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**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL UNDERSTANDINGS:
THE EVOLUTION OF A TEACHING SELF**

BY

JOANN PORTALUPI

**B.S., New England College, 1979
M.A., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1988**

DISSERTATION

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Reading and Writing Instruction

May, 1995

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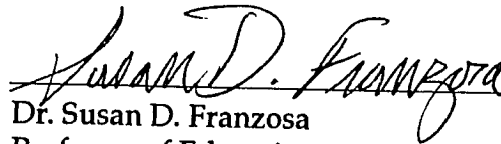
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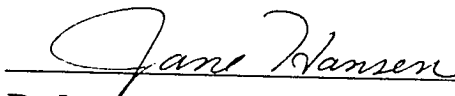
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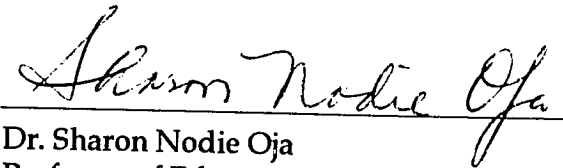
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DEDICATION

to my mother
who is more remarkable
than she knows

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It has been said that writing is a solitary endeavor; and although it is true that this text was composed in the quiet enclave of my study, it secretly bears the signatures of numerous others. Some of those individuals are introduced in the text. I do not mention them here because the story speaks more eloquently about the ways in which they have influenced my life.

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Jane Hanson, with her unique ability to create spaces where students can listen to their own voices, made it possible for me to write an early story which gave me the first glimpse of what it would mean to re-enter my childhood. Her responses to drafts in progress helped me understand the impact of my words.

Sharon Nodie Oja provided important guidance in the area of adult development. My course work and conversations with her helped me develop a perspective about myself that was critical to the writing of my autobiography. The eagerness with which she ventured with me into new territory gave me wonderful encouragement.

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Taylor and Adam, old enough to understand my need for solitude, showed tremendous patience during the long hours I worked at home in my office. Together with their brothers, Robert and Joseph, they made it impossible for me to lose myself in my work. For that, I am forever grateful.

It’s impossible to acknowledge the countless ways in which my husband, Ralph Fletcher, has given of himself in order to make it possible for me to do this work. Day after day I entered a world of writing where I often felt tentative, terrified, or stuck. I was able to do this because he created a safe haven to which I could return to be replenished and loved.

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ABSTRACT

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL UNDERSTANDINGS: THE EVOLUTION OF A TEACHING SELF

by

JoAnn Portalupi
University of New Hampshire, May, 1995

In this study the author uses autobiographical method to explore specific questions about teacher development: How is a teacher identity constructed; What constitutes the teaching self? In addition this study seeks to consider the potential uses of autobiography as a tool in teacher education.

Part One, "A Quiver of Truths," is an autobiographical text in which the author explores issues of her own development as a teacher to reveal its broad roots in a wide expanse of life experiences, specifically the familial, cultural, and historical influences as well as broader issues of human development. Any attempt to make meaning out of experience draws one into an impulse to order one's life. This study attends to the particular work of bringing that meaning to written language. The author composes the story of her life from a particular location marked by a multitude of factors including race, gender, class, development. Reflections on the act of writing are interwoven into the text making the work of autobiography itself an additional subject of the text. In writing this story the author attempts to make visible the story of her writing.

Part Two, "Notes and Further Ruminations" extends the theorizing function of autobiography as well as provides more explicit discussion on the narrative strategies and structures employed by the author. The notes are

meant to further explore the complexity of autobiographical work by discussing both the potentials and limitations involved in constructing a written story of one's life.

Readers are invited to both witness and participate in the autobiographical act. While the novelty of a traditional study lies in the reported findings, the novelty of this work is in the reading and the writing. It lies in the act of perception, both the writer's and the reader's.

INTRODUCTION

When the notion of writing this autobiography was still an infant idea, I shared my plans with a neighbor. Without missing a beat Andy looked at me and quite seriously asked, "JoAnn, you're only thirty-five: how can you write an autobiography?" At the time I didn't have the answer. More accurately, I didn't understand the question, behind which I now see the assumption many people hold about autobiography as a genre earned by a person who has lived a long life of some import and who now will render that life in order to answer the question: "What does it all add up to?" This view of autobiography sets writing apart from living—a mirror revealing the static monument of what one has experienced, and most importantly, accomplished.

Jill Johnston (1993) challenges this notion of writing as a summing up by asserting that when we write the life we are making it up—not the facts but the ways of seeing and organizing them—and that this in itself is an act of self-recognition. I was born in 1957, the second of three children born to first generation Americans. I moved as a 15 year old entering my sophomore year in high school to a new state, a new school; my first introduction as a teacher was in a British Primary school. These are indisputable facts.

The crafting of an autobiography, however, goes far beyond the facts. The story lies within the webbing of organization I give to them. What receives heft; what becomes warp and woof; how is this all to be ordered? This fiction, some would call it, is almost equally

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indisputable. For who could possibly dispute it? If I write of others' intentions, they may dispute those aspects. But the subject of the autobiography is one's own intentions, one's own inner landscape; it lies beyond dispute. Though this is not to suggest that readers might come to their own conclusions about the relationship between the "faction" (Bishop, 1993) and the writer's actions. It may be then that the purpose of an autobiography is not to stand as a testimony of who one is, but as a mechanism to trigger the actions that will define who one is becoming.

Autobiography may be seen as the interface between word and action. In describing and recounting past actions I define future ones. When I write a life I do more than attempt to understand my history; I lay the groundwork for my future. And if that autobiography is about my teaching self, the writing becomes a critical part of the continual act of becoming a teacher.

Long before I developed a conscious interest in autobiography and its potential as a tool in teacher education, I had a more general interest in the stories teachers told in the context of their teaching lives and the view these stories provide of the personal histories teachers bring to their work. When I began my doctoral work I decided to take a closer look at the impact personal history has on one's current teaching life. I had long been influenced by Lortie's statement that we learn to teach from the years we spend on the other side of the desk or as Deborah Meier (1992) writes, "The habits of schooling are deep, powerful, and hard to budge" (p. 596). In a small study I interviewed three teachers over several weeks, asking them to engage in both oral and written activities to look at the way in which their histories as

learners, both in and out of school, came to play in their present work as teachers.

As I listened to these teachers' voices, I was more intrigued with the stories themselves than any effect the telling might have on the teller. Each of them, in telling their stories of schooling, departed in dramatic ways to recall seminal experiences outside of school that impacted on their current teaching. It was clear that learning to teach had broad roots in a wide expanse of life experiences. Listening to these teachers convinced me that any chronicle of teacher development needs to include stories teachers tell about their own experiences learning to teach within the contexts of schools and the experiences outside those contexts that make their way into the work we do in classrooms. We do not know enough about what makes a good teacher and even less about what it is that helps teachers continue to stay alive and vibrant over the lifetime of a career.

My original plan was to elicit narratives from teachers about *how they are coming to be the teachers they are becoming*. My precise language is important. I wanted to look at an evolving teacher self, to understand the way in which the teacher identity is constructed. To ask the question: what constitutes a teaching self? If, however, I was to ask teachers to construct such stories, it seemed important to write my own story given the way in which our own stories become the filter through which we take in the story of another (Genishi, 1994).

So I began, through a variety of narrative strategies and structures, to compose a teaching autobiography. I had planned to do this quickly and then move on to the more interesting work of eliciting other teacher stories. But it wasn't long before I realized the process was

too rich to pass over without making a serious attempt to understand and learn from it. I write this preamble today, eighteen months after this turn of events.

Any attempt to make meaning out of experience draws us into an impulse to order our lives. This study attends to the particular work of bringing that meaning to written language. View it as a demonstration of an autobiographical situation which necessarily includes an autobiographical perspective (Gunn, 1982). Perspective shifts the focus of autobiography away from "Who am I?" to a question of "Where am I?" In composing a story of a life the writer does so from a particular location, a location marked by a multitude of factors including race, gender, class, development. This story is marked by the fact that I am not only a woman, but a mother and a spouse. My Italian-Lebanese heritage has been filtered through the life my grandparents chose when they came to this country seeking the melting pot of America. It bears the influence of being constructed from within the academic institution at which I have studied for the last four years as well as countless other contexts each of which has had a shaping influence on how I currently exist in the world.

This is an ordinary story: a personal story of learning to teach. At the same time it may be seen as a story of the way in which learning to teach is situated in broader issues of human development. But there is another subject as well: the work of autobiography itself. In writing my story I have tried to make visible the story of my writing.

I invite readers to both witness and participate in this autobiographical act. While the novelty of a traditional study lies in the reported findings, the novelty of this work is in the reading and the

writing. It lies in the act of perception, both yours and mine.

**If I do my job, the books I write vanish before your eyes. I
invite you into the house of my past, and the threshold
you cross leads you into your own.**

— Nancy Mairs —

PART ONE

A QUIVER OF TRUTHS

ACT ONE

ACT ONE - PRELUDE

There is a story that lives inside of me. It lays itself down like a blanket over my consciousness, or even deeper than that, into the subconscious realms of my psyche. I carry it vital to my existence as every cell in my body, and yet, it is not of the body at all.

My father is nine years old. He doesn't know it yet but he will walk home from school today amidst the hushed voices of his peers. The hollow of his stomach will grow stiff and heavy and by the time he reaches the bottom of B Street he will know in his heart that his father is dead. He will know this before he turns the corner to find the normally empty street lined with cars, confirmation of the fear he was unable to name until that very moment.

It is 1938 and Vermont has been hit by a hurricane. My Nono will be a casualty of that storm when he slides to his death while repairing roof tiles on the house I will explore as a child thirty years later.

Every morning of my elementary school career I walked up the granite steps my father would walk down on his way out of school the day he was to lose his father. I learned to ride my bike on the hill he walked years earlier when his insides froze as he tried not to listen to the muffled voices of his friends on his way home from school. I picnicked under the apple tree on the lawn in which he and his father gardened. Now we dig bulbs out of my own flower garden. Pulling the moist nuggets out of the earth we sort them into bags. Some will return to my garden, the others will travel home to his. In the spring each bulb will send an off-shoot into seemingly separate worlds. But still I wonder. Human beings do not stop at the skin (Bruner, 1990); we

are permeable to numerous rings of influence. The ring of the family is the first to encircle us.

CHAPTER ONE ¹

The basement of my childhood house was divided into two parts. One side was the rumpus room: a tiled room half-filled with a couch, two chairs and the television, the rest half-empty for us to design whatever play we had in mind on any particular day.

On the other side of a door was the less finished half of our basement--the workshop where my dad worked with his tools, my brother built his go-carts, and we mixed chemicals from our science kits. It was in this basement that I witnessed the violence of caging a wild animal. I had captured a chipmunk in the rocks behind my best friend, Denise's, house. Wanting it as a pet I housed it in the old cage from when I had two white mice. I was shocked watching the frantic staccato movements of an animal that outside looked so graceful and at ease. My brother helped me carry the cage outside where I released the chipmunk, feeling shameful at having tinkered with nature.

In the Rumpus room I set up the first classroom in which I became a teacher. And I was a Teacher, with a capital T. I'd stand next to the roll away chalkboard. With teacher's edition in hand I'd neatly print the math assignment on the top right hand corner of the board. My students, Mary and Scott, young enough to boss, sat at makeshift desks facing me. They had paper and pencils poised. Ready to go. They'd start in and inevitably a hand would shoot up.

"I have a question," Mary would declare. "Do I write the whole problem out or do I just put the answer?" An attentive teacher I'd relish the role of having the answers. Later, amidst requests for help, I'd lean over my

¹ Portions of this chapter were originally published by NCTE in Language Arts.

students, red pen in hand, and reach down to demonstrate a procedure on their paper. There was role call and other business and when I sensed the students were getting itchy I'd call recess. A real one, secretly hoping they'd return willingly as students when we tired of the new adventure we designed for ourselves.

I loved playing school. These first performances of school play capture my earliest image of teacher. Learning to teach is a process of casting and recasting images of what it means to teach. I discover this in the story I compose today: a story of one life, my life, and the early influences on the teacher I am today. It holds in its grasp a shifting image of what it means to teach, as well as the multitude of tensions that give contour to the line I draw from the present back into my past.

Everything I learned to love about school I soaked up during my five years as student at Ayers Street Elementary School. Ayers Street was a brick box of a building about a quarter mile away from my two story house on C Street. Each September, with my new school clothes hanging crisp in my closet and a new pair of shoes on the closet floor, the excitement of school once again filled the air. On the first day our neighborhood gang would gather to walk together. My best friend Denise was two years older than me; my sister Mary, three years younger; Denise's brother Scott, a year behind her. There were others. Kathy and Patti Scrizzi, Laura Atkins. We would walk down the two small hills, pass the granite sheds, across the red steel bridge to the bottom of Washington Street hill. A small building sat at the base of this hill. This white clapboard shop was called the Maple Museum. Inside were Vermont collectibles, tiny ceramic vases with painted Maple leaves, posters of fierce autumn colors. But the main attraction was the two tiered glass case holding miniature maple candies. The building stood still against an

autumn-blue sky on those early mornings. We continued, along the flat stretch of Ayers street, past the filling station on the right, the high school and then the dairy factory on the left that each day delivered cold bottles of milk to Ayers Street school which sat directly across the street.

The school sat in the middle of a large flat lot with playground space all around to hold our childhood games. We played kickball on the left hand field. Jumped rope on the concrete in front of the granite steps. Dug holes for marble games each spring on the right where other children ran games of tag around us. The swings were set back, almost into the woods that stretch their way up a steep banking. If you hiked up through the woods you would come out at the top of the Washington Street Hill. But I never wanted to. All I needed was contained in the short distance between my home and this school.

