irish Catholic; her parents were politically active and creative, and were card-carrying Communists in the Thirties. Elizabeth’s grandfather was a hard-drinking, mercurial man, and by the time Rosemary married and raised four children, she had become an alcoholic. She returned to art college and taught art, but spent ten years after sorting through the emotional rubble of her youth.

During these years, when Elizabeth was a teenager and was attending a convent, she kept her diaries. Elizabeth says she rejected women and took on an armour of aggressive, masculine behaviour, a shell from emotional pain. She wore pants, grew her hair long, and wore no make-up. By fifteen, she was taking mathematics at Dalhousie University. The rigour of the discipline appealed to her quick, logical mind; she could master the numbers, and could feel control. She bought a motorcycle when she was sixteen, joined the campus police, and moved out of the house at seventeen. At eighteen, she married the son of a Halifax businessman, and six months later they were separated.
The control and mastery she felt in mathematics didn’t extend to other areas of her life. By the time she moved to Ottawa at eighteen, she “had no female friends, was either dieting or binging, was desperately lonely, and knew that the life (she) had constructed had no basis.” She felt in danger of collapse.

In Ottawa, Elizabeth “promptly ate (her) way up and down Bank Street and gained twenty-five pounds.” Her eating habits finally caused her to re-assess her life. She wrote in her diaries about her “dieting” cycle and concluded that recovery meant total change, and that terrified her. She sank further into herself and emerged six months later “curiously cold” but twenty-five pounds lighter. She polished what she calls a “urethane image” but felt guilty about the betrayal of self she paid to get it. “It was clear that the demons had given me a body in exchange for my soul. I was 21.”

The little girl who, at fourteen, had written about finding strength and wisdom, was now a young women determined to continue the quest. She met a woman friend with whom she could talk, she
drew, took martial arts, and began to read all the major psychologists of the last century. When she read Jung, she knew what she had to do.

"I thought Jung was the bee's knees. I was in a job without a lot of pressure and so I read, read, read. It took me a year. I read Jung himself, Jungians, anything I could get my hands on. I was just insatiable because his concepts were so compelling.

"I had never re-read my diaries before, but I realized then I had a bank of dream material in them and that I had the thread to go through the maze backwards. It was a huge revelation. I took a week off work, sat down, and re-read everything I had written over the years. I drew flow charts of the themes, photocopied all the essential parts, and showed how the themes had developed. Recurring images were there, like purple flowers, and forests, and flowers growing, and golden colours. Here they are."

Elizabeth brings out her pages of analysis and shows me. The extensive work reveals a woman fiercely determine to take control
of herself, to understand herself. Reading Jung was a turning point for her: she stopped devouring food, men, herself.

"I met Jack. He saw right through the galvanized exterior to the exhausted, scared girl who needed hugs. I saw through his insolence and romanticism to the person who need nurturing. We tugged, pulled, kicked, and screamed – tried every trick we could on each other – and it was a full year before we both realized we had grown. He taught me martial arts; I taught him about computers. I started to paint, to let dreams come, and to talk about them with him. He took from me the weighty masculinity I had been wearing as an armour. I learned to cook, and wore skirts for the first time. I decided to return home to Halifax to start my MBA and to study computer law."

The male animus that Jung refers to was well-developed in Elizabeth, and, she says, will continue to serve her well in her career. But she learned to accept being a woman, and at 22, she wrote: "the woman in me is young yet, but never again will I turn my back against her."
When Elizabeth returned to Halifax from Ottawa, her mother had stopped drinking, and now, after twelve years, remains a recovered alcoholic. Elizabeth's eating habits returned to normal. Her marriage to Bill was good timing, she says; she was ready to let herself be nurtured. She doesn't write in her diaries anymore. After the intensive reconstruction of self a decade ago, she doesn't feel the need.

I watch her as she speaks and I try to imagine a young woman in bike gear with a quick tongue and a tough exterior, but it's difficult. This woman on the couch, with a pile of words that represent her youth in a box beside us, is bright and strong and feminine. Her drawings and colorful artwork are beside her on the floor. She talks softly to the cat she holds in her arms and tries to persuade her to let Elizabeth feel her paw to see why she has been limping.
4.5 Project Literacy

At 8:30 a.m., Greg pokes his head into Elizabeth’s office. This is his first day of work at KTG Systems and he is fresh-faced, wide-eyed, solemn. He smiles tentatively.

"It’s Greg!" Elizabeth exclaims. She is full of energy, enthusiastic. Several people have gathered around the office door, and Elizabeth introduces us all to Greg. She refers to me as her shadow, and Greg looks confused for a moment. The lively banter, and the jibes, and the informality are what I’ve come to expect here, but Greg looks overwhelmed.

“Come on, we have to get over to your site,” Elizabeth says, and as we make our way down the hallway, Brian and Steve appear. Greg will know them as part of the management team, and Elizabeth as general manager, but they are taking shots at each other like old friends ready for mischief. As I watch Greg, dressed handsomely and formally in a suit and tie, I can imagine what he is thinking.
We run a half block in the rain – Elizabeth is talking constantly – and we race to take refuge in a service entry door. It’s a dirty, old government building and as Elizabeth leads the way up a maze of stairs and hallways, she is summarizing for me the framework for understanding people she heard at a recent management seminar. The world is made of squares, she says, and circles, triangles and squiggles. If you’re a manager who is a square type, you’re going to be more concerned with concrete, sequential, detailed and structured ways of doing things, and you’re not going to be able to understand the circles on your staff who are more flexible, creative, open. Greg walks behind as we chatter about the differences; I tell Elizabeth about the similarity I see in this framework to the Myers–Briggs model which categorizes people in degrees of extraversion, intuition, and so on. It is based on Jungian psychology, which Elizabeth knows well. As we enter the project site, Elizabeth is still talking. Our trip has taken no more than five minutes.

The dimly-lit government office is in total disarray; they are in the midst of moving the site. “Here we are,” Elizabeth says brightly, and calls out to someone at a desk nearby. I think I see Greg’s
eyes roll slightly as he realizes this will be his working home. “I guess we’ll have to find you a desk,” Elizabeth says. She stops to talk to people behind partitions: “Hi, how’re you doing?” and stays a minute before moving on to the next person. Greg and I stand together near the door for a few moments. “I’ve had three new jobs in the last three years,” Greg says, “and this … this has certainly been the most interesting start.”

When Greg joined KTG Systems, Elizabeth had been general manager for less than a year. Her gregarious manner and refreshing irreverence violate most people’s expectations of management behaviour. Everyone in the company respects her; as one employee said “she grew up with us. We trust her. We can be open and honest about anything and everything.” They see Elizabeth as highly intelligent and perceptive. I see her as a professional learner, and today’s discussion of circles and squares is just more proof of the hunger for knowledge that possesses her. I enjoy watching her consume theories and frameworks in an attempt to make them her own. My satisfaction is due, in part, to my own on-going consumption of multiple perspectives on the world. What some
people see as rampant eclecticism, I see as a desire to grow.

Later, when Greg has been taken under someone's wing, Elizabeth and I talk in the back room. I ask her about using Jungian psychology as a template for looking at the world.

"A lot of my management style is based on those concepts. When I re-read and analyzed my diaries, I rediscovered faith – not the organized, traditional procedures of religion, but the slow realization that "me" was in here, that I should trust myself. I'm basically an intuitive person; I just follow my nose and my heartstrings and that's the way I live my life."

Elizabeth sees her life in phases. As a child, she was encouraged to be intuitive and creative. When she studied mathematics and computer science, she found it comforting to have procedures, to learn the rigour of a thinking, logical approach to the world. Developing her rational side, she believes, enabled her to prove to others what she felt, to communicate with those who are less intuitive. Next, she pursued her feelings, and through the turbulent
years she spent in introspection and developing mutually supportive relationships, she grew. Now, she says, she is interested in what Jung calls "sensation," pursuits having to do with the physical body – aerobics, eating properly. She can see herself in ten or fifteen years doing things like weaving which is, right now, too hands-on for her.

Within, or perhaps beside, these phases, Elizabeth sees her life in stages. When she returned to Halifax from Ottawa, after having pulled herself out of emotional quicksand, she began a stage of professional growth. She studied for her MBA while she worked her way to a management position at KTG Systems. As the general manager, she is honing her people skills and her ability to nurture.

"Managers are intuitive, for the most part, especially in dynamic organizations. You have to learn to make decisions with very little information, and I've always been able to do that. In a complex, dynamic environment, you have to be intuitive to survive."

Elizabeth draws on the white board a matrix familiar to me.
Organizations that are stable and simple are industries that will, for example, make widgets in a lock-step procedure. These companies are concerned with rigour, rules, regulations, and procedures. Complex and dynamic organizations, at the opposite corner of the matrix, are organic, concerned with process, and are typically information organizations.

“You’ll likely have more squares in the stable organizations; they need structured, assembly-line people. In a dynamic, competitive environment such as ours, a manager has to have the ability to delegate, to motivate, and to see the future. If your head is down, you can’t be a leader because you can’t see. So you have to be a dreamer. Square managers don’t let people grow and develop; they are constantly mucking around in other people’s projects, not letting them do their work.

“An intuitive manager watches people to see what’s going on with them, where they are going. Because I have goals in my mind, I want to know how we are sharing the vision of that goal and so I always measure people in terms of the progress they are making.
To me, that’s the most important thing. I’m very perceptive and so I can read people well.

"You saw it happen this morning with Brian – we knew exactly what we were saying, we’re all quite intuitive. Greg didn’t know what was going on. A lot of times the management team has a discussion with half-finished sentences and grunts and nods. We don’t prepare a lot of written material because we read each other.

"But the little project leaders have to write things down. You have to teach them rigour while they’re little. We start off with them very authoritatively; they have well-defined, small pieces of work with well-regulated checkpoints. Then as they grow up we are more participative with them; we are elbow to elbow, cheek to cheek, sitting side by side to show how something is done. You can see how our work space is set up that way to allow for little pockets where two or three people can get together. Then the next level is accommodating where management can discuss approach and scope and deliverable in a time frame with an individual. The person goes off and does it and comes back when it’s done. Then there is the
consultative, which is the highest form of management. It pre-supposes a great deal of trust. Here you sit down and say, "I've got this idea," and you just bounce ideas off them and all you're really holding them to is an objective or a goal over a long period of time – say six months to a year. And that's what I would do with the management team. A successful manager in this environment is someone who has successfully moved through all four of the modes and can operate selectively in the mode that's appropriate for the person. They adapt their style to the needs of the individual according to their learning and their situation. You know which person to be participative with and which to be authoritative with. If I try to be participative with you and you have a lot of autonomy on a project, you're going to say 'bugger off, Elizabeth, you're on my territory.' The management team and I have a way of signalling to each other how we are going to behave with each other first.

"Greg is going to start today to pick up all the technical skills, the methodology and so on, but as he grows up in the organization and gets more freedom, it's not going to be the technical skills that are
as important -- it's the people skills. You have to learn to relate to the team.”

Elizabeth sees herself as a gardener, someone who can help her people grow. She laughs: ‘I want it to be the strongest, most beautiful garden in the world.’ Becoming a good manager is her current project; she gathers frameworks and theories, many from her recent studies in business administration, but many on her own initiative. She focusses on articles about management in journals, keeps her antennae out for information she can apply.

Ten months later, I see Greg again. He has moved over to the penthouse offices to work on a project Elizabeth has given him. She says he has skills she would like him to develop. As Elizabeth and I sit at the table in her office, she talks about her current project.

“I want to learn everything I can about end user computing, so I can build a strategy. How can users write their own systems; what kind of methodology do they use? See all these issues of
Information Systems Management? I’m going to go through all of
these and read everything in them about end user computing. That’s
a project in my head right now and I’m going to read everything I
can about it. All my reading is need-driven, has a purpose.”

Elizabeth has called herself “not much of a reader”; that is, reading
is not a skill she uses often for pleasure or to pass the time.
Instead, she reads to consume information on a current project.
When she was twelve, she read all the Canadian poets. In her early
twenties, she read the works of a number of mystery writers, such
as Dashiel Hammett.

As a teenager, she became involved with motorcycles. When she
returned from Ottawa, she became interested again, “not from a
gang point of view,” but to learn, to develop competence.
Motorcycles became a project; she raced them, read all she could on
motors, and taught a motorcycle safety course.

“I learned a lot, some by reading, but mostly by doing. A
motorcycle engine is an elegant machine. It’s beautiful; I can pick
it up and take it apart - intricate, small tiny things. It's also a mental challenge to try to go through what is going on in that engine, to visualize the system. I don't see much difference between my interest in mathematics and computers and my interest in motorcycles. It's all problem-solving, project work in systems. Troubleshooting.”

When Elizabeth moved into the house in Hubbards, she lived with Charles who taught her a lot about motorcycles. During that time, she started to drink goat's milk because it had once cured her cold. The place in Tantallon that sold the milk was always in short supply and the owners finally sent her to their supplier. That trip began another project.

"It was one of those really nice afternoons where the sun is coming through the trees and everything's green and the air is fresh. I got out of my car and I stepped over to the fence and before I knew it about fifty goats had come out of the woods and the barns silently; they were curious little creatures and I was just mesmerized. And so I went inside and said to Bill, 'How do I learn about this?'"
"And so I went to the library and got all kinds of books and information from Agriculture Canada and I read everything and did a cost benefit analysis, and worked out how much it would take to build a barn. By Christmas, I'd put an ad in a rural newspaper and I got a call from an old pastor in Barrington who would sell me two goats. We went to get them two days before Christmas and had to build the barn in a snowstorm. I kept going to Bill for advice and finally he sent me to Sylvia, who is a goatherder. She taught me everything about milking and birthing."

Motorcycles and goats came together when Sylvia’s son began to work on what Elizabeth called “Project House.” Sylvia taught Elizabeth about goats and Elizabeth helped Wayne with his high school calculus. He agreed also to put in 200 hours working on Elizabeth’s house; in that way, he could pay for one of Elizabeth’s motorcycles which he desperately wanted. The relationship proved tragic; Wayne took the motorcycle out one day, had an accident, and severed his arm. Elizabeth hasn’t ridden since.
Since the accident two years ago, Elizabeth has sold her motorcycles, no longer raises goats, and has only four cats remaining from her family of almost thirty.

"I learned a lot about management through animals. I always had a lot of hamsters and turtles as a child, and for a time, wanted to become a veterinarian. All the animals, the house, and the motorcycles were all projects I needed to do for that stage of my life. They taught me how to care for things, to understand group behaviour. I got the whole business of back to the land and isolation out of my system. Those were important projects for me at that time in my life and I learned a great deal. Some of the learning was through books - I always get books and journals in huge stacks on subjects that interest me - and read them all at once with that focus in mind; but most of the learning was by doing. I really think that's how we all learn best, by getting involved. It's all need-driven. And now I'm in transition; I'm entering a new phase and that phase will have its own models and frameworks and projects."
By the time I arrive at the office at 8:45 a.m., Elizabeth has been here for almost an hour. She is still in her exercise clothes. She closes the door to her office, changes into a jacket and skirt from the wardrobe in the corner, and begins her morning's activities. Typically, she will read the electronic mail from the computer in the office next to hers, do her paperwork at her desk, and plan the day.

Her desk is always tidy, with papers sorted into piles. The secretary will bring in the morning mail and Elizabeth will sort it into four categories of material: read later, act on immediately, put on hold to act upon later, or file. Her natural instinct for order, combined with suggestions she received from a time management course, allow her to move swiftly through the paperwork. Every piece of paper will be handled. She will scan magazines, flag an interesting article, and jot a note to Cheryl to copy it for those who would enjoy reading it. She will use sticky yellow notes to indicate "copy MT" (send a copy to the management team), FYI (for your information), or to request an action ("Please file in my project
notebook I asked you to set up"). She will scan through the handful of pink telephone message slips and sort them by priority. When she has processed all the paper on her desk this way, she will typically write two lists for herself: one, a running project list, which is updated daily according to the stage of the project; and the other, a daily “to do” list, which includes returning telephone calls, or contacting people inside or outside the organization. Behind her desk on a cabinet are several files that house the volume of paperwork: junk mail, general office correspondence, Ottawa correspondence, Halifax Branch correspondence, incoming resumes, courses, CEM information, and print-outs of electronic mail messages. She is in the office approximately two hours a day to do this paperwork and to hold any necessary meetings.

Today, Elizabeth is full of energy and eager to show me how the electronic mail system works. The head office in Ottawa and the general managers of branches across Canada use this mail system to communicate information instantly, especially information that is confidential. Elizabeth sits at the terminal, accesses her file, and the screen indicates how many messages she has received, from
whom, and at what time they were sent. Some messages Elizabeth will print out to answer later; most she tries to answer immediately.

She reads a message from a man in the Ottawa office who asks "would you be averse to letting us call your technical guru?" for information on the Oracle software. In answer to Elizabeth's reply command, the screen shows a memo format, complete with the sender and receiver's name and the subject line already filled in. Elizabeth composes her answer aloud as she types: "We are in the same position as you with limited technical expertise ... we sent two of ours to Ottawa for 3 days of (yawn!) training in Oracle so we have a bit of knowledge - we would be pleased to pool resources and learn this together .." After a couple of sentences with names and phone numbers, she signs the message "Ta, Liz." She is typing slowly this morning, she says, because she hurt her thumb. She ignores typos ("that's okay, they can figure it out"), and presses a key to send the message on its way. As I watch and listen, I note how informally she replies, how her lively style mirrors her speech, and how little attention she pays to revising or editing. E-mail is corporate conversation that focusses on meaning and prompt
response; it is not the place for polished writing intended for many
readers.

The next E-mail message is from head office, a response to the
draft of her yearly branch budget. Last year – her first year as
general manager of the branch – was the first budget projection
Elizabeth had written. This year’s budget, she says, was easier to
write because she knew better what she was doing. Writing a
budget for the year, she says, is “all a big game. You have to know
your numbers.” Her task in writing the budget is to inspire head
office confidence in the branch’s ability to land contracts and turn
profit cost effectively. The task also requires defending certain
expenditures and negotiating with head office in a cat-and-mouse
game of performance and expectation.

As the president’s response to her draft submission appears on the
screen, I watch for Elizabeth’s reaction. From what she has said, I
think the budget must be a critical document for a general manager
to produce, and yet Elizabeth remains upbeat, almost cavalier, as she
reads his response aloud. His words seem no-nonsense, very
business-like, and his reactions are in point form. Elizabeth comments as she reads: “He’s doing very well here; he’s caught all my snags ... okay, I can live with that ... geez, you know, you can’t get something this big right ... our revised budget will probably be accepted.”

As the memo comes to a close, Elizabeth notes his change in tone. “Aha!” she says, “listen to this. Watch how the wording changes from an implied directive to polite persuasion. He’s going to ask for something.” As she read it aloud, the secretary and I smiled. She was right. Head office assesses a corporate overhead charge to the branch offices, and this year they want to increase it. The branch will have to include the increase in their project expenses for the year. The terse tone of an executive changes to a polite “Please adjust your budget accordingly.”

Elizabeth’s reading of the change in tone and wording is accurate. She prints out a copy of his response to use later when she revises the draft. The final draft is due in two weeks. As Elizabeth returns to her desk with the hard copy in hand, I reflect on her
reading. It is obviously more than decoding words and understanding directions.

Some months later, we are sitting at the table in her office talking about literacy. When I ask her what her definition is, she replies with questions. “Does literacy have to be words that you read? Can’t it be signs? Isn’t a deaf mute using sign language literate? If a person can analyze and interpret art, is that person literate in art? We talk around here about people being computer literate—that means they’re technically aware of how things work—they can interpret, understand, comprehend. Can it be applied to anything or are there some people, like academics, who have a strict definition? What are the rules?”

A volume of responses springs to my lips, but I hold them back. Instead, I say, “Consider for a moment that there are no rules. What do you think it means to be literate?”

“We talk about computer literacy a lot in our industry. We have a healthy disrespect for the strict usage of words, so we apply the
term to a lot of things. We talk about being IBM literate, as opposed to being DEC literate, for example. We talk about being literate in technical communications. We like analogy in our industry too; anybody who is working in the abstract relies on analogy for understanding. Literacy isn’t just reading words; we talk about reading people’s feelings. ‘My reading of the situation is …’ – that’s IBM lingo that marketers always use. It means a number of things: my opinion, how I interpret the actions, what the fall out is, what the net effect is, what should be done in the situation.

“We are literate in one capacity or another because of our human need to communicate, to feel that we’re here and alive and all that stuff. I assume literacy is something that grows over time, but I could be wrong. It’s quite possible that we’re more literate when we’re born, and as we get older, we focus on a few things and block others out. Humans prioritize; they individually choose to focus their energies to accomplish. So I think literacy is keyed to the basic human drive to achieve.”
"To achieve both personally and professionally?" I ask.

"I don't differentiate between the two. I think that people who do probably have trouble with themselves at some point in their life. If there's a real difference in your behaviour from one place to the other, then maybe something is missing. We are all working towards what Jung calls differentiation; it's a natural process in life. You become truly integrated, at one with your environment, and at the same time closer to seeing your individual purpose. We are all looking for our purpose; it's something that's always becoming. The way that we perceive in life, which is the degree of literacy that we have, is all tied up with individual purpose. Insofar as an individual is able to see what their innate purpose is, and able to execute it, to become it, so is their literacy developed over time. And I use the word developed in couched terms – it doesn't mean that there is more of it; it could mean that it's more focussed, more rigid. A technical literacy can be an impediment in a certain stage of your life, so there may be a requirement to develop a different kind of ability to read situations. One literacy may block off access to others. But I think literacy is very dynamic, very tied to what
you need."

When Elizabeth was doing her math degree years ago, she spent a long time on a few pages filled with Greek symbols. "Those symbols were more important to me than the paragraphs that surrounded them, that supported or explained. Taking in the symbols was reading. There are just so many forms of the written word—announcements on the television screen, classic novels, comic books, pictures with a text—and the type of knowledge that comes through those media has got to be really different, and the way each of us reads them has got to be different, not only from the reading that other people would have, but within ourselves. Every time I flip through this long range systems plan, I see something different. And I may focus on the charts and someone else would read it cover to cover, or just look at the appendix for the level of detail. It's read differently according to the purpose."