What did I learn to love about school? The alliances formed between rows of desks. Finding the sweaty palm of David Coullaird in a square dance during a third grade gym period. Descending the granite steps ten minutes before the school bell rang wearing my white safety patrol belt—the quiet of the playground speaking a language itself. Having my very own bean sprouting in a box on the sunny windowsill in my second grade classroom. The long rays of sun cocooning me in warmth while Miss Donahue's voice washes over the class. School objects—the new crayons I kept in my desk. Neat stacks of paper. Square pink erasers. Moistened powder paint in jars. The smell of a fresh mimeograph and the cool on my cheek when I held the moist sheet to my face. I loved my space at school—the two feet of desk that belonged to me.

At home in the rumpus room I played teacher and granted myself a larger territory than I had at school. I managed the chalk board, owned the

texts, organized my students' time and allowed myself the right to invade the space of their desks. I relished this play at authority, but it was just that. I was acting out the role of distant teacher. As Dan Lortie (1975) suggests, I was soaking up the image of teacher from the student's side of the desk. All powerful, center of authority. In becoming the teacher I had crossed into new territory, leaving behind all understandings of what it meant to be a student. I donned the cloak of authority as it reigned in school.

But there was an authority that was mine during childhood. It emerged in the play outside of home or school: it was summer in the neighborhood and we had the leisure to design projects of our own. We staged a couple of major events each summer, events the oldest kids of our neighborhood gang would conceive, design, and execute. One summer we had a carnival. We set the date for one day in late July and on the morning when we woke, it threatened rain. We'd had the foresight to set up under the low carport on the side of Denise's grey tiled duplex. There were bean bags to toss into our orange hula hoops and bobbing for apples in a grey tin tub. A collection of our bicycles were ready for racing the obstacle course we made on her sloping driveway. Inside the shed at the back of the carport was a haunted house. We led blindfolded brothers and sisters by the hand to taste and touch our creepy treats. We planned each booth carefully, wrote and delivered invitations to the children we wanted to come, and even designated it as a fund raiser. All that we earned—the dimes, pennies and nickels—fit loosely into an old Chicklet box which sat on the top of the refrigerator in Denise's kitchen until we sent it away to the Jimmy Fund.

We were forever rehearsing a play. Setting up a snack bar. Painting rocks to sell to the neighbors up and down the street. In the long expanse of summer we found agency.

Each September came with the new promise of school. We carried ourselves down the hill to Ayers Street, having grown from our accomplishments of the summer only to find ourselves, once again, players in the game of school. A game that had little use for the self-authoring skills we were developing on our own time.

Still I loved being in school. I could play the game—play it easily and still have energy enough for the more satisfying work of nurturing relationships. School was about watching the clock until the day ended and I went home with Leslie Bertolini. Or watching the clock to change class where I would take my seat two rows away from John Milne in my high school geometry class. School was about the moments when the seal of authority opened up, if only momentarily, and invited me in. Miss Merrill asking me on my six year old birthday what sticker I wanted to place on November thirteenth of the class calendar. Licking the colorful turkey and placing it there myself. Waiting anxiously for books to arrive with the new tissue thin book order I would read cover to cover while deciding what to order for next month's books.

In the summer we would sometimes play at the school playground where a wider group of kids would gather. If we had enough we'd play a game of kickball or steal-the-bacon. Once we played hide-and-seek and I climbed onto the small back roof over the stairway that went down to the kindergarten classroom. It felt strange to occupy the school yard without its regular rules and regulations. Summer allowed us an intimacy that vanished during the school year.

Images of myself on the summer playground would overlap with the self caught in the time and space of school during the school year. In the summer the side door of the school was often left open and we'd sit in the

stairwell rummaging through a big cardboard box filled with puzzles and checkers and crayons and paper. We would pull things out, spread them around and play. I would sit inside on those stairs and later during the school year, walk down those same stairs to the bathroom only to meet a ghostly feeling of the summer memories floating back to me. I would let them enter. I may have been constrained by the regulations of the classroom but I could leave and, once outside the classroom, pause for a moment to remember occupying this space with a totally different set of feelings. I could remember my summer self.

School brought a new level of fragmentation into my life. If school is a container in which we place ourselves, the institution of school and the constitution of the person together decide how much of the individual will fit into that container. This fragmentation suggests boundaries. Where are the lines being drawn within myself? This is a question I can ask at this moment—child of six, seven, eight, and nine—and ask again at the age of twenty when I decided I would study to become a teacher.

CHAPTER TWO

I don't remember ever saying to myself, "Now I want to be a teacher." It was just something that I always wanted to do. I wanted to work with children in some capacity, and that seemed to be the best way to be able to do it in a situation that was somewhat structured—not just a recreation director for the summers. *First Year Teacher* (Ray Raphael, 1985, p. 26)

Unlike this teacher, I didn't go into teaching in pursuit of children. I was seeking the authority teachers had wielded over me all those years in Elementary school. I wanted the teachers desk in the corner of the room. To have the off limit drawers sectioned off to hold my own important things. I wanted to be keeper of school time. To walk into school and be allowed to continue all the agency I developed those long summer days at play in my childhood neighborhood. As an adult in school I could break the barriers of all that was forbidden. The forbidden use of space and time—to walk freely in and out of the classroom, to carve the moments of the school day into the size chunks I desired. To right the inequity of distribution that always resulted in being assigned a book too worn by last year's students, a water color set whose colors were muddied by a hapless previous user. I wanted the two and one half by two foot desk that was my own to expand to include everything in the room. I wasn't in pursuit of children: I was pursuing authority.

This is but one explanation among many for why I entered teaching. This is the place my last narrative delivers me. In order to stay inside the unity of my earlier story I must arrive here. There is no other explanation for why I would choose to become a teacher. Yet singled out like this the explanation sounds harsh—a sharp contrast to the profile I idealize when I think of new teacher recruits. It is not a story I easily sign my name to. But if I

am an honest reader of my own narrative, I must acknowledge this explanation and accept it as part of the raw material out of which my teacher self is shaped.

Of course, I wouldn't (couldn't) have explained my decision to go into teaching as such at the time I made it. In fact I'm sure the sentiment was not consciously there at all. I think it's true I was not pursuing children. Like many nineteen year olds I was imagining a more perfect society. The explanation I would have given then might have been caught up in the belief that by making an impact on children, a teacher has the potential to effect the shape of society. And of course, this is again about power.

Outside of my earlier narrative the truth goes more like this: I recall little about my decision to become a teacher. I don't remember if I decided the spring semester of my sophomore year when I first met Sarah, a close friend who was studying to become a teacher, or if it was later, having gotten married when I returned to school as a junior that I decided to try it out. Regardless I didn't take an education course until I started with Principles of Education in the beginning of my Junior year. At the same time I was taking the language arts and science methods courses, and over the following summer and fall semester I completed the remaining methods courses (math, social studies and creative arts) along with Educational Psychology. I was one step away from being a teacher. After a twelve week stint of student teaching I would be fully certified.

I did not start college with plans to teach elementary school. I entered my first year at the University of New Hampshire with the intention of majoring in math. I had travelled to UNH at periodic intervals as a high school senior to take the first year calculus examinations in order to convert my senior calculus course into four college credits. When I arrived as a first

year student I had not only fulfilled the requirement of first year calculus, but I was qualified to take a work study assignment at the testing center where I would grade and tutor incoming freshman (and sophomore, junior, and seniors) taking calculus. That year I took my first college level math courses, linear Algebra and FORTRAN programming. Linear Algebra was a small class that met weekly with a professor who struck me as your typical "math person." A man with a smallish frame, belted khaki slacks and a beige plaid button down shirt tucked in, sleeves rolled up. In the breast pocket a plastic protective sleeve holding a bunch of pens and pencils.

By contrast the FORTRAN programming class was a lecture style class with about three hundred students. The instructor, a small Asian man, would enter class with a coffee can full of colored chalk which he'd place on his podium. During the lecture he'd draw his programs on the chalkboard reaching into the can to pull out various colors in order to code the linking commands of his complicated text. This made note taking near to impossible. Between the two of them, my computer teacher and the other professor who was nice enough (when I met him in his office it always seemed to make him a little shy) I began to question my decision to enter the field of mathematics.

I've always explained it this way: one day I looked around and realized I didn't see myself in any of these people. I wasn't particularly interested in the kind of people I encountered in my math courses. Suddenly I didn't see myself as a "math person."

I couldn't feel passionate about math and I wanted something I could feel passionate about. I write this now though I never used those words to describe my decision to drop out of my major in math? The next semester when I went on consortium to New England College's British campus I studied drawing, dance, film, and French. I returned to Henniker with an idea

to study graphic arts. I thought graphic arts was a good marriage of my mathematical skills and my interest (passion) in art. The problem was I nearly failed drafting (academic success not being a priority at this point) and despite having fun in my graphics course, which was taught by a yet undiscovered Tomie DiPaola, I felt discouraged. I ran for cover into teaching. Safe, familiar, friendly. All the wrong reasons I'd want to see someone enter a job I now see as full of passion and challenge.

So I have two story-explications of how I came to be a teacher. In one I face the profession head on, ready to charge in. In the other the profession swallows me from behind. An autobiography is a quiver of truths. These are but two. I will need them both if I am to navigate my way toward some understanding of this part of my history. I fight the tendency to order them according to which comes closest to "the truth." Dialectically thinking, the truth is neither one or the other for no single story can serve to tell the whole truth. Instead I seek an understanding revealed in the way in which these stories work together. I will have to let this last one remain for the time being despite the discomfort I feel when I read the words, *I ran for cover into teaching*.

If I ran for cover into teaching, once I was safely sheltered, I let my energy flow into the chosen path. I didn't look back. There, having said that I feel better already. But I am getting ahead of myself. I need to stay inside each story rereading so I may spy what Patricia Hampl (1990) describes as that which "is shyly hugging the walls, hoping not to be seen" (p. 103).

* * * * *

Spaulding Junior High School was a three story brick building which sat at the top of a long sloping lawn just on the south side of Main street in Barre, Vermont. The first wave of memories float forward as images of the physical space of that world. The art room, the corridor just outside the room in which I studied Spanish, the too-small seventh grade math room, my sixth grade homeroom. I do not recall easily the names of other students and must labor somewhat to reel in the name of a teacher or two. But I can map out the space inside those classrooms—take in the view of the front of the room, once again. Even memories of the emotions of a pre-adolescent girl come first as the hollow space inside myself they often defined.

Each of these memories float forward as visual images—well-packed suitcases carrying particular entities of their own. Open the image from Mrs. Christies' classroom and I unpack the photograph of the room. Six columns of desks, I sat on the last one, four seats back, closest to the corridor door. I stood in this room to recite the poem, *If*, by Rudyard Kipling. Over a period of days, each student stood alone to recite one of two versions each tailored for the different aspirations young boys and girls were expected to have. My hair was long enough to pull a small clump from the back forward into my mouth. I could hold it in place with a strong suck and I did, habitually. I can even uncork the emotion of an endless day in junior high when I should have washed my hair the night before.

Another image. I am seated in a front row desk in "The Fish's" classroom. The most formal of teachers, he expects us to address him respectfully and in return by-passes our first names calling us by our surnames tagged with a proper Miss or Mr. One day The Fish hands paper to each of us along the front to pass back. On this day I take the papers and assertively reply, "Thank you Michael." The Fish glares at me, "I'll see you

after class Miss Portalupi." Later inside the empty classroom I tell him the truth; I have no idea what had possessed me.

I feel the tug of other memories rushing forward to align themselves with this one: a young child of three my mother takes me by the hand and walks me into the bathroom. She points to the brass razor she uses to shave her legs and arm pits. It sits on the tub's edge. "Never, ever touch this. It is sharp and could hurt you a lot." That is enough to make me wonder. I lay in bed later that night thinking about the razor. Wondering about the feel of it in my hand. The sharpness of the edge I couldn't see. I swing my legs over the side of the bed and walk quietly pass my parents' bedroom and into the bathroom. I reach for the razor, run my fingers across the forbidden edge. Blood appears before any sensation of pain. In fact I feel no pain, only panic as the blood spills onto the floor, the tub, my pajamas.

Some years later, as a second grader I push again through the invisible barriers my mothers sets up. This time she warns me never to place my lips or tongue on cold metal—a strange, but realistic concern growing up in Northern Vermont. Still, I am not convinced by the story of Larry Perojo whose tongue was stuck on the metal rung of the steel, red bridge I crossed each day to Ayers Street School. It took a kettle of warm water to set it free. I need to feel the grip of the frost, or better still, prove my mother wrong or myself invincible. This curiosity, or perhaps bravado, led me to lean ever so slowly to land a gentle kiss on the corner metal post of the school yard fence. It was enough contact to adhere me firmly. It took fear of embarrassment to pull myself clean off the pole when I heard the hand rung bell signaling time to line up. This time I didn't tell the truth to Miss Donahue when she asked what happened as she cleaned the blood from my torn lips. "I don't know. I was just standing in line, I reached up and I was bleeding."

If I am stringing strands of memories, these go together. Each reveal a child who lives in the world by asking, “what would happen if?” (*This same child might have been wondering the same about changing the world from the mantel of a teacher’s desk.*) Compared to these, memories of Junior high seem remarkably ordinary. I sit in class; I work; I steal away to the art room where we are allowed to play games during free time. I develop the reputation of being a good Stratego player. I study Spanish for the first time. I walk to and from school. These were solitary walks when the rhythm of my steps on pavement create a space in which to think, mostly about boys and friends and the shifting, often volatile relationships that mark this era. There is a quiet moment just after my grandfather died when I steal an extra five minutes enroute to the bathroom. I spend it tucked inside an alcove of the third floor gazing out the window. Across the street is the hospital where I was born. It is a nursing home now. It is raining and as I watch I wonder how it is that every ordinary thing—streams of water running down the pavement, a breeze blowing sheer curtains on an open window across the way—does not seize for even one fraction of a second when a life slips out of the world.