I tell Elizabeth that I see her as being a complex reader. I have watched her over time, and have observed her ability to read people and situations, her acute perceptive powers. Is that literacy?
She calls forth another of her frameworks. "I talk to all the project leaders according to PEP - I give them a PEP talk - it means performance, expectation, and perception. As the general manager, I have to do on a large scale what project managers do in their own situations. I have to constantly monitor, interpret, measure impact, synthesize and take action to correct. If it's a performance issue, we have to be literate about the task, what has to be done, what skill level has to be applied to get it done on time. Then we look at expectation - that's within the team, and without the team, the user community, all the things behind that task that people expect to be done, ensuring that you have the same vision and that people aren't developing expectations that aren't travelling along that path. Perception has to do with how people perceive the success of it or the profile. As a project manager, you have to be literate about all this; we use written reports, emotional meter-readings, body language, open-ended tests, probing. Probing is the key technique used by managers - posing a question and watching how somebody responds to it. Do they respond with confidence, are they answering the question in the first two
sentences and then backing it up with details, are they telling you another story, is there commitment, confusion? Which way do their eyes go – up, down, to the side? What kind of feel do you get from them; do they close up, open up? Do they look like they need help?

"You can read them through their writing; you try to get their draft stuff as much as possible. For example, I've got this stuff on my desk from Brian and it says: 'Liz, round one. Comment accepted Thursday morning, many thanks, BH.' There are all kinds of spelling mistakes, grammar mistakes, everything – there's a lot of trust here to give me this raw form. He hasn't even re-read it; he typed it into the PC and ran it off. He's just past the stage of formulating ideas; it's his first brain dump. What's important is that he can do that and that I can help shape that document. Jane would give me a finished document; she doesn't trust me enough. I have to get to Jane conceptually, verbally, knowing that I'll never get to her document. I accept that about her.

"You'll have to learn how people will let you read them. How do
they feel most comfortable? And how do they read you? If I want to give Jane the message that I want something done a certain way, I would probably say: 'We have a problem. I've been thinking about this as a potential solution. There are these factors that influence it; what do you think?' General discussion ensues. No commitment from Jane. Then I ask her to go off and think about it. When she comes back, she will probably have accepted my solution. Sometimes I may have something sketched out and leave the details for her to fill in so that by the next day she has filled them in and owns it and actually recommends it to me. She prefers to go off, get the problems, digest, and come back. Other people want a lively dialogue right now."

I ask Elizabeth if she intentionally "writes" herself for other people to read. She is emphatic. "Absolutely. All the time. And I have to teach others to do that as well."

That morning, Elizabeth worked with one of KTG Systems' clients, a man in charge of overseeing the implementation of a long range systems plan in his organization. He had been working with the
KTG Systems team in writing the proposal for a plan, and now had to present it to his superiors in the organization. He ran through his presentation with the KTG Systems team that morning in the conference room. Elizabeth says he was presenting like a manager, and he was not effective.

"I had to play producer of the show and coached him. Every time he sounded like a manager, I had to stop him. He had to learn to sound like an executive, to talk about grand strategy, then tactical plans, objectives. Those kinds of words are very different from the words that a manager would use. A manager would talk about philosophy or approach; the language would be much softer, interactive, influencing, persuading, shaping. An executive has to be very goal-oriented, has to take a stand, to sound confident and in control. He had to get inside this stuff, to own it, otherwise he would not inspire confidence in the plan.

"I think there are a lot of consultant-type literacies. This morning I gave him some pointers about body language. I asked him what he would do if he gave his presentation and this guy asks him a really
tough question, sitting there with his arms crossed in front of him. Mike said he would try to answer the question. Disaster, I said. You’ve just not connected with him. You should sit down, with your elbows at the same level, connecting on the same level, mirroring his body language, answer the question, then sit back and open up. Nine times out of ten, he will mirror you. You’ll connect. And I talked to Mike about listening to the words people use. If they say things like ‘I can’t get a handle on this. Could you walk through this again. I don’t grasp this’ – that’s a lot different from saying ‘I can’t see what you’re saying. I’m not getting the picture.’ And that is different still from ‘I don’t hear what you’re saying. We’re not in tune.’ One’s from the hands, one’s from the eyes, and one’s from the ears. If you don’t listen to the way people perceive the world, the metaphors they use to explain themselves, then you’ve just by-passed each other this way.”

Elizabeth’s hands slice the air. “If you use the language that people understand, then they’re going to feel as though you really understand them, and they’re not even going to know why, but they’ll trust you. And I don’t think that’s contrived or dishonest; I
think it's making an effort to be sensitive to how people want to be read.”

Elizabeth says she learned to read people by trial and error and through an intense desire to connect. As a manager, she has learned how to give support to someone else, how to read them, and how to foster commitment. Five minutes of conversation that really connects, she believes, can result in a year’s worth of commitment. She has learned to master the literacies of management.

I think of her as she was a year ago, still the “new” general manager, and reflect on the enormous amount she seems to have learned. She is more subdued now than she was when I first met her. She says she has had to become tougher, and to not worry as much about being liked. She has had to learn to be firm, to put her foot down.

Elizabeth is also more subdued, she says, because now that the days of learning to “become a manager” have reached a plateau, she is looking ahead.
“All the goals I've set for myself the last seven years, I have achieved. So what's next? I'm compelled to do something; it's coalescing, it's going to come. I'm personally outraged because, in some people's eyes, I've reached the height of my career because I'm female. I'm reliving the big horror I had when I was twelve, which is: don't get yourself mixed up with that gender because you're never going anywhere. Maybe I have to do some ground-breaking. But I feel as though I've already gone through so much; I don't want to have to go through more trials. When I talked to my father, the night before you came to the house, I spoke to him about my goals becoming more apparent. Two years ago, I would have said 'Tell me what to do.' Now I feel more in control, much less reliant on others. I think this job has helped me grow.”

The vice-president from Ottawa had visited the Halifax branch that week, and Elizabeth talked to him. Paul spoke about the differences between being a manager and being an executive. True to form, Elizabeth grasped the concept, quickly and with insight, and used the information shortly after to coach Mike on his presentation for
the long range systems plan. Paul’s words also set her thinking about her own goals.

“My goal for the next seven years is to become an executive. I’ve spent the last seven becoming a manager. When I talked to Paul, I said I think I have to get my act together, to learn more about the outside world. I have to read the Financial Post every day. I have to learn about being an executive. He just sat back and went “bang, bang, bang” – here are your weaknesses; and “bang, bang, bang” – here are your strengths. And he outlined everything I had to do. He said, ‘It’s very much the difference between being a manager and being an executive.’ It was a grand revelation. They’re really what we’re all about. I thrive on grand revelations.

“He said, ‘Elizabeth, you’re very flamboyant; it’s a strength and it’s a weakness and you have to learn when it is.’ That one phrase is everything. He said you have to learn when it is. He empowered me by saying that I could do it, that I had the raw material, and I just have to learn. And now, I’ll try on all sorts of things and will unconsciously be dedicated to the process. I’ll watch CEO’s on
television, I'll read books, I'll watch how CEO's operate, and I'll be doing a completely new literacy scan of the world.

"Remember when Peter responded to my business plan last year. Remember when you were in the office and we were reading the E-mail?" I remembered. I had thought Elizabeth’s reaction was quite upbeat, perhaps flip. My reading of her hadn’t been very good.

"I think I didn’t forgive or understand then why Peter had been brutal in that message. That was not a manager’s communication. That was an executive communication. Now, after all these months, I understand that. Responding the way he does teaches all the little general managers like me how to behave as executives. We have to learn that."

Elizabeth believes in self-fulfilling prophecy. She believes that if she visualizes something as her goal, she will achieve it. Her reading and writing of people, situations, and words on the page will be directed toward that vision day by day. It’s as though she programs herself to be receptive to the signs in the world that lead
toward her realizing that vision. The manager has arrived; the executive lies ahead.

"You know how very old maps always labelled uncharted territory 'more beyond'? That's what it's all about for me. More beyond."
4.7 Plato's Legacy

Elizabeth's interest in motorcycles made me think of Phaedrus in Robert Pirsig's book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. I went back to Plato, and to the keystone of his thought.

Human behaviour, according to Plato, comes from desire, emotion, and knowledge. Desire is our appetite and impulse; it flows from our sexual energy, and manifests itself in our lust for living. Emotion flows from our hearts; it is the source of our feelings and our strength. Knowledge is born of the head; it drives our understanding and our search for truth.

As I read Plato, I saw Elizabeth, a highly literate woman whose stormy life has been driven by desire, emotion, and knowledge in unequal proportion at various times. These forces have shaped her character and her literacy. As a young woman, her eating disorder, her passion for the unconventional, and her flamboyant behaviour threatened to overtake her. By flagrant consumption, she was almost herself consumed. As she worked to understand her
emotions, and to develop her emotions through nurturing others and letting herself be nurtured, she gained more control of her life. Her capacity for deep and rational thought has been present throughout her life; she used it to master desire and develop emotion, and now her knowledge is her guiding force.

Keeping these three forces in balance seems to have been the major task of Elizabeth's life to date and her literate behaviour has reflected that goal.

Like many adult children of alcoholics, she has a driving need to achieve, and exhibits the compulsive, "binging" behaviour that so often propels us through life. Like Judy and me, Elizabeth pushes herself very hard. As she has grown, her activities have become highly constructive, and all have been carefully chosen to help her achieve her goals.

She is a clear-headed, concise writer, perhaps one of the most clear business writers I have read. When she has a large document to produce, her writing process is intense. She will typically write
non-stop, even around the clock, to complete the task. She is highly organized and meticulous in her writing, and demands the same qualities in her staff. She has a perceptive understanding of audience, a sensitivity she has developed alongside her compassion for people and her management skills. As her knowledge of the job has grown, she has developed a greater clarity of vision for the writing in the company; she can see clearly the part each memo, deliverable, or long range system plan plays in the overall goals of the company.

Her reading activities are also intense. When she chooses a project, her appetite for the subject causes her to consume information until she has been sated. Information is the food she digests; it becomes part of her, and part of the way she perceives the world. Knowledge she gains from reading is not discrete, building-block information; it is used dynamically, and the incoming information is continually transforming, refining, and shaping her view of the world.

More than most adults with whom I've worked, Elizabeth believes
she can shape her own destiny, and to a great degree, she does.
All her behaviour, including her literate activities, is in pursuit of
becoming, of realizing her goals. She seldom wastes time on reading
or writing that are not, in some way, useful.

Elizabeth extends the terms “reading” and “writing” to include
understanding and creating signs in human behaviour, such as speech
and body language. In that way, where text is concerned, she
doesn’t separate the writer from the writing, the reading from the
reader. Beyond the text, she is intuitive and perceptive in her
ability to understand context and to use that understanding with
skill and intelligence. She is highly literate in her professional field
and her work surroundings. She can read people and processes, and
can help write the direction of her staff.

As each vision or goal appears in Elizabeth’s life, she does a
“literacy scan” of the signs she needs to read and write to make the
vision reality. Some signs may be on the page, but many are signs
of behaviour and context surrounding the page. She has a
sophisticated understanding of meaning, knowing that it is carried in
ways more subtle and complex than words read or spoken.