* * * * *

I turn and turn the soil and find little that suggests why I would want to recast myself as a teacher in this scene. I can only conclude that my entree into teaching (and marriage) was a script written for me (and millions of other American women—remember how fervently I played school as a child). What does it take to live consciously? What would it have taken then?

Though they never articulated it, my parents viewed college as a sort of vocational school. You go there to become something. Teaching was a practical answer to the question, "What are you going to do when you get out of school?" Perhaps I hadn't the example or propensity to think this career choice out. When I made the decision to go into teaching it was with the idea that I'd take the physical journey to England to practice teach. That may have been more intriguing than what would come after. I was living the means, without much concern of the ends. I remember a sense of relief when I had an answer to what I would do with my four years of school. Become a teacher. It was acceptable, expectable, identifiable. It paved a respectable, public, route. A path of little resistance. It fit nicely into my passage to adulthood.

None of the story explications are the ones I want in answer to the question of why I entered teaching? I want a different story—perhaps a long line of teachers in my ancestry whose nobility points the way. I would settle for a single inspirational teacher in my history—some distinct form of sponsorship. But it is not that simple. And yet in other ways it was ridiculously simple. There was a familial and cultural script and my own personality that wanted action, agency. My mind knew the threat of the razor, the adhesive cold of metal. But until I held it, my body did not. I lived in the world as a body; it was there I sought to make sense.

There's a lot coming at the eighteen year old all at once. At the point at which I made this decision I was learning to live on my own for the first time. I regulated everything: sleeping, eating, laundry, school, work, play. I hadn't a clue how to prioritize the multiple waves of development that were ripping through me. Personal relationships, sexual relationships, career choices. In a conversation ten years later my second mother-in-law told me she had tried to teach her daughters to take their first thirty years to discover

who they were, then they might be able to make a decision about what they wanted for the rest of their lives. It seemed like clear sound advice.

Deceptively simple. I was thirty years old, ending a nine year marriage, and wishing someone had clarified that period of life for me. Instead, when I was nineteen I was overwhelmed by the task at hand, a task I didn't even understand the need to define for myself. And so I jumped into life—marriage and teaching—the way I had walked into the bathroom to lift the forbidden razor from the edge of the tub.

* * * * *

It is Saturday, June 11, 1994 and my son, Taylor, is in the third game of the Concord Open Chess Tournament. He beat his first opponent, a middle-aged gentlemen with a rating a full 150 point higher than his. He lost his second game to an equally high rated player and is now playing the first player's son. In the middle of the match he loses his eye tooth which has been wriggly mightily for a day. He excuses himself while his clock is running. It takes ten minutes to flush the blood from his mouth and clean up the mess he's made in the sink. He returns to win the game.

Later that day he asks me, "Do you think the tooth fairy still comes?" He smiles shyly and I squeeze his shoulders, "I bet she does." It is night and he reminds me that his tooth is going under the pillow. I delight at the paradox of this accomplished chess player, a twelve year old on the brink of adolescence willing to engage in this childhood fantasy. But I misread him. I ask if I can just give him the money now. He shoots me a glance that says absolutely not. Funny, since I am sure that two teeth ago he suggested this very thing to my own surprise. But this time it's different. There is a different

game at play, which I won't discover until two days later. In the frenzy of the evening I forget to become the tooth fairy. Taylor reminds me gently the next morning, "Gee, the tooth fairy must have been busy last night." And again, the following evening I forget until the next morning when lying in bed Ralph asks if I have exchanged Taylor's tooth for some cash. I jump out of bed still sleepy-eyed, grab a handful of change on the dresser and go down the hall to Taylor's room. Taylor is up and getting dressed. I ask him to close his eyes and I quickly make the exchange then go straight back to bed. The whole thing is so quick that I manage to stay half asleep and I am still dozing when I hear a whimpering at the door. Taylor is saying something softly. I call him closer and can see he is upset, holding back sobs. What is it? I ask. He leans down, "Can't I just be a kid anymore?" I hold him a moment while he cries.

It takes another night before the whole thing is set right. Taylor washes his eyes and manages to escape explaining what's happening to his younger brother, Adam, who joins us a little later for breakfast. But later that day Taylor brings me the handful of change. "You can have this. It's not real tooth-fairy money." I look at him, surprised that this continues and hold out a cup shaped hand. I tell him the tooth is in my jewelry box upstairs. "Why don't you try again tonight and let's see what happens."

So it took three days altogether to make the whole thing right. During this time it seems that Taylor's growth toward adulthood was made visible. It was the understanding of the certainty of leaving childhood that made him want to hold on that much more. Where months earlier he had used the fantasy of the tooth fairy as a way to make a buck, he now saw this ritual as sacrosanct. Things just weren't the same.

I remember having this feeling the day I realized I didn't fit on my father's lap anymore. This was more than a matter of not physically fitting. I

could have found a way to fit, but it wasn't the same because of who I was becoming inside my head (as well as outside in my body.)

Taylor's emotion seems born from a quick shuttling back and forth from two constructions of self. On the one side is the child who can live within the various fantasy worlds they and others around them create. On the other side is the young adult who is capable of reasoning the world around them. This reasoning can stifle the imagination when it introduces itself at first. Taylor couldn't go back to believing in the tooth fairy in the way he did as a child. Perhaps he can re-enter the play of this fantasy but it must be on new ground. It will not be the same. How far away must one be in order to feel the poignancy he felt at this moment? It is a precise distance. Away, but not too far away.

I decided to become a teacher at the same time I was making the decision to get married. This was a time of being off balance. I remember the apartment above Sarah's and Dan's. My dad helped me move in. One afternoon, Charlie and I were making love upstairs when my father stopped by to visit. He knocked at the door of apartment. On the other side, just six feet away we were lying there. Holding my breath, I waited for him to leave. I made the decision to get married holding my breath, afraid that if I let it out...what? I might see things differently? How did I see it with my breath held tightly? Getting married was a passage to adulthood. A short cut I now know does not exist. Some things you can't rush along. But at the time it seemed a way to grow up suddenly in my parent's eyes. If they saw me as an adult and if I set up the role for myself, I would naturally step into it.

In the whole spectrum of possibilities maybe this isn't a bad formula for growth. It requires imagination and guts. You cast an image you do not yet embody and step toward that image until you fill it up. Set up the artifice of

who you will become; then become it. The consequence is that the becoming happens before I am ready and this period of being something I am not is filled with self-doubt. Certainly this is how one becomes a teacher. It doesn't happen during the few years of pre-service education. It doesn't happen that semester long internship. Though all that (and more) is the material you have to work with, it begins when the image is before you inviting you to try it on. When the Epsom School Board hired me they made me a teacher. They gave me the chance to fill out the two-dimensional image I had created for the concept of "teacher."

CHAPTER THREE ²

I must confess. In an effort to be honest I have created stories to tell myself, stories that are at best, partial truths. And yet without these partial truths I arrive at the most superficial understanding of my life. The decision to become a teacher was an alloy forged of the pure essences of personal, developmental, familial, and cultural influences. In each of the stories one influence takes center stage: each providing a lens through which I view my passage into teaching. Closer to the truth is the fact that all were in operation when I found myself a sophomore at a small New England College in seminars of ten to fifteen students.

I had sat as a student on the other side of the teacher's desk for fifteen years when suddenly I felt the gap beginning to close. If there was a single person who ushered me into the profession it was Walter Robinson who manipulated me into writing an emotional essay on wanting to teach after I was forced to listen to a ninety minute lecture about what a thankless, miserable job it was. He met us at the door on our second day of class. Half the students had fled. Surveying our faces he began, "Now that I've weeded out the less serious students let me say this: Teaching is the most rewarding career you could ever have."

Walter Robinson was passionate about his teaching and this passion invited me to explore subjects I had previously thought little about. He taught a course called Greek World, and so the following semester I was enthusiastically studying Greek culture. New aspects of myself emerged, and with this growth I felt the the power of good teaching. I began to re-define what it meant to be a teacher. Teaching offered an avenue for building

² Portions of this chapter were originally published by NCTE in Language Arts.

relations with others. My newly formed relationships with professors brought me close enough to begin imagining myself in their positions.

I have been a teacher for fourteen years and during that time I have drawn and redrawn the contours which shape my image of this word. As a student teacher I arrived in Midhurst, England on a Friday with no place to live, a husband, two suitcases and a single slip of paper outlining my teaching assignment in Bette Kidd's junior class in the local infant school. We took the weekend to find a flat and on Monday I walked the mile to school to begin my first post as a teacher. Bette greeted me with a question, "What's your theme?" She wanted to know what I was planning as the organizing unit of study through which the students would develop their skills as readers, writers, researchers and mathematicians.

I had always attributed being the teacher I am to having first taught in a British Primary school where there were no text books guiding learning or mimeograph machines demanding uniform work. But now I wonder about the striking similarity of my emotion at hearing Bette's question to the promise-crammed feeling I experienced standing at the brink of another summer with endless time to shape to my own desires. More than anything else I knew how to play and I brought that understanding into my teaching.

That semester we built a weather station on the playground, measuring and recording the local conditions. We created our own books to teach others what we had learned about climatic regions around the world. This had us painting, mapping, writing fiction and poetry. I felt at home. I was tapping the energy I had as a child at play. If I was playing at school I allowed this old child self to enter into this new image of teacher. This teacher was more personal, unlike the stern, authoritarian teacher I became downstairs in the rumpus room on C street.

I no longer felt bound by the traditional parameters of "teacher" I had observed as a child in school. This image of teacher allowed more of my personal side to enter, but still I drew mainly on an identity of "teacher" that came at me from the institutional structure of school. I was central to my students' learning. Though my classroom was lively, challenging and fun, it revolved around the projects I designed. I set the pace, inviting children to follow my lead.

It wasn't until a number of years later that I dipped deeper into the knowledge about learning lodged in my early play. As a participant of the New Hampshire Summer Writing Program I began to shift my attention away from the role of teacher toward the experience of becoming, once again, a student. There were three solid weeks of writing and learning about the teaching of writing. I remember the feeling that came with being a writer in this community.

It is one of those New Hampshire summer days-to-die-for. I am sitting under an aged elm on the sloping green lawn of the University. People cross the campus at a summer pace. Filtered through the screen of summer everything seems cleaner, more in focus. Minutes don't collapse in heaps of hours as they do during the school year when too many agendas pile on one another endlessly. There is room to breath. Each moment occupies its own space, a miniature celebration of sorts. I sit with a blank sheet of paper before me. I have been given the gift of time to write.

My language surprises. Writing has never felt like a gift. A chore or barrier, something to get out of the way, a task to be crossed off my To-Do list, yes. But this is different. This blank page is a landscape all its own. Bound on four corners by no limitations at all. I am complete master of my neighborhood here. I pace myself. Call forth old worlds, create new ones.

Organize my own production, select the audience I choose to attend. This is at once both familiar and strange. I know this feeling, and recognize it as play. But it appears here under the guise of learning, for I am after all, a student returning to school.

What memories float forward that mark this feeling as familiar? The day is one big chunk of time. It begins in early morning. The air, still damp and cool, throws off the night. The world talks because I am there to listen. And I listen as long as I like. I learn secrets encoded in the deliberate actions of busy ants on the pavement. Monitor the changing hums of insects as the sun reaches higher in the sky and notice in late afternoon as the Queen Anne's lace droops every so slightly. I check the ripeness of the blackberries behind my house and estimate a few more days. There is time to anticipate the event. So many things to do with fresh blackberries. I toy with the options but know in the end it will be the same as always. I will pull on long pants, grab a plastic container from under the sink and make the trip up the hill before breakfast. I will reach into the briars avoiding the dew-scribed webs to pluck cool plump berries until I have a bowlful. Later, I'll eat them straight: a mound of berries, a sprinkling of sugar, in a pool of milk. I'll eat them on the front steps before any neighbor is up, before Denise or Mary or Scott and I'll plan the day. Not a list of things I must do, but the myriad of things I might possibly choose. It will be like every morning with the promise of an open day before it. And it will be like none other, unique of its own accord, an empty page whose only certainty is that a story will find its way there.

But this feeling is also strange. The strangeness comes when I try to fit what seems familiar with what I know about school. This doesn't match my experience as a student. My memories of school do not suggest a place for this kind of learning.

I sit at my desk. I am six, seven, eight and then nine. Each desk is the same. Well worn wood. I learn the geography of its gashes and grooves so my handwriting won't be upset when the edge of the pencil falls into one of these ruts. The desk faces forward where the action is with the teacher and the blackboard. I am peripherally aware of the world that goes on around this desk, at the desks of my peers. Any time spent there is stolen from the tasks I've been assigned. Time moves slowly. The clock marks every minute with a click, its faint red line sweeping away the seconds. The air is always the same. This is school and it is something to succeed or fail at. It asks little more of me. I am not a creator of this landscape.

Years later, as a student once again, writing process offered a way for me to sit on the front steps of my learning. It showed me how, as teacher, I could tap whatever agency my students had developed outside the parameters of our time together. As each new September approaches, I still experience the feeling of promise of what is to come. This feeling comes forward from the past, and I let it instruct me. I recognize that like me, my students have summer lives, neighborhood lives, whatever-lives that often do not fit in our classrooms. What appears as two distinct worlds— home and school—I now understand to be arbitrarily divided. The child at play might well have been invited into the school house. My own early play provides the backdrop against which I can make such discoveries.

It is only now, years later, having created reading and writing workshops with students of my own, having worked with teachers on their own writing during summer institutes similar to my New Hampshire experience, that I can recognize the familiar/strange feeling I had that breezy day thirteen summers ago. And armed with that feeling I can navigate my

way even further back through all my schooling to find its roots in the early play I experienced as a child at home and in my neighborhood.

CHAPTER FOUR

I check the ripeness of the blackberries behind my house and estimate a few more days. There is time to anticipate the event. So many things to do with fresh blackberries. I toy with the options but in the end it will be the same as always. I will pull on long pants, grab a plastic container from under the sink and make the trip up the hill before breakfast. I will reach into the briars avoiding the dew-scribed webs to pluck cool plump berries until I have a bowlful. Later, I'll eat them straight: a mound of berries, a sprinkling of sugar, in a pool of milk. I'll eat them on the front steps before any neighbor is up, before Denise or Mary or Scott and I'll plan the day. Not a list of thing I must do, but the myriad of things I might possibly chose. It will be like every morning with the promise of an open day before it. And it will be like none other, unique of its own accord, an empty page whose only certainty is that a story will find it's way there.

Who is this child? Surely I do not know. I remember a child too timid to enter the woods alone. Yet the anecdote works: a simple shaping of facts to create the unity the story needed. The child I create comes alive through these actions and the intentions they imply. And yet, I remember less this child and more the child as fertile ground in which my mother planted countless seeds of fear. Fear of strangers, fear of rivers, fear of getting lost in the words. In an attempt to make the world a safe place, my mother scarred the world with warnings of anything (and consequently this means everything) in which danger may prevail. This child would not have eaten a mound of dew-moist berries in the early morning hours of my neighborhood. More likely I would have waited to wake Denise cajoling her to come with me, or maybe taken my younger sister, Mary. Maybe I'd have gone alone, but it would have been later in the day once the world of people were stirring. I have done this before but I do not relax or lose myself in the moment. My ears are sentry for unfamiliar sounds. I inevitably leave quicker, pick less than I would on

another day. Once I make the decision to turn and come down the hill I can not hold back. I break into a run and let the weight of my body pull me faster down the hill. I come within sight of the house and suddenly feel lighter, more playful, more safe.

I recognize this emotion in the face of my son, Adam, as he shouts down from his bedroom on the second floor. I am putting my bag into the car. "Where's Ralph?" He is awake to the possibility of being abandoned. At play with a friend in his room he has been on guard to any sound of departure. I point out his step father who is mowing the side lawn. He is reassured and goes back to play. This emotion is like a vine which makes its way from one mother to daughter and later from that daughter to her son. I do not know how this happened, but I lift the leaf and find it is the same. It makes a sturdy claim on each of us binding us together in ways we may never understand.

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Phenomenology is interested in experience. It is reflexive description and analysis. "It is not description and analysis of any objective aspect of the world, but of our experience of the world" (Crowley as cited in Brockelman, 1985, p. 45). Because autobiographical writing involves the subject in perceiving, remembering and imagining (all potentially reflexive and phenomenological acts) it can function as a tool in the phenomenological search to uncover the teaching self.

For Brockelman coming to understand phenomenologically involves a complex series of steps.

First of all, there must be a tearing away of the veil of "sedimented" meanings and opinions which gets in the way of an adequate encounter with the phenomenon in question.

Secondly, a creative search (by analogy) for words and phrases to articulate the intended meaning of the phenomenon must follow. We do not "know" that meaning first and then simply clothe it in proper language. On the contrary, we come truly to know it in the very process of disclosing-saying it by means of the metaphorical extension of the meaning of the words and phrases involved. Struggling to express the meaning of a phenomenon is at the same time struggling to disclose or "know" it. (p. 48)

I render a single scene. To tear away the veil of sedimented meanings first I read. It is not the words on the page I read, but a feeling in my gut. I am shamed when the child I know--the one not invited onto the page--pokes her head out from behind my cleaner, more favorable image. "What about me!" she cries. A strong sense of loyalty to myself forces me to bow to that voice. I thought I had her tucked carefully away by writing her out of the larger story. I've done it now. Once she utters a word I must let her finish. And so, I open the door to see where she will lead.

This is what Ricouer means when he talks of texts as disclosing. They point you in a direction. The act of writing, and then reading reflexively, lays a new path. I follow this and it leads me to see another child, my son Adam. And then to see myself anew again, as a parent and a teacher with an inkling of the way in which all these selves are connected in the work of nurturing: mother, child, teacher all wrapped into the body of one.

And what of the child I have written? If she is not who I was, she is the child I wished to be, the "child" I can be today by writing her into my life. If she lives on the page of the past it is a short step out into my present.

ACT TWO

ACT TWO - PRELUDE

I spend a weekend at home visiting my parents. On Saturday I drive from the outskirts of Bow, into the downtown city of Concord. It's funny. I lived in this town for three years, and three summers after that. Actually learned to drive in this very city. And yet, I ask my mother for directions to the grocery store. There are enough new roads, redirected one way streets, and added traffic lights that I feel a stranger to this landscape. Still, I find myself turning on to familiar streets. I take a right onto Perley and drive slowly through a depressed neighborhood. Young children playing on their front porches, and in the small patches of yard that separate the houses from one another. I get to the intersection of Pierce Street and stop, look left to a well-maintained house three doors down from the corner. Charlie and I looked at this house when we were buying our first home. I remember thinking at the time, if we could only move the house to a better location. Today I take in the whole landscape: place my children on one porch, look across the street to find the houses of their closest friends, imagine myself in one of these kitchen windows.

I drive on. Three more cross streets before I reach the light at the end of South Main. The light is new like the continuing road across the way. I sit at the light and look left again, this time to the imposing brick of St. John's Church. I was married in this church some years after I stopped going regularly. Funny how we don't make our mark on the landscape when the landscape seems to make such deep marks on us. There is no evidence of my presence in the scene. It is just another church, on another main street, in another town in the United States. And mine was just another wedding

amongst a stream of them that took place inside those walls. Beyond these two buildings there is little else of me in this landscape.

By contrast, the landscape in which you are a child inscribes itself on your internal map of being. A map on which we constantly refer in order to place ourselves. I find myself less in the streets and buildings of Concord than I do when I remember the local landscape of Vermont where I haven't been for years and years. And yet that Vermont landscape is more vivid, closer to the heart, closer to home. I remember visiting a friend in the mountains of western North Carolina. The landscape of hills and hollows threaded with water touched a place deep inside of me. A blood memory. I was home.

If home is etched with the landscape of our earliest years, then it is no surprise that the first classroom in which I was a teacher was also drawn from an interior map set in place during my earliest experiences in school. The more recent experience of my work in England could only mark up the landscape already set in place by those long, intensive years as a student in elementary school—years during which the original landscape was being charted. This original landscape casts its shadow—pentimento-like—throughout every changing landscape to come.

CHAPTER FIVE

Fact: January 1979 I arrived in Midhurst England with a practice teaching assignment, one suitcase, a husband with no job, and no place to live. I had the names of my cooperating teacher, Bette Kidd, the headmaster at the primary school, Michael Tupp, and my supervisor, Doreen Brisland.

I do not know the geography of this town only that it is unreachable by train isolating it in a country whose rail network makes it manageable for people to live without cars. It is an old town with the distinction of having one of the oldest continually operating pubs in the country. Charlie and I try out this 16th century landmark but find it stuffy and prefer others of the 24 pubs in the town's local vicinity. We are in the heart of Sussex county and spend weekends walking the numerous footpaths that lead through the back yards of country cottages, down seldom travelled lanes, across the top of a down which opens our view to miles of this gently sloping landscape.

We find a furnished apartment. It is more than we had hoped to spend, nicer than we imagined we'd have. The front door opens to an entrance hall off of which is the bathroom, bedroom and larger room which divides itself in kitchen, dining and living areas. We will live in this sparsely furnished apartment for three months as if we had only meant to stay a weekend. The installed ceiling heat is too expensive so we huddle together most nights and read on the sofa in the living room. Toward the end of the winter we will notice black mold growing behind the curtain on the outside walls of the apartment; we have fostered the perfect condition with the slightly warm, but not warm enough air of the apartment. We will sleep on sheetless beds, linen is too costly and I didn't afford myself the space to carry it from home. Instead, we use a cotton undersheet meant to cover the mattress. I will send home for

new vegetarian recipes. Parsnips, carrots and Brussel's sprouts are the affordable abundant vegetables; I have no casseroles up my sleeves for any of them.

Charlie finds a job as a publican in a local pub making 60 p an hour and all the drinks patrons will buy him. I call Mr. Tupp and get directions to school. I have wellies and a rain coat and will be able to walk the mile easily. I make this walk to and from school everyday. We will have supper twice in the homes of fellow teachers. Bette Kidd and her husband and another teacher who will host a smallish party to welcome us. She serves a traditional English version of curry. I learn that peanuts are referred to as groundnuts and enjoy the other condiments — raisins, coconuts, tomatoes, cucumbers, apples, carrots, chopped hard boiled eggs— that are sprinkled over the thick stew. Each time it feels wonderful to be in a home where there is heat, a wide range of foods, a phone that occasionally rings; so unlike the flat we have created for ourselves where we are on the edge of living, dandelion seeds on the wing. At school I take root. I center my energies there. Tie myself to the landscape with the relationships I create with Doreen, Bette, and the children.

Fact: There are no basal or text books, no ditto machines, no report cards. Many of the objects that define school as I know it are missing.

On my first day Bette asks me what I have chosen as my topic for the term. I have no idea what she is talking about and later, after she has described the format of selecting the topic through which all subjects are taught, I wonder at how I could have missed knowing that I was expected to have come prepared with a plan. Together we arrive at the topic of climates and I begin to design the work I will do over the next nine weeks.

I am not only learning how to teach, I am reconceiving an image of school. My British students are ten and eleven years old. When they prepare

for gymnasium the boys and girls scoot to separate corners, strip to their underclothes and put on their uniforms for gym class. There is no snickering, only business. They work together, play together, eat lunch together. The work area just outside the classroom converts to a small eating area during lunch. The lunch cooks serve warm pudding for dessert all winter long. Pudding over cake, over cookies, over custard. Sweet, creamy pudding by itself. There are no bells in this building, no office intercom. When I want copies of a world map for the books on climatic regions of the world my students are making, Bette says we can send to the local high school where there is a machine to make copies. It takes a few days but in the end we have what we need. Each child keeps a file of work to be shared with parents at the end-of-term conference. At noon I often walk with teachers into town to have a leisurely ploughman's lunch. Once I join them in having a half pint of beer It is strange to return to work having relaxed so in the middle of the day. Each morning begins the same: we file into the gymnasium to meet as a school community.

At Ayers Street school I enjoyed an intimacy with my classmates as we passed each year from the single first grade classroom, to the second, third, and later, fourth. Funny the void of memory I have of students either younger or older . Despite both my brother and sister accompanying me to school, my memories resolve around the group of twenty that comprised my class. We alone were enough to fill the school. I see us there as first graders, second, third and fourth simultaneously. At the Midhurst Primary School everyone in the school comprised the community.

Every day we assemble in the gymnasium. First the infants seat themselves in a row along the front. Behind them come first-year juniors, then second and third. Mr. Tupp addresses us all. One day he expresses

concern over vandalism he's seen on the playground. He speaks to those who may have committed it, warning of the consequences if it continued. He speaks to the rest of us suggesting what we might say if we observed someone acting in such a way. Often he shares new accomplishments: a group of graduating infants or others who have recently learned to read. He addresses individuals by name, pointing out an older sibling's good deed to the younger brother or sister. Sometimes teachers and children address the school. We listen to young musicians and one time I tell a story about a young boy hiding from the Nazi's who had learned to recognize various types of clouds during the weeks he peered out a small crack in the ceiling of his hiding place. During these assemblies children see their single place in the greater community. First year juniors see where they have been; they also imagine where they are headed. The pulse of the community is felt in these gatherings. Children's lives in school are larger than what takes place in the classroom or on the playground with their peers.

My work in the classroom also contrasts with the image I carry forward of my own elementary classrooms. Children work in pairs or groups of three, each studying a climatic region of the world. They locate their climates on a world map and begin to study the environment and life of the people of the region. They view slides, read books, study maps and paintings, research their topics by talking to people. They create paintings and detailed illustrations to depict the landscape, write poems and fictional stories to portray the life, write historical accounts of happenings in their chosen parts of the world. They make puzzles, word games for others to play at the end of their books. The room is teeming with activity. Working in groups, children set their own pace, design the particulars of their own projects. Each day they start and stop, packing away materials in a way that allows them to start in quickly the next

day. We decide to study weather further and build our own weather station on the playground for measuring the elements outside the school walls.

Where did this classroom come from? I wasn't carrying on Bette's teaching, which in fact was more traditional than this. Some was Doreen's influence. It was her notion that students produce books. She was passionate about demonstrations (a word whose subtlety in teaching I would later come to understand). She expected me to share poetry daily with them. And her three guiding principles were the standard against which all my work was judged. Principle one: All children are loveable. Principle two: All children are capable. Principle three: All children deserve their teacher's respect. I internalized her judgement. So some of this classroom came from Doreen, but some came from me and the deeply embedded understanding I had of being a child at play in the neighborhood. This classroom was no way similar to those in which I was an elementary student. It was, however, what I would have wanted to experience.

I left at the end of the term saying good bye to another American student teacher who would follow me home some weeks later. Her parting words: "See you on the other side." The other side was more than the patch of land ending the Atlantic; it was the landscape of school I had carried unexamined inside my head. What was the geography of that landscape?

Fact: I spend the summer on Cape Cod sunning and sending out resumes. In early August I turn down an offer to teach math at a middle school in Weare, New Hampshire. Instead, I accept the position of fourth grade teacher in Epsom, New Hampshire.