Elizabeth has achieved the balance of desire, emotion, and knowledge that Plato speaks of. Her deepest knowledge, however, is of the kind most essential and difficult for success and growth: the knowledge of self.
Saturday Morning

Jackie Dunsworth's bakery is behind the Dunsworth's small law office on the main road. We park at the back, David and Allan go next door to Mother Hubbard's, and I take the baby inside the bakery. Jackie is filling some of the bins that contain rice, seeds, and flour. "I'll get some whole wheat bread if you have some today," I tell her, "but I really came to see how much Elizabeth weighs now." He has always been underweight, and I watch every pound of improvement. We lay him on the digital scale — he is lighter than a small bag of flour — and we try to calculate how much he weighs without the snowsuit. The baby loves the attention. I choose two loaves of bread, pay Jackie, and walk next door with Elizabeth to meet Allan and David. The old building is a confectionery and antique store, and Sylvia, the owner, and Bob know us well. I'm surprised to see Elizabeth and her new husband inside; I rarely see her in Hubbards. We introduce everyone all around, and they both make a fuss over the baby. We stand and chat; Elizabeth and Bill have come for their Saturday morning trip to Bob's and to Jackie's bakery. David noses around the potato chip display, Allan holds the baby and talks with Sylvia, and after Elizabeth and Bill leave, I wind through the narrow rows of old furniture to look for a blanket chest. A man whose face is familiar comes in for cigarettes and chips, and Bob puts it on the tab by the cash register. I ask Sylvia about her health and her new teeth, David chooses his treat for the day, and we prepare to leave. The stained glass, old irons, and knick-knacks that were here the first summer we came are still by the door; only the furniture changes. The baby weighed and the errands done, we climb into the car and drive to the post office to see if there is any good mail today.
5.0 LITERACY FOR LIVING

Literacy, beyond the rudimentary ability to encode and decode words in print, is a process of learning to participate fully in necessary and personally important social, intellectual, and political contexts. It is a life-long process of learning to read and create contextual signs in print and society. Literacy has many houses, each of which we can learn to make our home.

This definition of literacy describes the reading and writing behaviour of the three adults in this study. To understand how information about their literacy gave rise to this definition, it is important to look at these people from several perspectives: their ways of knowing; their primary contexts for literate behaviour; their varying facility with sign systems; and their process of becoming literate in context. These descriptions will help the reader see the literacy process as one of becoming at home in the world. Becoming literate, in many ways, is a process of enculturation. Such a definition provides new insights and poses new problems in determining what it means to be literate today.
5.1 Literacy and Knowing

Adult Development

As their stories demonstrate, the literate behaviours of the three adults in this story cannot be separated from their perception of themselves in the world. Each person I worked with views himself or herself differently. When I analyzed their views, I did not attempt to categorize each individual by the stages offered by adult development theorists. I believe that stages of adult development or ways of knowing are context-specific and, as most theorists recognize, no stage is discrete or comprehensive in its ability to describe an individual.

In more general terms, however, each of the individuals in the study demonstrates behaviours that studies have shown to be typical of their gender. Judy and Elizabeth tend to conceive themselves as connected and related to others; responsiveness, nurturing, and caring are the bases for self-understanding and behaviour. The literate behaviour of these women, in spite of the differences
between them, is used primarily to make connections within themselves or with others. Jim tends to see an objective/separate self and to see relationships built on fairness, "the golden rule," and impartiality. His literate behaviour, for the most part, is used to "get things done," to exert control, and to serve instrumental purposes. The differences among the three people, however, go beyond global gender differences.

Most models or stage theories of adult growth describe moral, ego, and intellectual development along several dimensions. One of the most frequently used dimensions is the simplicity/complexity dialectic. Generally, those adults whose epistemological stance is marked by rigid notions of right and wrong, by black and white thinking, by stereotyping, and by separation of self from society in a we/they distinction are those adults who seek simplicity in the world. Adults who recognize and welcome ambiguity, who accept relativism, who view decision-making and behaviour as context-specific, who think in terms of integrative and collaborative behaviour, and who value means as much as ends are those adults whose experience and understanding of the world are complex. In
the terms used by adult development theorists, the simplicity end of
the continuum includes Perry's (1970) dualism stage, Loevinger's
(1977) self-protective and conformist stages, and Belenky et al's
(1986) stages of silence and received knowledge. The other end of
the continuum includes Perry's relativism stage, Loevinger's
autonomous and integrated stages, and Belenky et al's stage of
constructed knowledge. Most theorists agree that as an adult
develops along the continuum toward a complex understanding of
himself or herself in the world, not only do they achieve greater
self-knowledge, they perceive themselves as more integrated in
society. In other words (and reminiscent of Vygotsky's (1978)
perception of the development of language in the individual as a
process of socialization), the more individuated and self-aware we
become, the more we are integrated with society.

Another dimension of growth and development characteristic of many
stage theories of adult development is the passive/active or
dependent/autonomous dialectic. This dimension of adult growth is,
in other terms, a continuum of empowerment. At the
passive/dependent end of the continuum, the adult looks to others
for knowledge and power, seeks the safety of conformity and rules, and sees knowledge as a body of information outside of himself or herself and in the hands of authorities. Again, this perspective is typical of those individuals at Perry’s dualism stage, Loevinger’s self-protective and conformist stages, and Belenky et al’s stages of silence and received knowledge. At the active/autonomous end of the continuum of growth, the adult views himself or herself as capable of effecting change in the world, of constructing knowledge, of having the power to use knowledge of self and society as a means of making connections. Here, the adult sees self and knowing as inseparable; he or she therefore sees knowledge as contextual and dynamic, and sees self as the instrument for knowing. Perry’s relativism stage, Loevinger’s autonomous and integrated stages, and Belenky et al’s stage of constructed knowledge are examples of stages marked by an active/autonomous perspective.

My synthesis of these two dialectical dimensions (simplicity to complexity; passive/dependent to active/autonomous) does not capture the complexity and the variations among adult development stage models; nevertheless these dimensions, known by different
names in different models, seem to be common underlying features. Models differ by gender as well; Gilligan's (1977) analysis of women's moral development and Belenky et al.'s (1986) research on women's ego and intellectual development show how women's concern with relationships and connectedness cuts across all stages. Regardless of these gender differences, however, the dimensions I have outlined have validity for the insights they can provide about adult change and growth. Where literate behaviour is concerned, this research shows that these dimensions apply in the reading and writing attitudes and behaviour of the three adults in the study.

**Epistemology of the Participants**

As the stories of Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth have demonstrated, their literacy and their ways of knowing cannot be separated. How they view themselves in the world affects their behaviour, including their literate behaviour. Their attitudes about, approaches toward, and uses for literacy must necessarily be a reflection of their epistemology, or way of knowing.
Judy is seldom reflective, and sees herself as having no definable goals. Her current purpose is to help others: her children, her husband, her friends, and the community. She calls herself a realist, saying that by having no expectations, she avoids disappointment. At this time in her life, she defines herself in terms of her relationships with others, and does not have a strong sense of her own power or identity. She conforms to the expectations of her parents and the community in which she grew up. Because she is highly intelligent and a quick study, she has always met the standards of academic achievement expected of her; she simply learns what the standards are, and achieves them. She instills the same performance standards in her children. She reads constantly and most often uses the reading in the service of others close to her; she does not write frequently and lacks confidence about her writing ability. Where school and book learning is concerned, Judy tends to be a passive learner, given to acceptance of received knowledge.

Until recently, Judy’s tolerance for ambiguity was not high. Once she quit full-time teaching, she said she learned to relax more, to
realize that things can’t always be perfect. Her boys’ first years of schooling in a whole language classroom tested her concern for perfection and notions of right and wrong; she learned that they could learn in an educational environment different from her own. As she learned more about the whole language movement in education, her understanding about teaching and learning became more complex, although her approach to teaching has always been marked by an understanding of relativity and individual differences.

Judy’s knowledge of the Hubbards community is complex. Her knowledge of the details of life and the histories of everyone around her give her a rich background for understanding the complexity of human behaviour, at least in the daily life of a small community. As a result, her perspective is one of understanding and not judging; she sees herself as part of the social fabric of support and caring that keeps a community cohesive. In her family and community activities, she is active and constructive; she works to contribute to the quality of life of those around her, and uses her knowledge of the community to get things done.
Jim likes facts and the power and authority they can provide. He likes clarity and efficiency in procedures, and enjoys working in areas where he can see a right and wrong, a black and white. His tolerance for ambiguity is sometimes low; he likes neatness, order, and consistency. He sets his religious faith apart from other areas of his life because the existence of a God, he says, can’t be proven. He values objectivity and control. He approaches many tasks as problem-solving activities and enjoys applying reason and logical thinking to many areas of his life. He has acquired procedures, skills and techniques for obtaining and communicating knowledge which he can apply to most situations. He approaches any assertion or argument with the understanding that there may be contrary evidence or multiple perspectives on the issue.

Jim’s literacy demonstrates his way of knowing. He prefers contemporary non-fiction because he finds information useful. He avoids reading about extreme positions or issues that are contentious or ambiguous. He has developed strategies and procedures for clear writing and for efficient accounting and financial processes which he can apply to his writing and management of information. He
considers effective reading and writing to be efficient processes for taking in and communicating information. Literacy, to Jim, is instrumental and practical, a skill one can acquire to exert control and to achieve efficiency.

Although Jim prefers to work in areas such as accounting and computer applications where he can see a right and wrong answer for a particular situation, he recognizes the multiplicity of perspectives on issues. He does not, however, accept full relativism in knowledge; he considers experts to be the ones who have acquired, through research and inquiry, the most incontrovertible facts. Jim has avoided reading and writing in the humanities because there are no facts, and because the relativism in areas such as literary knowledge promotes ambiguity and subjective decision-making. While Jim recognizes the complexity of the world, he prefers, and is drawn to, activities and understandings that are marked by clear-cut answers.

Jim sees writing as a grey activity, not black and white; but he felt greater mastery of the process when he learned strategies that
helped him be clear and logical in his business writing. He sees reading largely as a passive activity of taking in knowledge, rather than as a process of constructing meaning. For the most part, Jim views reading and writing as skills rather than behaviours.

Jim is a confident individual, and sees himself capable of exerting control in areas of his life that are important to him. He is active and self-reliant and feels compelled to be a responsible citizen and father. At times, however, he can be inflexible, and his conservative views, his preference for the "middle of the road," reveal his need for order. He is by no means passive or dependent, but neither is he fully active and autonomous, for his concern for social order and convention is stronger than his commitment to individuality, personal knowledge, and moral or intellectual relativism. He does not actively engage in a process of self-knowledge, and except for his experience in writing about his life, does not view literacy as a vehicle for self-awareness.

Elizabeth views knowledge as dynamic and constructed and sees herself as an instrument for knowing. She uses her ability to read
and write to promote and extend her knowledge of herself and the world. She also uses her literacy to foster connections and relationships with those around her. She is committed to collaboration and co-operation, and to empowering others by promoting their independence and self-knowledge.

Elizabeth views the world as complex and dynamic and does not seek simple answers of right and wrong or black and white. She sees literacy as a complex process which changes according to circumstance and need. Knowledge and information must be made one's own, she believes, in order to be useful. She believes literacy is used to achieve goals which the individual must identify in order to achieve self-awareness.