I try to to recollect my first year teaching and all I have is a slide show. There is nothing movie-like about it. I hear no voices, see no motion picture of a classroom. Only scenes. Sometimes just views. The view out the front door of the classroom, down the stairs to the bulletin board filled with work

from my class. The view through the wall of glass windows beyond the parking lot to the grassy field across the street.

What can I make of the fact that while I sit to write I have trouble placing myself in the classroom. So much of the daily work of teaching took me away from an interest I had in children (or people for that matter). I remember the basement room of the elementary school where the teacher materials for the reading program were stored. I'd descend the stairway, turn sharply left and enter a door near the edge of the stairwell. Metal strappings held shelves. The shelves held boxes of dittoes. The dittoes unleashing row upon row of words meant to distract us from one another. With these materials I could re-enact the school I played in the rumpus room.

My lesson plan book is a grid. It is preprinted to divide the week into five distinct days, each day into seven distinct periods. I took it even further and that first year I made smaller boxes inside the pre-made boxes so the class was divided into groups, each working in linear fashion on assignment upon assignment. Where did I learn how to do this? I had never seen a teacher's plan book before being given one at the staff meeting, one day before the children arrived. We hadn't worked from plan books in England. And yet here it was. A tool of power, a signal of my authority. Sitting at home I took control of shaping the school hours. But was I really in control? Would it have occurred to me to ignore the indelible blue lines already set in place in the pages of my book.

Designing time and space. There is no course offered on this in teacher education programs. And yet, in some ways, this is among the most essential work we do. But the tools of our trade usurp even this authority from us. The tools given us to use—lesson plan books, single desks, report cards—shape our teaching. They fasten in place the template for life in the classroom, the

culture of schools. Before I became wise to this phenomenon I wanted even more of these tools.

In some ways my first plan book reflected pieces of who I was. I brought my newly discovered love of poetry, the idea of student-centered projects. But as the first year slipped into the second, and then the third, less of me is reflected. Instead, it holds more of the stuff of school: the textbooks, marked off planning periods, the tests.

As a fourth grade teacher I felt responsible to move my students from where I imagined they had been delivered at the end of third grade to the place they were expected to be as beginning fifth graders. I was certain someone, if not me, knew what these points of departure and arrival looked like. In most subject areas I could rely on the texts to outline a curriculum. But I was lost in areas like writing where there were no text books to impose some sequence of skills.

Why this mismatch between my experience in England and my experience in American schools? How is it that I dusted off and made operable the childhood image of school when the more recent one—my field work in England—left the smallest trace on my first two years in the classroom? The nine weeks weren't, by themselves, enough to unfreeze, reconceive, and crystallize a new image of the classroom. I needed a mediator on the other side— someone who shared the image I lived in England and could help me unpack the tensions, recognize the contradictory currents pulling me away from the classroom I might have created toward the classroom I was expected to create. If I was to push this new image of a classroom (borrowed from the strikingly different trappings of the British Primary School; sense of community, use of resources, lack of xerox machines, view of curriculum, assessment) into the flowing current of the

American system without watching it capsize, I would have needed someone to help me navigate the tumultuous waters.

As a practicing student teacher I had such a person. Doreen Brisland was a tall, confident woman, a recently retired headmistress. I had been in school for just a week when she visited my flat to see how it was going. As a student teacher it's difficult to know how and where to pay attention. Everything strikes some sort of chord. Helping the student sort it into a harmonious sound is the work of a supervisor. There was the schedule of schools, conversation in the teacher room, lunch times during which children revealed other facets of themselves. There were the notes and drawings children stuff in your hands upon arrival at school, and learning where to put your body in the classroom when the other teacher is teaching. And there are all the firsts: not knowing the answer to a child's question, saying something cross to a child who's testing limits, acting as mediator to two teary eyed girls.

On this day Doreen pointed the spotlight in the oddest of places. She entered the flat with a large easel chart under her arm. In her bags were fat, felt tip markers. Opening the chart to a clean sheet, she proceeded in precise strokes to letter the alphabet calling my attention to the roundness of o's, a's, e's. I expressed enthusiasm while inside I pondered in disbelief, what is this about? She controlled the marker to fall over the top of an invisible a, sweeping around, fat blue streak to kiss the line succinctly, back up in symmetrical fashion to meet seamlessly at the top—a straight line down again to the mark—aaaa. Another ruler straight vertical line, again the plush curve over the top of a crest outward to meet the bottom—beeee.

"You expect children to do their best, and in return you must always demonstrate your best. Show the respect you have for the work they do by

always presenting it beautifully. When you display it mount it first, write a title, make it attractive and pleasing to look at. If you want them to do their best for you, you must, in return, do your best for them."

Doreen left me her chart and a marker. I was to practice making clean strokes of the letters. This was decidedly British. I would later see the results of this value for presentation in the hand scribed work of the students. Boys and girls alike showed carefully controlled penmanship. But Doreen's action conveyed a respect for children that would serve me well as a teacher. It would take me awhile to notice the many ways in which American schools countered such respect for children. This lesson would also make it easy for me to recognize respect for children when I came across it two years later in a workshop on teaching writing.

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Thoughts while peeling apples. By some odd fluke our apple trees have delivered us scads of fleshy Washington State apples. An aberration of sorts; it does not go unnoticed that of the four trees these are the two that produce. Ralph and I have an on-going debate over the worth of this kind of apple. Being a native Vermonter, I carry a strong allegiance to the Macintosh and Cortland varieties. I question these apples that deceive with beauty. A ripe Delicious is truly a beautiful apple. Quintessentially burgundy. But the image stops at the skins, melts in your mouth into sawdust. While the mind conveys a tart-sweet explosion of juice, the tongue registers what it finds—dry, tasteless pulp.

Still, this morning I look at the orbs on the tree littering the ground. They are starting to fall and so I must do something with them. I have a leftover sense of frugality bred into me from my father who was born in the

depression. I gather the apples into my canvass school bag, haul them upstairs and spill them—not even gently—into a sink full of cold water. I stand between the sink and stove, quartering, coring, peeling the apples. Waste falls away into the compost bucket while the white meat is tossed into a large pot on the stove. I love the rhythmic monotonous motion. My hands were made to work. Broad palms, short, thick fingers: working hands my mother says: the hands of a surgeon. I carve the apples and while my fingers work my mind carves its own path through the pile of detail that comprises my life. I envision each thought as a captive prisoner, waiting for the sentry to depart in order to flee. It is only when thoughts flee that I can catch them. Such a funny sort of balance. Stop paying attention to discover what to attend. Let go in order to reach out and grasp. The pan is starting to fill with apples, the heat rises off the chunky surface and I understand I have worked too hard to tell the story of my first year teaching. I worried when only a slide show came forward. I see now that I have pulled the camera in too close, looked only at the classroom, without really placing myself there. If I zoom back I can widen the angle to pull in the personal.

It was 1979 and I was making 8200.00 as a first year teacher. Charlie and I were setting up a new apartment. We had been married a year and a half, but this was new. We woke each day to go off to work. We were saving money for a first house. Flirting with the idea of having a baby. I was having fun learning to cook (At the time I would have said I knew how.) We lived in a four room apartment on the second floor of a turn of the century white farmhouse just a couple of miles from my school. Charlie, on the other hand, would drive an hour each day to Weare, New Hampshire where he was teaching history at the Junior High School.

At twenty-two I was still in the early stages of opening my perspective on the world. I became friends with Debbie, the school librarian, and I remember discovering my ignorance the day she described her decision not to have children. It had never, ever, occurred to me that a couple might consider not having children. I was twenty-two years old and assumed most people were essentially (internally) like me. Over the years I've opened up to see myself as unique in the world—others as separate personal and cultural islands. Today I'm learning to reconnect again with others but in a different way—to trust an essence inside myself that reaches toward some universal nature of humanity. Human beings, there is a commonality to our experience in the world that binds us. This does not disavow the unique and individual story each of us holds as our own personal identity.

Teaching puts you in intimate contact with others. A child's story—their words and objects—become the telegraphic wires on which the privacy of a family is made public.

Joe Pero in black: black T-shirt, black jeans, black coloring whenever the choice is given. His crazy smile when I caught him trying to get away with something. But usually, the black expression he wore most of the time when he wasn't able to succeed at school—academically or socially. He would have liked to arrive at school on a Harley-Davidson. The youngest of a family of boys, Joe didn't fit with the other fourth graders. He was a nine year old kid who had been living in a family shaped by older brothers which had long forgotten a suitable environment for a child of ten.

Gregory. Tall and narrow came to school from a different world. He'd carry in projects made at home. A paper maiché Easter egg complete with carefully glued yellow ribbon bows. Slender fingers moving delicately along the surface as he described to the class how he and his mother made it.

Billi Jo. Sunshine smile. School work was hard. It never asked what she knew—only backed her against a wall of knowledge and skill she was unequipped to scale. She was unflustered. She'd shrug her shoulders, look into my eyes and smile acceptance to any suggestion that she try again. While Joe was hypersensitive to his failures and unable to accept recognition for something well done, Billi Jo felt equally good about her hits and her misses. Her smile reappears on her mother's face as I try to explain how I think she could help Billi Jo do better.

And then there was me, a young teacher with the responsibility of living a year with these children. How like and unlike were they from the child I was in school? What was the backdrop against which the images of them emerged in my mind? If you are a young teacher this close contact occurs at a time when your own intimate world is opening up for review—a time at which you may be little equipped to recognize, appreciate, and tolerate another's difference?

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When I thought of teaching in England I imagined settling into an eighteenth century cottage or perhaps a thatched-roofed cottage with its kitchen opening onto a garden of ancient perennials. At the very least we'd find a flat decidedly British: an electric meter that ran on tuppence coins, walls that met at eschewed angles. In contrast to this romantic image was that apartment we ended up renting. A decisively modern flat in a two story brick apartment building.

The apartment looked like all those sorts of apartments. You know, white walls, neutral tone carpeting. Beige tile on the kitchen floor. One

spatula, ladle, tongs, a can opener in the kitchen drawer. Silverware settings for four in another. Designed to be innocuous these apartments want to offend no one. Elude to a home—this is a place you can make your own. Overlay your image of home and it allows you to fill in the gaps until it's recognizable as something familiar. I had left a similar apartment in Henniker, New Hampshire. Whitewashed walls covering all traces of earlier inhabitants.

I wanted difference. Of course there were some. A wire bottle holder sat outside our front door. I discovered its purpose the morning I tripped over three bottles of fresh milk on my way out to school. Reaching down to lift the glass bottles from the rack I spied the small dial, a red hand pointing to the number three. On the top layer of each bottle of milk lay a familiar inch of yellow creme. The one time I ran away from home as a child I crouched in the milk box inside our garage. It seems funny now to hide in a place that gets checked daily, unless of course the runaway yearns to be found. In England I carried the milk inside, placed it on the empty rack of the refrigerator and left for school. Walking to school that day I thought about the milk box at home. On Sundays my mother poured the creme from the bottles into a blue ceramic bowl. She'd whip it stiff while my father made a pile of buttered toast. My brother, sister and I would sit at the breakfast nook dipping toast into small bowls of sugared creme. Noni was often there, and she'd pour her coffee into the near empty ceramic bowl and sip it through a frothy layer of creme. I'd watch the movement of the fine white line tracing her upper lip as she talked with us.

I knew my Noni for thirty-three years, lived back to back with her for twelve of those. And in my mind's eye she is always the same age. My image of old shifts as she acquires years. When I was five, she was sixty. Coming

home from school we would reach Noni's house first. Weaving a path up B street, we'd cross her side lawn to enter the back lawn of our house on C street. She'd be sitting on the wooden bench on her back porch waiting for us. She might have fresh sorcelli's waiting, hand fried strips of sweet dough powdered with confectioner's sugar. We'd go together into her kitchen, pull out the side drawer of her white enamel stove and reach in to lift out the treat. She was first to admire the white safety patrol belt I got as a fourth grader. On another day she cleaned my bloody knee while reassuring me she'd fix the hole in my new tights. She added thickness to the intimacy of my life.

At twenty four I am a new mother and Noni is seventy nine. I remember the soft expanse of her lap and bosom as I watch my infant son nestle in testing the hills and valleys for a slope that will hold him just right. She is still old, but just that—not older than she was when, as a child of five, I perceived her as such. She has always been old. It takes a leap of imagination to see her as she might have been at twenty four, a young mother herself. And even then I can not begin to imagine it until I have some footing in which to start the journey. When my third son was born, six weeks after she died, I thought of our common lot and what it must have been like for her to raise three sons on her own.

Why do we say, "growing up?" It should be called "growing out." During childhood we become enmeshed in the intimate world of family, a webbing of relationships which suspend us in the sea of life. Each relationship a stranglehold from which we one day work to extricate ourselves: if not in order to move away, then to move in more closely. To see oneself in relation to others involves forming a distinction from those others. The word *family* carries with it all the emotions embodied in the

relationships, At what age does one realize that others do not have the same understanding of grandmother? Father? Sister? Mother?

Teaching rests on the relationships we forge with students, colleagues, parents. It asks that we see beyond the child seated in front of us, both in time and space. To recognize the layers of experience that trails the child into the classroom, to perceive a picture of life that falls outside the frame of our perspective. Even the child who appears most like us—in race, sex, temperament—is a culture all her own. We should meet her as we would any foreign landscape. Place our assumptions at bay. To speak of difference is a trap; it implies that somewhere there is sameness. Find me a child with whom I share an understanding of the world. And yet, quite paradoxically, once we acknowledge even the most radical difference we can look at that child from the perspective of what is the same: each of us human organisms driven to make sense of our existences, to flourish under an ethic of care, to want acceptance, understanding, tolerance.

I'd like to say I thought all this as a beginning teacher, that I was intent to discover my students. But closer to the truth, I was intent to discover myself. Teaching puts you in close contact with so many others that to fully take it in can rock the boat of one's own understanding of the world.

CHAPTER SIX

It is three o'clock and the last of my students are gone. It is winter of my second year teaching. Each child's personal mark is stamped on the classroom by the way they leave the room. Whose coat manages to be left behind, crumpled in a ball at the bottom of the coat rack? Which objects have been left in a hurry on the top of the desk. School objects or home objects? And what of my desk tucked in one corner of the room? Over my four years as a classroom teacher it becomes a space shared with the students. When I was a student, the teacher's authority appeared to reign over the entire room. But now at three o'clock on any given day, the children are gone, their marks left in various places around the room, and I feel in control of so little of it.

On this day I leave everything as it is, grab a notebook and go down stairs to the room directly beneath mine. I have signed up for a two session course on Writing Process. A number of my colleagues are there plus teachers from other schools. The room is full. All of us, teachers who have been accustomed to occupying the front of the room, are squeezed into chairs behind child sized desks. We are seated in rows and I am amazed at the feeling of constraint that comes from being surrounded on all sides by other students.

In creative writing class during my junior year in high school I sat in rows just like these. Our teacher takes the front of the room. She must have taught. Lectured. Assigned. But I only have this; all of who she is squeezed into the red mark in the right hand corner of the page. My close friend Brad was in the class with me. The tiny A in the corner of his work, dwarfed the B or B+ I always received on mine. A mystery of high school.: what would it

have taken for my paper to be like Brad's? What, for that matter, was his like? And that is the whole of it. No memory of the stories others wrote, or of information shared on what makes writing work. The whole of it carried on the backs of the tiny red letters which appeared out of some mist. What did I learn that year? That I was not good enough.

It seems as if I have not written "creatively" since then until this teacher at the front of the room tells us that Don Murray (1968) suggests we write to discover what we have to say, and that we should feel free to do that on this first, small index card. I can't for the life of me imagine what I would have written, but that the card was small made it seem possible. And so I wrote. And when I was done I waited, like a good student, for the teacher to tell me to turn to a person next to me to share.

A few months later, in April of that year, Charlie and I drive into Concord to have dinner with my parents. I call ahead to tell my mother I may be pregnant. She brings the testing solution home from the OB-GYN office where she works and I am standing in the kitchen when I get the news. She gives me a knowing smile, a moment of intimacy only women can claim. I am suddenly fragile, awed by the unleashed phenomenon taking place within me. Growing a baby is a slow process, and learning to embrace it happens gradually. But the moment of being two, where earlier you are one, is only sudden and abrupt.

Before I share the news with my students at school I hide my morning sickness. I keep dry saltines in the top drawer of my desk. When I can't make it to the recess break without a bite to eat, I step outside the door and munch down a couple of crackers before slipping back into the classroom.

Inside the classroom my children write. I have been experimenting with the writing process approach since that winter workshop. Just as the

instructor had given us the freedom to select our own topics, I ask my students to write what they know. My questions about teaching begin to change. Where earlier I wondered which topics would motivate my students to write, I now ponder how to deal with the flood of lead smeared papers that find their way into my hands as “finished” work.

We put writing to other uses as well. I’ve found people in the community to volunteer for an oral history project. In the classroom we practice interviewing one another, writing our questions first before testing them in a real-life situation. We work on how to listen: learning when to leave the list of questions to follow a tidbit of information offered up in a person’s response. Teams of children pile into parents’ cars and travel into various homes along the roads of this rural community.

All of this brings more voices into the classroom. Historical voices come in through the taped interviews students bring back. And students’ own voices come in through the stories they write. We paint our images of Spring on the windows along the outside wall of the room. The sun streaming through these images sends colors dancing across the tops of our desks.

Like many teachers I leave each day with my arms full: math papers to correct, construction paper to cut a title for a bulletin board, penpal letters to mail at the post office. There are the books I need to plan tomorrow’s lessons and the odds and ends of my life as a teacher: a sample science curriculum to preview for the curriculum committee, referral forms for a child, the collection of papers I pull out of my mail box in the office.

I can continue to be this kind of teacher while I am growing a baby inside of myself. But just barely. Each day I return from school and collapse on my bed to nap for an hour or two. I eat and have just enough time to work my way through the pile before falling back into bed.

By July, when I go to study at the New Hampshire Summer Writing Program I am over my sleepiness. My belly is swelling. And here the tension mounts. Just as I am beginning to focus intensely on my internal state, I find myself riveted to new ideas about teaching.

Summer in New Hampshire. The days start clean and crisp, warming gradually until mid-day has you wrapped in summer heat. I am in-between; I have no clothes that house me. In the mornings I reach into the box of maternity clothes my sister-in-law has sent. They are too big, and not at all the right season, but I am anxious to wear them. I pull a light weight sweater over my head. It is loose, and the looseness feels good. My stomach has wanted room to expand. Each morning I drive twenty minutes to the University, park my car and walk to Murkland Hall. Some days I don't feel the heat until I walk back to the parking lot at 3:00. On this day, however, it is warm and sticky at 9:00 a.m. and I am feeling self-consciously overdressed. I wonder why I am here. A tiny voice questions, "Shouldn't I be home fixing up the nursery?"

* * * * *

Today I sit at home in front of my computer—recently aware that I've placed it, in typical female fashion, in the central location of my busy family while my husband's office extends off the back of the house, a private enclave—and write about these earliest years of learning to teach. I can not get it right—if such a non-relative notion exists. I get tangled in the knowledge I've developed about teaching these thirteen years since I've left the classroom. I imagine myself a time traveler, passing through a decade of dense space, trying to emerge out the other end clean. I can not make it. I

push through the spaces of graduate seminars, step over the multitude of devoured texts, turn down the volume on conversations I have had about teaching, retrace miles of footsteps I have left across the corridors of New York City schools to find myself as I was: a young teacher of nine and ten year olds. A young, enthusiastic teacher of nine and ten years old. A determined teacher. An eager learner.

But this does not always come out in the stories I write. And yet, I hold it now, so clear. So true. I was devoted to my work. Carried piles of student papers home to read. Spent long weeks before Christmas hand-painting clay ornaments I made for each child in my class. Volunteered for committees—a newly formed parent-teacher curriculum committee and the committee to negotiate a new teacher contract. Expressed my opinions on the issues of running the school—children should definitely be allowed to talk during lunch. Felt compelled to accept challenges—during my first two years teaching I taught an algebra course before school for qualified eighth graders. Read professionally and knew there was much to learn. When I applied to the UNH summer writing program I was in the middle of my second year teaching, the minimum years required for acceptance.

But in rendering a story I am unable to free myself from the sticky cobwebs of time. I see now that I was teacher-centered. My plan books held my passions before the students'. And I see how even these passions eased away as I felt the influence of external voices (curriculum mandates, published programs, the institutionalized setting of schools). School by its very nature does little to encourage the development and pursuance of the students' or teacher's own passions. And this will remain the case as long as those who influence school policy fasten their attention on outcomes rather than a definition of what it means to be a learner.

* * * * *

The summer at UNH was about passion. There was passion in the ideas expressed by Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Donald Murray—teachers and writers themselves—talking about how to help children do what writers do. And there was passion in the experience of placing my first trembling words on the page.

For three weeks I eagerly fill my notebook with the ideas I will try in September. When the course finishes our section group of fifteen teachers plans a reunion in February. I don't worry about reconciling the contradictory pulls in my life: the world of teaching from without, with the inner sanctum of becoming a mother.

I return to school in the fall; there are twelve weeks before I give my class over to the teacher who will finish the year while I am at home with my baby. I want to write about that first group of students to whom I said, "Write about what really matters to you." But I have only this: the image of Jeff, a tall blond child, hunched over his yellow-lined paper at his desk which is pushed against the far wall of the classroom. He is painfully shy with teachers. A good child who has spent three years in school without learning to read. He suffers from what he lacks: confidence in his ability to learn. Still he writes quietly. A steady stream of indecipherable letters work their way slowly across the page, line by line. When I ask Jeff to read me his story, he does, tentatively. I am surprised and search his page for the symbols that might match his words. There are none.

One image. A single child in a single moment. What does this mean for the writer of her teaching autobiography? Shouldn't the images of

children be central in my mind? What does it mean that so many have faded away? When I look again at this image I find there are others, only they are not the ones I expect to find. Images are artifacts with which I piece together my story. The artifact-images I find here tell a different story than the one I presumed to tell—a true story, in fact, a truer story.

I am seated at my desk. The room is loud: children scrape their chairs against the dusty linoleum as they move to get more paper for their drafts or ask a friend to listen to their story. It is writing time and in another moment I will leave the chair behind my desk to listen to their work. But for now I practice relaxing. I focus on each muscle of my body, beginning with my feet and ankles. Concentrate as I move through the lengthy muscles of my thighs to the abdominal muscles stretched across my giant belly. My shoulders droop in this state as I breathe deliberate slow breaths. If I can relax in the midst of this chaotic classroom, I will be well-prepared for child birth. And when I hoist myself out of my seat, I move around the room squatting beside my students' desks. I am careful to keep my heels on the floor—a true squat that will strengthen the muscles I may need during labor.

I want to blurt these two images simultaneously: the image of attending to Jeff, and the image of attending to myself. I do not want the reader to linger, even for a moment, with the notion that I was distracted by my own life separate from the classroom. And yet I was intensely distracted which might explain the reason so few images of that partial year remain. Still the image of Jeff stays in my mind and with it lingers a shadow of the teacher I had been and the foreshadowing of the one I would become.

For now however, I am on the brink of something big: the sphere-like belly that prevents me from tying my own sneakers.

Taylor is born on Christmas day, thirteen days after the date the doctors determined him due. I labor for eight hours in the hospital before I take to the bed where I spend an hour pushing his eight pound body out of mine. I do not use the inside thigh muscles I have developed in the classroom. It doesn't matter, he comes anyway. An hour later, he is bundled and taken off to the nursery. I am in bed—the same bed—at noon when the nurse puts a tray of Christmas dinner in front of me. Prime rib, mashed potatoes, french-style cut green beans. I haven't eaten meat for four years, but how are they to know?

Later, Charlie and I walk down the hall to the nursery and look through the glass wall at our foreign child. In his own bassinet, Taylor sleeps: a tiny red stocking cap on his head, a green satin Christmas bulb at his feet.

Do I tell the story as I see it now, or as I saw it then? Our cape, set back from the road was lost to the mounds of snow we had gotten that winter. A narrow ribbon of a path shoveled from the road led to the front door: an umbilical cord to the house which held my entire world. That winter I became a mother; I also became my mother and her mother before her. On the corner of my kitchen shelf I kept a pan of laban. My grandmother had taught me how to heat the milk—until you can barely hold your pinky in to the count of ten—then to add a tablespoon of yogurt and wrap the entire pan, lid on tight, in a towel to rest for twenty four hours. Some days she would hang the laban in a cheese cloth sack over the spigot in her tub, letting the liquid ooze out to leave a soft cheese. She would roll the cheese into small balls and marinate in olive oil and cracked pepper for us to spread on crackers. My Lebanese heritage was passed to me through the foods my Italian grandmother learned to prepare for her Lebanese husband.

Sitting on the rug in the living room, Taylor nurses as I talk with Carol, the woman who is teaching the class I left. She has brought their writing. It is spread across the floor. I realize she is reporting in and I want to tell her she doesn't have to. They are her students now. It surprises me how eager I am to let them go.

The winter drags on. Taylor and I leave home only rarely; walk the ribbon path to the road to drive thirty minutes to do the weekly grocery shopping. Taylor grows and I am amazed at how natural it feels to be his mother. But that is the only thing that matches the picture I have carried into adulthood. Charlie is out of work after deciding two years of teaching was enough. He needs to do something else and so this winter he sells wood stoves. It is a good winter to sell stoves and I am happy he is at least back to work.

I often nurse Taylor in the middle of the night: sit in the rocker in his bedroom and drink in the image of his face. I tell myself to remember this picture always. The pale of his cheek half hidden next to my breast. But then I am aware that I have seemingly returned to this moment—a middle of the night nursing—and that very little is held between these tender moments strung together endlessly. The days slip away fast; there is nothing to hold them in place.

In February I gather at UNH with my peers from the summer course. Taylor comes and I tell about the workshops on writing process I have been asked to give for my colleagues at school. Later, when I leave Taylor with a sitter to go to the school to give these workshops, I am sending an anchor line into the world (*the first line a spider spins in making a web*). The few hours I spend away from Taylor heighten the moments I am with him. Each day

takes on a new dimension when I flavor it with my other world: the world of teaching.

CHAPTER SEVEN

My Noni became a widow when my father, the youngest of three sons, was nine years old. She worked outside of her home her entire life until she retired at the age of sixty-four. I was nine years old and so my memories of her were not of a "working woman." Instead I picture her always in our house or hers. Noni preparing rabbit and polenta for a Sunday dinner. Noni rolling out large rectangles of pasta dough on her formica kitchen tabletop, filling the centers with meat, crimping the edges to make ravioli. Noni on the porch to greet us on our way home from school.

Yet still, the white uniforms she wore to her housekeeping job at the hospital hung in the closet of the upstairs bedroom. She stuffed the dresses to hold their shape and these headless forms beckoned my sister and me to the edge of our fear when we played hide-and-go-seek. Neither of us dared to hide in the closet with these shapes, but we both had the courage to crack open the door just to see if the other was in there. I knew from these preserved objects, that my Noni worked. That women could do that.