She sees her interactions with others as being individualized and context-specific. She learns about herself through her interactions with others, and constantly monitors her process of self-understanding. While she is largely active and autonomous in her approach to the world, she nevertheless uses others' perceptions, such as perceived profiles of a "manager" or an "executive," for
example, as prototypes for goals and achievement. She is somewhat dependent upon sources other than herself for these models, and yet understands that she must make the behaviour her own and must grow into these roles in her own way.

Elizabeth currently balances the use of mind and emotion in her process of self-awareness, although when she was younger the two forces held sway at different points in her life. She aims for integration and synthesis in her life and believes that behaviour in all contexts must be informed by a coherent vision of the world, a world view that is comprehensive and yet constantly changing and developing with time and experience. She sees her literacy as a means for refining and expanding her world view and sees herself as an instrument for reading and writing both text and context.
5.2 Primary Contexts

Each of the adults I worked with can be considered, by most standards, as literate in any context, to the extent that they can use their ability to write and read to survive in most situations in contemporary society. However, I have chosen to discuss their literate behaviour as it is demonstrated in their primary contexts. By primary, I refer to those situations of personal, social, or political importance to the individual. For Judy, her home and community are her primary contexts, and because her community is, in fact, her home, I have considered the two contexts to be one. She has acted out her life in the streets and personal histories of the community of Hubbards; her making of a home and family in this context is merely an extension of the home she has made in Hubbards.

For Elizabeth, her workplace is the primary context in which she demonstrates her literate behaviour. She is obviously at home in her house with her husband, Bill, but this context is not primary; she does not spend much of her time there, nor does she define
herself largely, as Judy does, by her personal context. For Jim, his work, whether it is the workplace itself or the work he brings home, is an important context for his literate behaviour. His family and community, however, are equally important, and can be considered equally primary, for purposes of this research, as Jim defines himself as much by his home and family obligations as he does by his work. But, in terms of elapsed time, however, Jim probably spends more time in work pursuits.
5.3 Literacy and Sign Systems

The rudimentary ability to encode and decode words on the page can be considered in this research as basic literacy. Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth are, by most standards, competent adult readers and writers. Words are symbols on the page with the potential of meaning for the person who reads and writes the words. These signs hold significance for the literate adult; they are the linguistic sign system.

But language is always created and understood in context, and as a sign system for conveying meaning, it is supported by other systems that exist alongside it. One of these is the numeric/mathematical sign system. It can be argued that this system more properly belongs with the linguistic system because it is "a language" and appears on the page; but for the purposes of this research, I have distinguished between them. Another sign system that can exist alongside or support the linguistic is the social/interactional sign system, which includes body language and interactive behaviour.
Obviously, many other sign systems must support and extend reading and writing behaviour, but for Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth, three systems appear to be most salient in their demonstration of their literate behaviour: the linguistic (written language), the numeric/mathematical, and the social/interactional.

Competence or facility with the numeric/mathematical system is often referred to as number literacy, or numeracy. Gardner, in his theory of multiple intelligences (1983), describes a logical–mathematical intelligence that arises not out of the auditory–oral sphere, but out of a confrontation with objects. As the child develops, he or she becomes facile in manipulating objects, abstracting objects and the relations among them, and eventually to conceiving and manipulating symbols that stand for objects and relationships among them. This logical–mathematical intelligence is most obvious and evident in an adult's numeric/mathematical skill, but can also appear in the adult's facility with logical operations in fields such as computer programming, and, as Gardner suggests, may be evident in musical skill as well. As signs supporting the primary linguistic system of written language, the numeric/mathematical
system includes, for purposes of this research, the symbols and signs used by an adult to understand and convey meaning in numbers and logical operations.

From evidence appearing in this research on the literate behaviour of three adults, I define the social/interactional system as one which supports linguistic signs through an adult's understanding of and competence with the social/physical behaviour. It is the adult's ability to take meaning from body language and interactional patterns, to understand the significance of social behaviour through his or her developed competence in understanding gesture, movement and other physical human behaviour. It goes beyond Hymes' (1972) communicative competence, which refers to our understanding of appropriateness of language in social contexts; it has more to do with the ability to take significance from the human behaviour that arises from or leads to the words or the page. Whether it is innate or learned is not an issue that will be discussed here; it may be a competence steeped in personal history and experience, and, as studies of women's development have shown (Belenky et al, 1986), it may be gender-related. The signs that transmit meaning to this
system are not as easily defined as the numeric/mathematical signs. They are context-specific and ephemeral and can include subtle behaviour such as eye movement and voice inflection or obvious behaviour such as initiating social contact.

Judy is a competent reader and writer. She understands what she reads, whether it is an article on child-raising, historical information she will use to prepare for substitute teaching, the newspaper, or a recipe. She perceives reading as useful activity for improving her ability to help others or get things done. To that extent, she is facile with linguistic signs for taking in meaning. Similarly, she can be a competent writer when she has writing to do, but she does not use it as a dynamic vehicle for growth or self-understanding. She is often nervous about writing, and during the research, preferred to talk about her perceptions rather than write about them.

Judy doesn't read or write a great deal; her facility is primarily with spoken language. She is fluent and articulate and speaks most often about the concrete realities around her, rather than about abstract relationships or concepts. Spoken language is her primary
medium for conveying meaning and understanding others, whether it is at home, in her volunteer activities or in her community interactions.

Judy uses social/interactional signs to create meaning in the contexts of which she is a part. In fact, those signs dominate her meaning-making to such an extent that her reading and writing are secondary to them. In other words, compared to Jim and Elizabeth, who write and read comparatively often, Judy's use of written language is not a primary force in her meaning-making.

As I researched the community, it became apparent to me that Judy could read the significance of an individual's behaviour with greater facility than most community members I observed. She understands the genesis of a comment or an action, whether it is Rosalie's comment about a teacher, or the reason why the treasurer of the Home and School Association would lose an important receipt. Because she is steeped in the details of Hubbards life, she can read the social/interactional signs in the community extremely well, and can not only know and understand community behaviour, but also
anticipate and predict it. When she does read and write for her family and community, her literacy is supported by this complex understanding.

Certainly, her ability to read the signs in the community has been developed from experience – most anyone living in the same context for nearly forty years will learn the habits, stories, foibles, and traits of the people around them – but Judy’s competence in reading the significance of social/interactional behaviour derives from forces additional to experience or enculturation. She tends to define herself in terms of her relationships with others, she is extroverted and socially active, and she tends to behave according to social norms of the community, which gives rise to greater attention to behaviour that meets those norms.

Jim, like Judy, is a competent reader and writer. He reads primarily to gain information to expand his knowledge, particularly knowledge related to his work. In his casual reading he prefers non-fiction and factual information. He reads for pragmatic purposes, and views reading largely as a passive process of taking in knowledge. He
does not like writing, but writes regularly, and uses his knowledge of practical strategies to approach writing as a problem-solving activity. He does not view writing or reading as processes for self-understanding. He considers them to be activities for communicating information objectively.

Jim’s competence with numeric/mathematical signs is equal to and supported by his knowledge of linguistic signs. His facility with numbers and mathematical concepts is an integral part of the reading and writing he does at work. He conceptualizes, solves problems, and creates new information with financial and statistical information. His competence with numeric/mathematical signs has developed to the point where he can learn to apply it in new contexts and new situations. Problem-solving activities appeal to him; he enjoys the challenge of applying formal operations to write computer programs for his home computer, using logical approaches to gaining efficiency in management, and finding effective solutions and procedures for personal and community financial activities. His accounting and financial competence and his logical problem-solving abilities allow him to exert control in contexts important to him,
such as his work and his community service.

Because Jim tends to see a separate/objective self, which can be typical of his gender, his knowledge of social/interactional behaviour is different from that of the women in this study. He is intelligent and socially skilled, but his behaviour is marked more by reaction than responsiveness. He uses his knowledge of social/interactional signs, particularly at work, to effect change in or control others’ behaviour. He tends to take people, as he says, “at face value,” and react accordingly.

Elizabeth appears to be equally competent not only with the primary linguistic signs of written language, but with the attendant systems, numeric/mathematical and social/interactional. She seems to integrate all systems knowingly and to orchestrate her reception and creation of them to take and make meaning from text and context in her life.

She is slow reader; but the lack of speed has less to do with ability than to her on-going absorption and synthesis of the ideas. Reading
is a process of making the ideas her own by incorporating them with existing beliefs and information. Her reading is project-driven; current intellectual passions, models and frameworks, or fields of interest lead her reading behaviour. She actively constructs meaning as she reads; in the reader-text relationship, she is the driver. Because of her wide experience in writing and reading, she tends to view text as mutable and in process. She also views readers and writers around her as mutable and in process, and often reads beyond text to context. As a writer, she has a highly-developed sense of audience.

Elizabeth, like Jim, is competent with the numeric/mathematical sign system. Her experience and facility in mathematics and computers makes her able to conceptualize in numbers and logical operations. Like Jim, she has gained knowledge from working in a number of roles to be competent in both concrete and abstract applications of numbers and logical operations. She does not, however, use deliberated problem-solving approaches objectively; while she has the ability to do so, she more often uses intuition (usually informed by reason and knowledge of context) to make decisions.
Elizabeth is skilled in reading the signs of social/interactional
behaviour. Her knowledge of these signs is not only specific to the
context in which she works, but is sufficiently well-developed to
serve her in new contexts as well. She uses this knowledge of
these signs to read text and situations, to "write" her own text and
behaviour, and to teach others to do the same. Her knowledge of
this system is explicit; she not only demonstrates her facility with
this system, she is aware of it and can explain it. Like Judy,
Elizabeth's knowledge of social/interactional behaviour demonstrates
a responsiveness and connectedness to those around her. She sees
herself as an integral part of the ebb and flow of daily life and sees
her role as constructive and dynamic.

All three adults in this study are competent with the linguistic sign
system. Judy's reading and writing is secondary to her use and
tacit understanding of social/interactional behaviour. Her behaviour
gives evidence of her competence in both spoken language and
social/interactional realms; she does not, however, articulate what
she knows of these competencies. Jim's competence in reading and
writing is supported primarily by his knowledge of his numeric/mathematical signs. He reads, writes, and thinks in numbers and logical operations; the logical and problem-solving approach that can underlie the knowledge of this sign system is part of his approach to the world. He is aware of his competence, uses it, but doesn't articulate his awareness. Elizabeth integrates her knowledge of linguistic, numeric/mathematical, and social/interactional signs. She seems to use all three equally, without giving primacy to any one, in order to participate in the contexts important to her. Further, she can describe her processes of knowing and her means of understanding text and context. She plays an active role in creating the contexts in which she participates through her interpretation and use of these sign systems.

**Becoming Literate in Context**

Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth use their competence with linguistic signs and with supporting sign systems to function in the contexts of their lives. But these competencies vary with the individual, and with the contexts of which he or she is a part. Each of these
people, during the course of the research, talked about their developing competencies in certain contexts. Each has demonstrated using their literacy in new situations so that they move from being “uninitiated” in the context, to participating in it, to helping create or shape the context.