My mother worked as well during the years I was a child. But for the most part she kept it from us children. I don't think she did this consciously, only that it was background to her desire to be attentive to us. I remember my mother as the girl scout and 4-H leader. Baking molasses and peanut butter cookies. Preparing Sunday dinner which we ate together in the dining room rather than squeezed around our tiny breakfast nook. Imagine her and my father coming in late on New Years Eve with paper hats and noise makers she had saved for us children.

Two years ago, just months before my mother retired from her full-time job she was named New Hampshire Nurse Practitioner of the Year. I sat at the awards ceremony when her name was announced and watched as she approached the podium in utter surprise. I listened to her colleagues talk of her career involvement in women's health care. I listened to this portrait, so different from the one I held in my vision, and was struck by how little my mother spoke of her profession inside the confines of the family.

So the image was there for me: the image of a woman with dual commitments to family and work. Or perhaps I should rephrase that to say: the image of a woman with a single commitment to nurture herself with the rewards that come from embodying both these personas. (This was true for my mother, if not my Noni who worked, I suspect, purely out of economic necessity.) But this image was attached to another, more indelible image of the woman at the hearth—nurturing her family. In this latter image, the nurturing of family stands in place of nurturing the self. Call it a double exposure: a bifocal image carried forward in the steady stream of my own unfolding adulthood.

How does such an image function as one is shaping a life of her own? Each day, new reports spin out from the data gathered by the Hubble telescope. A recent one ponders the invisible matter that makes up 90 percent of the universe. Scientists know that the universe (all that which is not suns, planets, etc.) is not empty space. They know it is some sort of matter because of the gravitational force this matter exerts on the planets and stars which are visible; but in order to describe or define it exactly, they need more information. So they are searching through a powerful telescopic lense to see if they can bring something, anything, into focus.

Autobiographical writing is the telescope with which I look beyond the visible, at those things which exert a gravitational pull on my development. When an image emerges, I can read my life against it. I see my life in relation to this double exposed image. As a twenty-four year old new mother I was eager to place myself on the mother image I saw in the family in which I was raised. So I took the maternal role my Noni and mother made most visible. But it wasn't long before I felt stiff from standing in that pose. I wanted to borrow from others in the image; I wanted mainly to claim the agency-in-the-world that I perceived to belong with the father image. I wanted to take; but I didn't want to relinquish the distinctly different agency that was housed in the mother image. This seems absolutely consistent with the second image nestled in the first—of my mother's quiet career moving forward while she remained a central figure at home. So I've borrowed tremendously on this double exposed image. But I see now where it falls short and how its presence has, at various points in my life, provided the tension needed to spur growth.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Some women make choices. By contrast, my life is like the overloaded dinner plate a person brings back from the buffet line. A friend recently said to me, "You have to say no a lot in life." I thought about that, came home and said to Ralph, "I realize I hardly say no to anything."

Writing the story of these four years as a classroom teacher puts me directly on the fault line of my life, the divide between career ambitions and my desire, and need, to be central in the lives of my children. I don't want to imply that these two always fall away from one another; as often as not they figure prominently in the success I find in either. I am a better mother because of my involvement in the lives of other children and adults outside the family. And I am a better teacher because attending to my own children's growth challenges the contradictory—often covert—messages about learning embedded in the structure and design of schools. This understanding is specific to my life; other women might find it otherwise. For me, it has taken thirteen years to arrive here. In the beginning, when I found myself a teacher and mother both at once, I thought I had wrecked everything.

When I returned to teaching nine months after Taylor was born I couldn't be either the teacher or mother I wanted to be. I had one body in which to live out two intense roles. Everywhere I looked I was forced to cut corners. I woke Taylor from his sleep to bundle him, pajama clad, into his snowsuit to drop him off on my way to work. At three-thirty I left unfinished work in my classroom as I raced to be reunited with the baby I had missed all day long. When I was at school, I thought of home. When I was home, I felt tugged to think of school.

It was a slow Fall during which time I began to pull together these separate lives. The woman who stepped back into the classroom was truly a different self. I had been back to study for a second summer at the NHSWP and I had been reconfigured in the process of having a child.

* * * * *

Each morning I would sit and write at one of the student tables for the first ten minutes of our writing workshop. At the beginning of the year I wrote stories about Taylor, who at the time was ten months old and learning to eat with a spoon, pull himself up, make faces to get his father and me to laugh. When the ten minutes were up I would rise—leaving my folder open with my writing visible for children to see—find a child to slide my chair beside and begin to listen. It was the listening that made the difference and it was the absolute lack of accountability for a subject such as writing that made it possible simply to listen. Writing was one of those areas many teachers avoided altogether. When I began then, it gave me a certain amount of freedom to experiment.

As I listened I discovered things about my students that I wouldn't have found on a checklist anywhere. Derek wanted a guinea pig and wrote about it everyday. Brent worked steadily on task and at the end of each writing period had only a few dark leaded lines to show for it. Kurt's spelling was so limited that neither of us could read his stories and yet, he wrote pages and pages unfettered that the trail of letters behind his pencil was indecipherable. He would tell me what he wrote while I scripted it on a clean sheet of paper. I was surprised to observe what he did with it. He would begin each writing workshop by copying my writing onto yet another clean paper

and then continue to add to the story, referring to the words above to make his new writing more readable. In this manner Kurt taught himself to read over the course of the year in a style I doubt I would ever had considered. By the end of the year my writing folder held stories about my students alongside the stories I continued to write about Taylor. One was about the day Vicki and Faith visited the third grade classroom of my closest colleague, Lori Breshnahan.

Lori taught third grade. We shared our teaching in conversations with each other that flanked both ends of every day. These were often centered on the changes we were making in our teaching of writing. One day we decided to swap a couple of students during our workshops as a way to cross pollinate the kind of talk and thinking that was going on in our separate classrooms. Lori would send two of her students to my classroom during the large group time in which we responded to drafts in progress, and I would send two of my students to her share time. Vicki and Faith were the first to go. When they returned they quickly made their way to the writing center, grabbed a sheet of paper and found a place to sit. I watched as Vicki wrote their list of recommendations for improving the third grade share session. When they were finished they brought the paper to me. On it were four suggestions:

Don't just say you like it, tell what you like about it.

Make sure to tell what you want us to listen for before you read.

Make sure to tell whether it's a finished piece of writing.

When you say something, make sure you tell why you say it. Make yourself clear!

I stood, paper in hand, looking from their faces back to their still developing handwriting and marveled at how they had uncovered the

underlying structure of our own writing share sessions, not to mention some of my own unspoken teaching intentions.

Like all elementary teachers I taught math, science, social studies, health, and reading. Writing workshop would end and the students would tuck away their writing folders, and their autonomy, take out their math books and begin once again to fit themselves around school.

As I became comfortable running a writing workshop I was willing to address the contradictions that emerged in the ways I taught other subjects. Some of these contradictions were triggered by the professionally developed materials I was expected to use. Text books, worksheets, a basal reading program. Such materials don't require the teacher to engage in her work on a philosophical level. This doesn't mean one can't engage philosophically, only that it's not necessary to do so. Teachers can carry out a prescribed set of lessons without ever articulating for themselves what they believe about teaching or learning.

This is true for writing process pedagogy as well. In the beginning I focused on the mechanisms of running the workshop. Coloring coding folders. Establishing a set of rules. My first ones: you must write during writing time, no interrupting the teacher during conferences, write on one side of the paper only. My engagement in teaching children to write provided a way to reach into the overwhelming mass of details comprising classroom life. I was simply trying to get a workshop running and the philosophy that was embedded became explicit to me over the years that followed. It helped that I was talking to others about what I was doing; there were conversations with colleagues at school, network meetings with like-minded teachers at Atkinson Academy, the newsletter my colleagues from NHSWP and I created

for ourselves. These conversations pushed me below the surface where the philosophical tenets of the pedagogy were lodged.

* * * * *

Stanley Tripp had gone to a one room school house in Epsom New Hampshire fifty years earlier. Vicki and Ian were studying one room schoolhouses as part of our class unit on Colonial New Hampshire and I had arranged for Mr. Tripp to visit the class as a way for them to gather first hand information about their topic. He sat on a high stool and talked about being paid a dime a week for hauling the wood for the stove and sweeping the floor at the end of each day. He carried his lunch to school in a pail. All of us listened, but none as closely as Vicki and Ian who were taking notes and making sure to get all their questions answered.

The unit on Colonial life was my first attempt to push at the boundaries of the writing workshop. Ironically, what resulted was a classroom similar to the the one I created in England. As a class we were studying colonial life, but within the umbrella of that topic students chose an area to study indepth. Within a couple of weeks individuals were exploring a variety of topics: sports, farming, government, home life, architecture.

My student Ian lived in a two hundred year old cape. Took baths in a tin tub in front of the wood stove that heated the house. His father practiced antique carpentry and his mother, calligraphy. They sent artifacts from colonial times for study. In addition we drew information from illustrations and paintings, books, documents, and first hand resources like Mr. Tripp. The student's goals were to learn about their subject and prepare to teach the others in the class. Some chose to present orally, others designed bulletin

boards. We had skits and the more traditional reports. Teaching this way required me to let go of elements of more traditional teaching: students studying the same topic, at the same pace. Colonial life was in our curriculum, but I was leaving it to the students to cover the topic. By allowing individuals to study an area deeply and then present some of that learning to the class, I acknowledged we were not all learning the same thing. Of course, it was the acknowledgement that was different. Even when children study the same topic, in the same way, they aren't all learning the same thing. I became less interested in helping my students learn things, and more intrigued with helping them learn about learning.

As I shifted my goals away from covering the curriculum I ran into the problem that plagues many teachers: the momentum of my teaching sent me travelling a different trail. Imagine a train coming to a switch in the track. The switch gets made and the train veers off in its new direction. The problem is everybody's waiting for the students at a different railhouse. My goals may have been loftier, more life sustaining, but there was no rail house built to receive them. The current system of accountability was not equipped to recognize the gains students might achieve in desire and independence in learning, ability to identify a problem and construct a plan of action to address it. There was no measure for their capacity to listen critically or with empathy to the work of a classmate. The pessimist might have given up at the notion of launching students fully equipped into a system that rewarded the antithesis of their developing skills. (Competition, following the teacher's lead.) I did what many teachers do; I started to record the information I needed on my students—regardless of the demand the system was making. I gathered anecdotal records, eager to share at parent conferences. I saw cumulative writing folders as the most extensive evidence of a student's

growth in writing over the year. Translating this growth into the language of schools (i.e. a number system on report cards, a predetermined checklist of skills, grades) was the challenge. The disappointment was how much was lost in translation. And the frustration, that no one seemed to care.

I hold this still and imagine for a moment the person who can do this year after year. Gather information useful to herself and her students but find herself always staring in the face of a system that places little to no value on the understanding she has gained on a child. Instead we are always being handed the language with which to render our students to others, and for what benefit, and for whose? What is the profile of the adult who can maintain integrity in such a system? Watching year after year as students leave a classroom in which they had autonomy only to melt back into one that defines the learner's role in the most minimal way. Can we afford the attrition that results—the particular kind of teacher that is siphoned out of the system?

I began what was to be my last year as a classroom teacher with a class meeting. We were seated in a large circle on the carpet at the back of the classroom. (Interesting language—is there always a back to a classroom? What does that imply? What designates the front? Chalkboard, a particular use of the room, i.e. where the teacher stands when she lectures?) The classroom was somewhat bare. The bulletin boards were empty, the furniture only temporarily arranged.

I explained to the class: "I want this classroom to be a good place for each of you to learn. So we have some work to do to create the kind of room in which that can happen." We talked about how we might design the room and the need for different kinds of spaces—quiet spaces where you can work undisturbed, large spaces where the whole class can gather to work together.

We talked about materials and manners and we talked about what good learners do.

I remember John Dunbar's expression when I explained that it was okay for a learner to guess and be wrong. He looked at me and blurted, "You mean we can guess?" It was a funny moment because I saw on his face the belief that guessing was easier than getting it right. And that guessing was not something he had allowed himself in the past (nor had the school system allowed him). He broke into a mischievous grin which suggested to me he was planning to guess a lot that year.

I wanted my students to define a classroom that might work for us all. This was the first year in which I felt I was as much a learner as they. Surely we had different learning agendas, but I saw these in a symbiotic relationship to one another. Their learning would provide the basis for the lessons I was to learn about myself and teaching. My learning was returned to them through the enriched understanding I brought to my teaching.

What was my learning agenda? I wanted to be a better writing teacher. At first I saw learning to teach writing as distinct from learning to teach in general. Now I see how teaching writing gave me a new way to see myself in relation to my students, and how critical this perspective is if I am to earn the right to be anyone's teacher at all. Still, as a classroom teacher I came to love teaching writing and when I got the invitation to go to New York City to teach this to teachers I went with enthusiasm, thinking, 'What fun. I'll get to teach writing all day.'

CHAPTER NINE

Some experiences take a while to unpack. Taylor is twelve. He stands in the kitchen, leaning with his back against the sink, facing me. I sit on a stool at the end of the breakfast bar. Joseph and Robert are playing on the fringes of our conversation. They are pretending to be baby bees, both of them buzzing and twittering softly around the family room.

The subject of divorce has come up and I look at Robert and Joseph, then back to Taylor and say, "You and Adam were these ages when your father and I got separated. Can you imagine what it would be like for Robert if Ralph and I were to get divorced right now?"

Taylor looks at his almost five year old brother pensively before he makes the remark. "So that's what divorce group was all about. I never understood what the big deal was. They were always trying to get us to talk about feeling angry, feeling sad. It never really made sense to me."

But it makes sense to him now. I see it in his eyes as he watches Robert fly to the ground and roll himself into a little ball before proclaiming, "I'm a little bunny." Joseph follows him to the carpet and the two of them roll into each other laughing.