Judy is a literate member of the Hubbards community. Using her knowledge of reading, writing, and social/interactional behaviour, she can not only participate fully in the life of the community, she can help to create the life of the community through her involvement. Judy does not take what many would call large risks in situating herself in new contexts. She takes constructive action, such as starting a Block Parent program in the community, but she can support that undertaking with the knowledge and background she already has about the community. During the time of the research, she was confronted with a new context in which she had to take a part: the education and awareness of the parents with the whole language curriculum. She read about the curriculum, talked with others about it, and tried to achieve harmony in the community through her efforts. She gained new knowledge about education in
the process. Because awareness of the principles underlying the curriculum was important to her, she used her competencies to educate herself and others. For the most part, however, and for purposes of maintaining the life she has set out for herself, she is literate in her primary environment. Her lack of risk-taking may be a function of her self-knowledge; if she becomes more reflective, or sets new goals for herself, she may become more self-aware, take on new challenges, and extend her literacy development to new contexts.

Neither Jim nor Elizabeth have lived in Hubbards all their lives and learned to participate fully in the community life through an intimate knowledge of the personal affairs of the residents. Jim’s literate behaviour is primarily demonstrated in his work. In his former job, he learned to read and write the financial information in that environment with enough competence to play an active role in shaping that context. Similarly, when he became vice-president of the gold exploration company, he initially felt "illiterate" in the knowledge he required to function in the job and to effect changes in the company. As he grew in the job, he became more "literate"
and able not only to read and write in that context, but also to read and write the context itself. He avoids participating in contexts, such as reading literature, in which he feels he will never become "literate." In the context important to him, however, which at this point is his work, he is not afraid to take risks or to learn.

Elizabeth constantly propels herself into new situations in order to learn and to grow. She speaks of multiple literacies in a number of contexts, and sees herself as learning to participate in as many of these contexts as are important to her. In the relatively short time of a decade, she has situated herself in the contexts of computer systems analyst, project manager, and general manager, and has learned to become literate in each of them. In addition to these contexts, or alongside them, she has chosen to participate in other situations important to her and become competent in those. Although they are not her primary context, which, for this research I have considered to be her work, they are nevertheless contexts for learning which she has used to develop her competencies as a person, such as student, animal keeper, and motorcycle enthusiast. Her literacy has been used not only to develop competencies, but to
develop herself. Her self-awareness, in turn, gives her the confidence and momentum to take on new challenges and to develop new ways of being literate in new contexts.

**Being at Home in the World**

Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth have taught me about literacy in their lives. From them I have learned that literacy is not a monolithic set of skills in reading and writing. Being literate is behaviour informed by the ability to read and write and to use other signs that not only support these literacy processes, but also extend the definition of reading and writing beyond text to context. By studying the lives of these people, my literacy was transformed. I needed to learn not only what it means for these adults to be literate, but what I would require to be literate in their environments.

At first, I was an outsider looking into their lives, a neighbour looking in the windows of an unfamiliar house. By talking and working with them, I became more familiar with their environment and learned to be more at home in their worlds. I am limited, as
anyone would be, from becoming a full participant in their lives, and that limitation, to me, is the key to understanding the meaning of literacy. It is centred in the individual; it is the result of years of growth and change, of attitudes and experiences, of individual meaning in context. What it means for a person to be literate can never be fully understood by anyone else. Literacy is as individual as character.

The stories told in this research show the unique quality of literacy. When I began the research, I knew I would find individual differences, but I did not realize how powerfully the findings would transform my perceptions of literate behaviour. Literacy simply cannot be separated from the person. As a result of this research, I have difficulty thinking of literacy in the abstract, of thinking of it as anything other than individual expression. To tease out what it means to be literate by documenting each and every text written or read, by analyzing the genesis and effect of each reading and writing act, or by separating those acts from any other meaning-making behaviour in context is virtually impossible. The web of meaning is intricate, and the threads are woven finely; they stretch
from the depths of who these people are to the people – stranger or loved one – whose lives are connected to their own. Each of these people is a literacy of one.

These literate adults are long past the years of schooling that gave them the rudimentary facility with reading and writing textual signs. And yet learning what I have about their unique ways of being literate, I cannot help but re-think literacy education as we know it. It is folly to make literacy our curriculum and not the child. Separating how and what we know from who we are reveals a fundamental lack of understanding about behaviour in the world.

But literacy education is not the focus of this research and will not be discussed here. It is enough to read the stories of these individuals and learn, from the experiences of their schooling, what they think about literacy. All of these people describe the way they learned to read and write in school as being inappropriate or unconnected to their lives today.

If this research demonstrates that literacy cannot be separated from
the person, what then does it allow me to say about literacy in general? The behaviour of these people has shown me that the process of becoming literate, at least, has some common features. If we are to accept the notion that literacy is a life-long process, which these people have amply demonstrated, then the information they have provided about literacy allows me to conclude that they share common ways of becoming literate.

Each of these people uses the signs that are most salient in their lives to learn to be at home in the contexts they choose or that are chosen for them. Judy is at home in the Hubbards environment and uses her ability to read signs in that context to maintain her life, to continue to feel comfortable and at home in that world. Her literacy is highly context-specific. Jim’s and Elizabeth’s literacy is also context-specific, but each of them has had more experience in different contexts. Judy has learned to be at home in her world, and her world does not change as much as those of Jim and Elizabeth. Jim and Elizabeth’s worlds continue to change often, and they repeat the process of becoming familiar with new contexts. Of the three, Elizabeth has knowingly orchestrated sign systems to
approach new contexts and read their signs with competence and ease; and this competence is either supported or created by her self-knowledge.

But what does being at home in their world mean? From the evidence of this research, it seems that, to be literate in context is to learn not only to read the signs of that context, to take them in and to understand them, but to become an active participant as well. When one is fully literate in context, he or she not only participates fully in that environment, but helps to shape the environment by being an active creator of signs and hence meaning. In other words, learning to be literate in context is a process of learning to move from being merely receptive to signs to constructing them, and from a simple understanding of the context to a rich, complex understanding of it. All of the adults in this study have undergone the process of understanding the complexity of the contexts in which they work, and have learned to participate in them. All have learned to be, or are in the process of becoming, at home in their world. And all will continue that process as they take on new challenges.
How then does learning to be literate in context differ from becoming a functioning member of a culture, or becoming enculturated? From the evidence in this research it appears that the two processes are one and the same.

I distinguish between enculturation and the process of becoming literate by suggesting that literacy is a process of using text to understand and create context. By focussing on literacy, we focus on text and the attendant supporting signs systems that people use to learn about and to shape their culture, immediate or far-reaching. Obviously, it can be argued that enculturation, at least in contemporary culture, requires literate behaviour; and, to that extent, the processes are alike, for we then require an understanding of both text and context to be enculturated. But with the lens on literacy, we must start with the individual’s attitude about and approach to text, for it is through the individual’s reading and writing behaviour that we understand his or her literacy.

Literacy is one means by which a person becomes a part of a
culture, but it is not the only means. In the lives of competent readers and writers, such as the adults in this study, literate behaviour plays an important role. But the processes of enculturation and literacy must essentially make the same demands: participating in the culture, learning sign systems sufficiently well to create them; and gaining depth of understanding through time and experience. And the processes must essentially have the same effect: to achieve individuation through an on-going process of socialization.

I recognize the problems inherent in viewing the process of becoming literate and of being enculturated as being similar; where then do we draw boundaries? But perhaps in the very problem of definition we can begin to reshape our understanding of what being literate means to adults in contemporary society. Perhaps in our perceived need to draw boundaries we have cut off our understanding of the complexity and implications of literate behaviour. Perhaps by examining literacy as enculturation we can better understand its role in shaping the individual and the culture. To be literate today means we must be able to participate fully in those contexts in our culture that have importance in our lives.
PART TWO: LITERACY STUDY

6.0 TRANSFORMATIONS

6.1 Coming to the Research

I had taught junior high school for several years when I returned to study writing education at The University of Minnesota. I was soon swept up in the excitement of using variables in syntactic complexity to determine differences in writing quality. I believe the quest was to discover what factors made writing good; we could then, presumably, learn what we needed to teach.

Then came process. In the rapidly-changing field of writing education, I shifted my perspective from the product on the page to the stages of composing that student, expert, and basic writers used. Donald Murray was teaching others by examining his own writing process. The now-famous grammar caveat (teaching grammar for grammar’s sake would not improve writing) exerted a force in the field; it seemed to represent a shift in our understanding that the writer, not textual variables, was the curriculum. Voices from all educational levels, from primary to college, and from other
disciplines, such as cognitive psychology and linguistics, entered the discussion.

Writing and reading educators began to work together. No longer were these processes considered to be output and input skills on either side of a text; reading research began to soften the boundaries of its experimental cells and to examine the ways readers compose meaning from the page. I was teaching community college by this time, and watched the field of writing and reading education blossom with questions and theory. In a decade, writing and reading educators explored more territory than either field had explored in a century. As I used journal writing and the stages of composing with college students, I worked toward synthesis; I wanted to find the best way to teach by marrying theory with practice.

I left college teaching and began to apply what I knew about student writers to adults in industry who wrote letters, memos, and reports daily. Most adults I worked with had little fluency, were anxious about writing, and had little awareness of the complexity of the writing process. Accustomed in their schooling to defer to the
teacher’s perception of “the right way,” they continued in adulthood to look to an expert to tell them where they were going wrong. Working with them, I learned that the writing process is both universal and particular, and I began to understand how the exigencies of context – audience, purpose and organizational politics – can never be ignored. I could not play the role of the complacent expert with any conviction: even as the complexities of writing and reading in daily life were facing me, I continued to look for simple answers in my teaching and in the research. The inconsistency was unsettling.

By the time I had applied for doctoral studies at The University of New Hampshire, I had begun to look more broadly at writing, reading, and learning. What was literacy, if not a life-long pursuit? What was learning, if not a process that carried us from birth to death? I determined to learn more about child and adult development, about the social, psychological, and emotional forces that shape our learning and, therefore, our lives.

During the first few months of graduate study, I carried a suitcase
full of untested hypotheses, outworn ideas, and intellectual cliches. Slowly, through round-the-clock reading, writing, discussing, and observing, I began to describe to myself what I needed to learn. I examined my own writing and reading processes, and by doing so, learned how critical it was that I respect the uniqueness of others. I learned too the importance of finding my own questions and my own answers.

As I studied, I continued to work with adult writers and readers. I read a series of books on social change and management, including Marilyn Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, a work that many academics had ravaged for its sweeping generalizations. The dialectical thinking process it promoted gave me patterns that helped me make connections between writing and reading research and the world at large. It confirmed my perceptions that the hierarchical organization was changing, that employers were reaping the benefits of employees who had a say in the action. I began to see how work in the writing and reading process reflected an educational shift from compartmentalized, segmented pursuits to collaboration and integration. Writing and reading educators were opening their
doors to work not only with psychologists, linguists, sociologists, and anthropologists, but to work alongside – and to learn from – teachers and students as well.

What had been going on in my mind was simply a reflection of what was happening outside it. The search for simple answers became untenable to me in light of the complexity of context. Objectivity and conformity became questionable goals. I began, as I worked with men and women in organizations, to enjoy learning about the writing and reading concerns of specific people in specific environments and to worry less about one answer for all. I began to teach what I had learned, that given all appropriate strategies and variables to consider, we have the power to make our own decisions.

After a series of seminars with Sharon Oja and Rita Weathersby, both of whom work with adults in educational and organizational environments, I wrote the following words:
To transform is not merely to change. Transformation implies a fundamental shift in world view, a new way of being in the world. Leaves may change colour, but a caterpillar transforms. Once it has emerged from the cocoon, the butterfly no longer lives in the world in the same way. The butterfly is the transformation.

The key to my understanding of societal change, and to the change in writing and reading education, was the notion of transformation. Learning and growth, I came to realize, were not defined by incremental stages or by quantities of information received and transmitted; they were on-going processes of perpetual transformation, dynamic and synthetic.

Through my own writing and reading, I saw the individuality and contextual differences that mark all readers and writers. By becoming a researcher myself, I learned not to control for the vagaries of context as I had in the caterpillar days of syntactic complexity, but to invite the richness these vagaries brought to questions and answers. I learned the fallacy of wide-reaching applications of method in teaching and to learn from individual teachers and individual students. Finally, and most importantly, I understood that nothing stands still, and attempts we make to pin
the butterfly to the display board – whether it is by "definitive" research, standardized testing, or quantifying performance appraisal in organizations – must necessarily take life from the butterfly. We can learn just as much from watching it fly.

With these understandings, I approached the study of adult literacy. Since the days that the word "process" entered the field of writing and reading research, the field has expanded and become richly complicated. In fact, the use of the word "literacy" now connotes to most researchers the co-existence and interplay of reading and writing in the social, personal, linguistic and psychological contexts of education and of life.

But because "acquiring" literacy has become a motherhood issue, and is considered to be an undisputed goal of the educational process, I wanted to understand what it means in daily life to be a literate person. Researchers have examined the effects of illiteracy in the North American society, and the relative place of literacy in other societies. I read research in adult literacy to learn the ways in which adults in our society, once they know now to read and write,
I discovered that there are as many definitions of literacy as there are purposes for defining it. Many definitions have been instrumental: “functional literacy” connotes the skill level of adult to survive in a particular context; “basic” literacy is often defined by grade level or a measurable test score that is used for placement or gatekeeping in various institutions. A few definitions are epistemic, such as Freire’s description of literacy as an adult’s ability to read the world, to empower himself or herself to act in society. It was the epistemic definitions that made me think; they connected literacy to people.

Most descriptions of literacy use in adult life come from survey research. It provides full descriptions of daily reading and writing tasks by amount, kind, purpose, sex, age, and profession. Case study research of adult writing and reading is not common, nor is qualitative research of adult literates in context. I found ethnographic descriptions of literacy to be the only studies that mirrored the complexity of the process. Heath’s (1983) ethnography
described literacy in the context of specific communities and Taylor's (1983) work examined literacy in a family context. Dohney-Farina (1985) studied the role of writing in the context of an emerging organization.

After reading research in adult literacy (listed in the bibliography at the end of this study), I returned to the notion of transformation. If being literate is more than the sum of our skills and behaviours toward text, more than a list of letters and books we read and write, it must be a way we know the world. By joining the research effort toward studying literacy in the context of daily life, I hoped to begin to learn what it means for an adult to be literate.

Years ago, I could not have approached the study of literacy in this way. But years ago, the profession was young, and it seemed right at the time to view text without context, and to separate findings from people. Transformations in my thinking and in the field as a whole have brought me to the study of literacy not as a means for describing what people read and write, but as a means of seeing ways they behave in the world.
6.2 The Research Perspective

Working with Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth, I was able to begin to see what literacy means in their lives. As I questioned and watched, I made connections between what I was seeing and hearing and what I had already experienced and knew. What I learned from them gave not only life to the ideas about literacy and growth I brought to the research process, but extended them as well.

The field of semiotics, more than any other, has informed my perspective on literacy and learning. I take from semiotics the most simple idea: that, as human beings with intention, we receive and create signs, embodying meaning, from the world around us. The science of signs holds that our world (individual and collective) is a process of making and taking significance from things, actions, people, events, and beliefs. Semioticians such as Peirce have offered complex taxonomies of different types of signs and relationships among them; but, for my purposes in observing literacy in daily life, I took from semiotics merely the fundamental notion that every act,
gesture, symbol and word means in a context important to the people involved. We read and take significance from signs, whether the sign is a darkening cloud, a word on the page, or the movement of an eye. And we create signs to make ourselves understood; we write words, we nod, we smile, we act upon our surroundings.

I consider spoken and written language to be code systems with the potential of being trans-cultural and trans-contextual; that is, we can use our language, to a great degree, to communicate and to understand in a variety of cultures, from the school, to the office, to a community and society as a whole. Within specific contexts in a culture, such as reading office correspondence, for example, an adult uses language as a code system to create meaning from the words on the page, and uses essentially the same code system to read various types of correspondence. In this way, "basic" reading and writing ability can give an adult the potential for participating in the meaning-making across a number of contexts in a number of cultures.

But words as part of the language code system do not stand alone.
They are connected by “webs of meaning,” to use Vygotsky’s term, to the context in which they appear. The phrase “Please amend your records immediately,” appearing in a memo in one context could mean to one reader that the writer is making a polite request for action. To another reader in another context, the meaning could be different: the words could signify a terse command made by a hostile supervisor. The different meanings or different readings are infinite, depending on the variations in people and contexts.

Words, both spoken and written, are tips of the iceberg under which is a body of knowledge, a set of assumptions, a tacit understanding of certain individual, social, and cultural rules. And words, whether spoken or written do not exist as independently occurring code systems. A spoken message is always accompanied by body language such as gesture and posture, and inflection; a written message, by signifying elements such as timing and format.

In order to interpret literacy skills or literate behaviours from semiotic perspective, I do not consider an adult’s ability to read a computer manual, for example, a simple act of literacy: I consider
when and why he is reading it, his attitude in approaching the task, the circumstances surrounding his reading of the text, and the manner in which he reads it and uses the information. To describe what it means for that person to read that manual in that context at that time is the beginning of a description of literacy as a social semiotic activity.

Literacy cannot be separated from culture and from the signs that make meaning in that culture. When I approached the study of literacy in the lives of adults, my task was to understand the signs that people know and use that enables them to be at home in their world, to behave appropriately in any of the personal and social contexts in which they move.

Just as literacy cannot be separated from culture (and I refer here to contemporary North American culture), literacy cannot be separated from the individual. For that reason, I was able to enhance my understanding of the participants' literacy by reading current work in adult development. The study of adult development gave me a number of frameworks for seeing cognitive, moral,
emotional, and ego growth in the individual. No one framework or perspective can provide a full explanation of adult growth along any dimension; but these frameworks can collectively show the multiple ways in which we can view adulthood.

Reading these theorists reinforced my belief that growth and change do not stop with high school graduation or entry into the work force, but rather, they continue until death. Obviously, this recognition of adulthood as a development process assumes that literacy, as an inseparable part of the person, must also grow and develop as the adult ages and takes on new challenges in the world.

Early work in adult development, like early work in child and literacy development, often attempted to tie growth to predictable chronological stages and tasks. Recent studies of adulthood promote a perspective on growth that is transformative in nature; that is, growth is seen as an on-going process of change in which adult thought and behaviour build on themselves in a dynamic and increasingly complex process.
Work by Kohlberg (1969), Loevinger (1976), and Perry (1970) show moral and ego development as a movement from simple, egocentric perceptions of self and the world (a we/they duality) toward an understanding of relativity, multiple perspectives on reality, and contextually-tied values, understandings, and decision-making. Gilligan’s (1977) work distinguished women’s moral development from men’s, and an extensive study by Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger, and Taule (1986) demonstrated in depth women’s ways of realizing self in society.

The research by Belenky et al shows women’s ways of knowing as falling into five major epistemological categories: silence (voiceless and subject to external authority); received knowledge (not capable of creating knowledge); subjective knowledge; procedural knowledge; and constructed knowledge (valuing subjective and objective strategies for knowing and perceiving knowledge as contextual, created by self). I found the work useful and credible for a number of reasons: the authors resist the suggestion that these ways of knowing are fixed or pure categories. The research process they used emphasized discovery of the participants’ point of view and did
not privilege the researchers' agenda. Further, the authors recognize the use these categories may have in viewing men's ways of knowing. And finally, the research findings appeared, from my perspective, to synthesize key components of current thought on adult development through grounded theory that can inform the study of literacy development as well. When I began the research, I had not read Belenky et al's study; as I collected data, however, and my own theory-generating began, I saw connections between the literacy process and ways of knowing.

Most specifically, the authors’ grounded theory emphasized the dialectical processes that undergird thinking and action. They describe these dialectics along several dimensions: most interesting for a study of literacy are the continua between process and product (or means and end); discovery and didacticism (or constructed versus received knowledge); collaboration and solitude; and synthesis and compartmentalization of knowledge.

Within differences adults demonstrate in their ways of knowing, I believe they also demonstrate individual differences in their
reception and knowledge of differing code systems. Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences is not widely applicable to this study of literacy; however, his suggestion that people respond differently to symbol systems in the culture is useful.

For whatever reason – innate predisposition, education, enculturation, or exposure – we respond uniquely to linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, and bodily-kinesthetic symbol systems. Viewing literacy from a social semiotic perspective, I found Gardner’s theory useful as I began to work with adults who were variously skilled in working with numbers, reading body language, articulating concrete and abstract ideas, and visualizing concepts.

Perspectives on semiotics and adult development helped me to understand the complexity of literate behaviour in the world. I began the research realizing that I would not find any truths; rather, that I could find only diversity in meaning: that each individual was literate in his or her way, according to the differences each exhibited in background, personality, approach to literacy and learning, goals, life tasks, and ability to carry out the
work of their lives.

That realization was borne from experience in working with literate adults over the last decade. It reinforced my conviction that literacy research in the contexts of people's lives was necessary. Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth helped me make connections with what I read and knew before the research began; but, more importantly, they shaped my understanding of literacy in context in ways that no reading or theoretical understanding beforehand could predict.
What does being literate mean? was the question that prompted this study. Throughout the two years of research that followed, I clarified certain assumptions about research and about people through the research methods I used.

1. Learning to see from the participant’s perspective had to be the goal. All the research methods I used were directed toward understanding what being literate meant to Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth. I learned about the community of Hubbards to understand the setting in which they lived; once I had selected these three people to work with, however, their literacy and lives – not the community of Hubbards – became the field setting.

I distinguish between this topic-oriented ethnography and case study research in two ways. First, because all participants live in the same community, they share a context (although with individual perspectives on the context). And secondly I consider myself a
participant in the research, and by doing so, cannot stand outside what I see.

2. The research process is a story that can be written only once. Ethnography implies activity both on the part of the researcher and the participant. The methodological choices the ethnographer makes then become analogous to the choices a story writer makes. Each word, like each research move, both constrains and opens up new words and new choices. Had I chosen different methods or different people, or other methods at different points in time, the results would not have been the same.

3. The research process is dialogical. This assumption is a corollary of the previous assumption. As the participants and I discussed their lives and their literacy, and as they allowed me to observe, question, and participate in their lives, they, too, were making choices. How they presented themselves to me was determined in part by the way they perceive me and the way they want to be perceived. The stories they choose to tell me are chosen in terms of their significance to them, and my reception of
the stories is affected by what I take as significant in my role as interpreter. What I take as significant determines what I ask and do next. There can be, therefore, no objective, “true” representation of the participant’s perspectives outside the research process itself; once the research process has begun, the dialogical relationship affects the perspective of all parties involved.

Mishler (1986) talks about the dialogical process in research interviewing; he claims that both participant and researcher are actors in a speech event; they attempt to arrive together at meanings that both can understand. Like the research story as a whole, the discourse unfolds and is shaped by the speakers; meaning is always contextually grounded. Recognizing talk, and hence research itself, as a transaction is a necessary step toward respecting participants’ meaning.

4. We use stories to make sense of our experience. Narratives link the events of our lives, give coherence to our actions. From the early stages of the research, the participants told me the stories that were significant to them. Stories usually have a causal
outcome; and their implications hold for future experience. The narrative events that Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth recounted always had “a point,” a meaning that could or has affected their lives today. Similarly, the research process became an extended narrative, a collection of stories that gave shape to the lives of the people who told them. It seemed fitting, therefore, to use predominantly the story form to recount the research process.

5. Literacy is a social semiotic. People read and write according to the meaning those activities have for them. Each literate act has a significance in the context in which it appears. Each reading and writing activity is connected, in some way, to an individual’s intention to make or take meaning in the environment, and therefore, is connected, in some way, to the unique character of that individual. Further, all literacy activities support and extend other meaning-making codes in the context in which they appear.

These assumptions were nascent beliefs when I began to collect data. As the research process unfolded, the assumptions not only became clearer, they guided the methods I used.
7.2 Research Phases

The research process had four phases. The first, my entry to the setting, involved my participating in the life of the community. During the second phase, I observed community activities more closely as I participated, took notes, and talked to people informally about literacy and the community. Here I collected literacy artifacts, observed settings such as the library and the school, and began to develop sampling criteria for choosing participants to work with closely.

Phase three of the research began when I chose several literate people in the community to observe and to interview. My criteria were systematic, in part, but intuitive as well. From my observations of many residents in several contexts, including school, sports, and social situations, I selected several residents and recorded my observations about literacy in their lives. From that group of people, I narrowed the number of participants to three.

The last phase of the research process was the longest and most
intensive phase. Here I worked closely with Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth, observing, recording notes, and interviewing them about their lives and their literacy in a number of settings.

The research phases were not as discrete as this account seems to indicate. From the outset, I watched carefully to identify possible participants for the final phase, and from the outset, I moved often between global and specific observations of people and settings. The process was recursive, and emerging data determined each step. Theoretical sampling to test hypotheses occurred during all phases.
7.3 Participants

Some of the criteria I used to select participants were established early in the research process. I determined to work with community members who used reading and writing regularly in their daily activities; who demonstrated an ability to use reading and writing with a degree of control and competence; and who would be considered "successful" adults by community criteria. I did not use tests to measure their competence in literacy skills; instead, I used artifacts such as letters, notes, and reading material to determine whether a participant could be considered literate. To determine whether a person was "successful" by community standards, I used attitudes and perceptions of the community to select a participant.

After the initial stages of the research, I had selected several community members as possible participants. One was an active writer whose job it was to write training manuals at work; she was an espoused non-reader, however, except for work-related material, and so I did not approach her to participate in the final stage of the research. Another was an active reader and writer, but did not
demonstrate the ability to use writing effectively to accomplish her goals. Further, the community seemed to be mixed in its perception of her as a successful, literate adult. Yet another was a man who was an active reader and writer, was considered moderately successful, but was somewhat reclusive and unapproachable.

I approached Judy to participate in the research because she had lived in Hubbards all her life, was intimately familiar with the residents and community activities, was active in school and library settings, and had two children whose literacy she was actively trying to develop. Judy became my principal informant about Hubbards society, helped me map the community, and introduced me to key people such as the former local schoolteacher.

I asked Jim to participate because he had not lived in Hubbards all his life; was active in sports, church, and school activities; worked in accounting and finance, a field outside the humanities and education; and was considered a community leader.

I approached Elizabeth because she had a successful career, did not
have children, lived in Hubbards but did not participate in Hubbards society very frequently, was in a technical field, and worked in a setting that was exemplary of a "new corporation." Further, her views on many life issues were less traditional than that of other participants.

I had chosen a fourth person, another male, to work with but time constraints prevented me from approaching him to participate. I regretted this, because I felt his perspectives would have been valuable. Literacy has traditionally been seen as female territory, in current research, in society, and in the schools: more information from a male perspective would have been useful.

While my final criteria for selecting participants can be described explicitly after the fact, they were arrived at intuitively. If it can be said that intuition is simply our instinct for using information we acquire unconsciously, I must have read signals during the research process to approach the people I finally chose. Now that the research is complete, I see that the participants are different across many criteria.
1. Community involvement and knowledge: Judy’s is high, Jim’s moderate, and Elizabeth’s is low.

2. Primacy of setting: Judy spends most of her time at home, Jim divides his time between home and work, Elizabeth’s time is almost exclusively at work.

3. Degree of family involvement: Judy’s is high, Jim’s moderate, and Elizabeth’s is low, largely because she has no children and her husband travels a great deal.

4. Amount of reading and writing: Judy writes less than the other two, but reads as much; Jim writes and reads daily at work and at home; Elizabeth writes and reads largely at work.

5. Nature of career: Judy’s background is teaching, but her current career is being with her family; Jim’s field is accounting and finance, areas demanding different uses of literacy from those in
education and the social sciences; Elizabeth’s career is in the computer industry and management and, as result, uses her literacy differently from the other two.

6. Sex roles: Jim’s marriage show the most traditional sex roles and Elizabeth’s, the least. Judy’s marriage is in the middle of this continuum.

7. Values: Jim’s values and attitudes about education, child rearing, among other issues are the most conservative of the three. Elizabeth’s and Judy’s are more liberal.

8. Education: Jim has the least amount of formal education; Elizabeth has the most.

9. Articulation of self-knowledge: Elizabeth is most fluent in her ability to explain what she knows about herself. Her metalinguistic ability is well-developed. Jim’s and Judy’s fluency is less so.
Participants differ from one another along many other dimensions as well, all of which have been discussed in the "Literacy for Living" chapter. The criteria mentioned here show the more external or obvious differences among the three participants. I aimed to work with people demonstrating differences along many dimensions and consider it a weakness in the study that I was unable to identify participants from a wider age range. The potential fourth, the man whom I didn’t approach because of time constraints, is in his late forties, and would have provided a balance in age across the group.

Each participant I approached agreed without hesitation to participate in the research. I informed each of them that I would keep the information confidential, would gain their approval for any use of the information, and would change any names or circumstances if they wished me to do so. I informed each of them about the nature of ethnographic research, its intensity and its demands on time, and indicated that I would be observing them at home, in their work settings, and in other community activities. I told them that my field notes were available to them at any time,
and that they were to read everything I wrote on them, make comments, edit, and clarify my findings. All agreed to participate under those conditions.
7.4 Data Collection

During the first phase of the study, I observed the community and took field notes of my observations, including detailed notes of particular settings and activities, such as Home and School (PTA) meetings, the school concert, and the local library. Once I had chosen participants to work with closely, I used the following methods to collect data:

1. I observed participants at home, work, and in community settings. I took field notes of my observations.

2. I interviewed Judy, Jim, and Elizabeth about several topics, but not necessarily in the same order with each individual. These topics included the following: family and personal history, youth, and literacy in their parents' home; school experiences in reading and writing; attitudes about reading and writing as students and as adults; training or education in reading and writing; current literate activities at home and at work; attitudes and goals, life issues; and "watershed experiences" in literacy and life that have affected them
in some way.

3. In addition to informal interviews, I conducted several taped interviews with the participants on these topics. The interviews were, as I have previously mentioned, dialogical in nature; that is, although I may have had certain agenda in mind, I took the lead from the participants to a great degree, and let the discourse unfold according to subjects and issues that emerged.

I observed, took notes, and made audio and video tape recordings of Jim and Elizabeth as they were writing and reading. Because Judy did not complete an extended piece of writing during the time of the research, I did not tape record her writing and reading. I did, however, ask her to keep logs on the brief reading and writing tasks she performed during the day. Time did not allow Jim and Elizabeth to keep such logs.

4. I gathered as many examples of past and current writing samples as were available. I took notes about the amount and kind of reading that each participant did regularly. I talked with all the
participants about the purposes and goals for each literacy activity, the genesis of it, and in some cases, I followed up the results or impact of the activity on the participants. With Jim’s letters, for example, I observed the writing and tracked the impact of the letters on company policy. I tried to observe each literacy activity not as an isolated activity, but as part of the context in which it was written.

Aside from asking Judy to keep a log of her reading and writing activities, I did not impose reading or writing tasks on the participants. Instead, I chose to assume the perspective of an observer at their elbow, and watched them in the process. I took this stance intentionally because I wanted to remain consistent with my objective of learning to see from their perspective the normal literacy activities they were involved in during the course of a day.

As I began to write findings about each person, I followed up with specific questions to fill gaps I saw in data collection. I gave all the draft writing to each participant as I completed it, and they edited the writing and made changes. All their changes appear in the final version of the study.
AFTERWORD

The wind is cold and the light snow covering the first shoots of green tells me to be patient about spring's arrival. We have been held hostage by weather this long winter and I want the sunshine to come, to bring us out of our homes and into each other's lives again, as only summer will do.

Elizabeth is trying to sell her house and last night shared real estate stories with us over tea. She is currently "goal shopping," as she calls it, and has been asked to teach in the MBA program part time at a local university. She is keen now to read more about the outside world; she says she wants to broaden her knowledge. Judy took a permanent substitute teaching position this last term and is now talking about teaching full time again and perhaps returning to school. I talked to Paul at length yesterday about plans for her fortieth birthday celebration. Jim continues to work long hours at his job, and we continue to debate over issues of education and of life. He has taken to reading books on grammar and usage in
writing. Debbie has returned to school to complete a bachelor's
degree but finds that the cobwebs on the ceiling and the laundry
basket keep her from taking on a full time academic workload. The
conversations I have with these people get better and deeper each
time we are together; we talk about beginnings, not endings.

Each has talked about his or her heightened awareness of the
reading and writing they do daily. They don't know how profoundly
they have affected my understanding of literacy and of people.
These people have shown me how extraordinary the individual is,
how the roots of behaviour go deep into the past and reach out to
the future, how a single comment or event can shape growth and
experience forever. Researching their literacy has shown me how
schooling can sometimes make all the difference or none at all, and
how much we have to learn about literacy experiences outside of
school. This research has opened my eyes about the many ways in
which people understand their world and, of course, the many ways
they are literate. More than ever before, I see a need for us as
educators to rethink our understanding of text in context, and to
learn more about the signs people use to read and write their world.

Rosalie's son, David, is doing better in school; and the whole language curriculum is demonstrating its power in some Shatford classrooms to help the children become independent readers and writers. The former vice-principal, now acting principal, has softened her approach and gained community support. The new resource teacher, Cathy O'Neil, has helped Todd Power produce writing and reading he is proud of. Perhaps my lens is more focussed than it was, but it seems more community members than ever are taking an interest in literacy education.

Recently, the community was overjoyed to hear that Lynne and Lenny are expecting a baby, and saddened by the death on the highway of the man who owns the video store. The first Shore Club dance of the summer is less than a month away, and the summer people will soon be here. Tourists will drive through town and wonder, perhaps, what it is like to make Hubbards a home.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