CHAPTER TEN

Though it is not always possible to depict growth in this way, I can pinpoint the exact moment at which I turned a corner in the view I held of myself as a woman giving birth. My history as a mother is almost as long as my history as a teacher. If you count the years before actually becoming a mother as years of apprenticeship—years when as a daughter I was imprinted with images of motherhood in the same way years of being a student form one's notion of teacher—I've been growing into a mother as long as I've been growing into a teacher.

On the time line of my growth as a mother is a single turning point. I was seven months pregnant with Robert, my third child. Ralph and I were in Dr. Leiberman's office talking about our hopes for the birth. It wasn't going well. I had started with episiotomies—"I'd like to avoid it if possible, I understand you can sometimes do that with massage or warm oils."

"Ah... witchcraft." He responds.

I move on and ask about fetal monitoring. I don't want my movement to be restricted. He explains that the hospital policy is to monitor the baby's heartbeat twenty minutes out of each hour you are laboring. I ask whether there is any flexibility on this and his answer is a resounding no. But then he delivers it, the comment that marks my turning point.

"No flexibility. And the reason? Because if anything went wrong your lawyer would sue the hell out of me."

I like frankness in people and I especially appreciated it at this moment. I let the conversation wind to an end, left his office and went home to write the letter that explained why I would not be having my baby with his practice.

I must add this: I was deeply enamored of this doctor. He had delivered my second son, Adam, in the hospital he referred to. Had arrived at seven fifteen in the morning in a flannel shirt and jeans. Adam was born fifteen minutes later before he even had time to change his clothes. I asked if Taylor, almost three at the time, could come and see his new brother and he bent hospital policy by asking, "Can you get him here right now while the hospital is so quiet?" Charlie left, drove home and within thirty minutes Taylor was hoisted onto my bed, his baby brother swaddled in his arms.

Plus everyone falls in love with the person who delivers her baby. Don't they?

It wasn't just his words—*because your lawyer will sue the hell out me*—that created the ripple that sent me out of his office and into a free standing birth center where I delivered Robert eight weeks later. He might have said those very same words six years earlier when the basketball of my belly was Adam. I was a different person. The words penetrated where earlier they would have been deflected by my own timidity, fragility, lack of agency.

His comment was one thing and my temperament, understanding, concept of self was another. The first was an action, the other a state of preparedness or openness, of fluidity that allowed his comment to resonate fully. If I were an instrument I'd say the words struck their full chord, a richer, fuller chord than they might have struck in a less mature, carefully constructed instrument. Maybe there was more space inside of me at this point in time; but the carving out of that space had been taking place for years. For years and years and years—way back in Tom Hebert's sociology class as a junior in high school when I took a Lamaze birthing class and was on call to coach a woman whose husband was to be away for the birth. The experience of each of my births excavated more debris—debris that had piled up from

years of living in a culture that cut women off from valuing the knowledge of their bodies. Debris deposited from a medical system that had stolen from women their place in the process of birthing children.

I don't want the notion of space to be only one of taking away. Yes, there was a peeling back of layers —layers of fear—what if some thing happens and you can't get to the hospital, self-doubt—just knock me out I don't want to feel the pain, the layer that diminished a maternal instinct to know how to best take care of your child—letting hospital policy interfere with a nursing relationship (There are so many parallels to a teacher's place in school; it's staggering.) But there is another way to envision the creating of space.

I blow a bubble. My breath hits the plane of filmy soap and a tiny sphere emerges. The steady stream of air pushes the sides and the bubble expands. This space is not empty, but full. Sometimes the space inside myself feels light as a bubble and full. A spirited fullness rich with self-understanding. When Dr. Leiberman came at me with his words I could only respond as I did because I was full of myself. Understood my place in it all. Knew I was not empty and dependent on an institutionalized system that had figured out how I should have this baby. One curriculum for all. Women in labor are at least as different from one another as children learning to read. The challenge is in knowing how to tap into knowledge developed by years of careful research without rendering one's own experience of the phenomenon voiceless.

* * * * *

Robert was born at two thirty in the morning on May 21st. Ralph helped pile me and my pillows into the car and he drove the ten minutes to the birthing center. Nan, the midwife, met us at the door. It was dark inside. I took a shower, got into the bed to be checked and forty five minutes later delivered Robert. His was the first birth I didn't watch. I closed my eyes and saw it more clearly than either of the other two. In my mind's eye I understood his journey, inch by inch out of my body. The cervix opening and pulling back across the crown of his head and slowly, the sheer bulk and weight of that spherical treasure bearing its way down the birth canal. This is the point at which women who birth their own babies lose control. There is absolutely nothing to be done but experience it happening—no muscle exists that can counter the tremendous urge of the body to let this child be born. If you let go, you can experience it happening and if you are not afraid, you can enjoy it.

Dr. Leiberman's words were the catalyst for a change that had been brewing slowly inside myself. The slower, hidden-to-myself process of change was taking place as I experienced my earlier births, sat through the Lamaze classes, and then later through a series of Bradley classes where Deborah, the instructor, provided a critical perspective on standard birth practices that helped me critique my earlier experiences in a way I was unable to before.

On my time line as a developing teacher I sense no clear pivotal point that is parallel to Dr. Leiberman's words. Perhaps...*(but listen to how tentative I am even now)* ... perhaps it was during my first NCTE conference, at a book party for Donald Graves' new book, Writing: Teachers and Children At Work, when I found myself standing on the outside edge of a circle of educators whose names I had only seen in print: Jerome Harste, Ken and

Yetta Goodman, Glenda Bissex; listening to them banter about the ideas they had presented in sessions I had attended earlier.

Or it may have been some months later when I sat at the kidney shaped table in my classroom, a stack of three by five index cards in my hands, presenting a workshop on content area writing during a district wide staff development day. Maybe it was finding myself with something to say and an audience interested in listening.

But these seem less like turning points, and more like the slow process of establishing new relationships. First, was my relationship to a developing body of knowledge on teaching writing, and second, were my relationships with colleagues where I had seen myself as having something to teach, as well as to learn.

These four years as a classroom teacher were partially about filling up, as were the years during which I entered the realm of motherhood. Acquiring experience and knowledge, and later the propensity to read that experience with developing expertise. A stagnant pool, after reflecting the intrusion of an outside force, still remains a stagnant pool. By contrast, I became a moving current, a stream into which the influence of an external "other" could redirect its path.

ACT THREE

ACT THREE - PRELUDE

Driving to Grammy and Papa's house. Robert asks at the outset whether or not it will be a long ride. I tell him almost an hour, suggest that he settles in with his blanky and take a rest. He responds by placing his sucking fingers into his mouth, the tattered favorite corner of the blanket snug up to his nose. He is patient unlike Joseph who squirms in his car seat. After ten minutes he asks how much longer and I suggest about thirty minutes more to go. He asks once or twice again early into the trip.

Finally, when we have the bulk of the trip behind us and I think he has fallen asleep, his thin voice rises like a wisp of smoke out of the back of the car.

"When will we be there? One minute or five minutes?"

I think for a moment. We're ten minutes from his grandparent's house, but ten minutes is the number I often give for how long he has to play before bath or before shutting off the computer. Whenever I say ten minutes he always retorts with a smile, "Ten minutes is a long time."

"I'd say we're about ...eight minutes away."

There is silence for a split second before, deadbeat, Robert replies, "That's not one of your choices."

And then a little later. "Well okay. You can choose six, seven, eight or nine."

I love this child in control of his universe. Imagine to think you can dictate such things that are really beyond your control. His rebuttal suggests he is on the edge of recognizing his limitations. But still he's willing to try. In that five second pause he reconsidered the situation and saw it for what it

was; an experience unfolding outside of his dreams and desires despite the fact it was happening to him.

I drive and think to myself—there are ways in which I have been like this—wanting to exercise control by saying these are the options. And perhaps the images we carry of “teacher”, “school”, “classrooms” function in similar ways. They lay out our options. Growth involves widening this spectrum of options. When I answered eight minutes I rocked the reality Robert was laying out. For some reason it was enough to nudge him to widen his array of choices. At another time it might not have had that effect.

The images we take in of other teachers’ classrooms, that we get from colleagues in person, and the professional reading we do can nudge us to push out our parameters. They can nudge, but what determines whether or not they do?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

If entering a classroom and the lives of the children who peopled it opened up the parameters of my life, what did the move to New York do? Think of it: everything in my life changed outside of the inner circle in which I stood with my husband and baby son. Together we were an element shifting contexts and so even the relationships that held us together underwent changes as we uprooted ourselves from rural New Hampshire and moved to a second floor garden apartment in Palisades Park, New Jersey. We redesigned the family; Charlie was the stay-at-home father, and I would support the family with a job I knew very little about. I can look back now with all I know—understanding that has been growing in my very bones from that day on, some fresh as these words on the page—and see the way in which my future was cast in that action out of the clay of the past.

I will admit it today, nearly eight years after my closest friend Sarah accused me of initiating the breakup of my marriage when she said, “If only you hadn’t moved to New York.” She went further to suggest that my sister-in-law Elaine, who has chosen to stay at home with her three daughters, was a model for how a family does stay together when they experience the stress of picking up to start a new life elsewhere. It was my brother’s career that had initiated their uprooting. I resisted. Did not want to believe that women had to sacrifice an intellectual life to maintain a happy family or at least the illusion of such. My move to New York did not cause my marriage to fail. But Sarah’s comment aggravated a truth that did exist, a truth I hadn’t at the time been able to see.

I had been getting frustrated with my life. When I looked ahead I saw

more of the same: battling the woodchuck in the garden each summer and stacking the wood pile in the Fall to stock the furnace in our basement.

Watching Taylor grow with the McGillicuddy girls (all seven of them) up the street, and eventually walking to the Northwood elementary school at the top of the road. Learning to cope with the waves of frustration that would come and go as I tried to cajole Charlie into doing “something” (my kind of thing) with his life.

I weave my way through the words of the last paragraph and it is not until the very end that I say what I truly mean. I might have been content with my garden, watching my son grow up in a quiet neighborhood. I can envision this childhood as similar to my own. But I wasn’t content.

The move to New York was a perfect fit to the image I wanted for myself. With it I got to have both agency-in-the-world and the natural-parent nurturing I wanted for my son during his first few years of life. It helped that it solved “my problem” of Charlie’s career crisis. In addition it freed up the energy I had been exerting trying to control his life, giving me the chance to take control of my own.

New York worked on a personal level. Patience was not, at that point of my life, a virtue of mine. Maybe not even tolerance. I wanted action, excitement, some triggering event that would propel us into some new, and uncharted orbit. Throw my life off kilter and I’d have something to do getting it back into some semblance of order. I see that now although I wouldn’t have explained it as such at the time. I let this stand as another example of the way in which the personal issues of a life are bonded to those which may seem mainly professional. It is an obvious point, but one that is rarely put central in professional development work with teachers.

I was twenty-four years old, and had been teaching for four years; three

and a third if you subtract the months during which I was home with Taylor. I was teaching fourth grade in a school that enrolled three hundred or so children in grades first through eighth. This is the woman, teacher, who emptied her six room cape into the back of a U-Haul truck and drove with her husband and eighteen month old son down Interstate 95, over the George Washington Bridge, to Palisades Park, NJ, a one square-mile suburban township which sat on the lip of the Hudson River across which the city of New York loomed.

The lists of things I did not know was long: garden apartments, the back roads through Fort Lee that circumvent the George Washington Bridge's morning traffic crunch, the inside of a New York City school, the inside of any junior high school, the bus route from the GW Bridge through Harlem into Teachers College on its edge, bagels, lox or bialys, New York Style diners, what it means to teach teachers. I did not know about the gross differences between the various city school districts all governed by a single New York City Board of Education: to have a hood lock to keep your car battery from being stolen, to keep windows rolled up and doors locked while driving in Flat Bush, to walk in the center of the sidewalk—both away from the street and the alleys, of cement school yards and double dutch, of skating rinks that can convert to school buildings. I did not know the sound of jets passing overhead or the feel of the subway rumbling through a classroom, the sight of steel gratings on school building windows. I knew nothing of parking: the unspoken rules of double parking; the importance of parking close to a school building in scary neighborhoods, what to do on snowy days when all street parking was suspended. I hadn't learned to walk by pan handlers, not stare at sleeping vagrants, or what it is like for a child to live in the midst of constant violence. I hadn't seen a school's response to an absent teacher—classes

broken up like families with children sent to various classrooms around the building or of first grades leveled and numbered 1-1, 1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 1-5, 1-6, 1-7, 1-8. And what to expect to find in each of those classrooms.

I knew I liked to teach writing.

I was gutsy, or naive. Confident or too stupid to know better. I was the four year old child lifting the razor from the tub. What would happen if... New York was a possibility I couldn't pass up. What are the chances I'd get another opportunity like this?

Some might say I was impetuous. I would say I was impetuous. My way of knowing was through lived experience. I could not stay at home in New Hampshire never knowing what I would have missed.

Prior to my decision to move to New York I spent one day with Shelley Harwayne and Hindi List in Brooklyn's School District 15. Shelley was a staff developer for the district and Hindi, the district's Director of Curriculum. Hindi had brought Lucy into her district as a consultant and it was in this work that the Board of Education developed the interest that later allowed my move. Shelley and Hindi were Lucy's closest colleagues. In February Lucy suggested I visit some New York schools and see if I was really interested in coming to work. It was also true that, through Shelley and Hindi, Lucy was checking me out. I stayed with Lucy at her home in Connecticut and in the morning we drove into Teachers College. From there I walked down the tunnel of a stairway into the subway system. In my pocket were directions for the train switches that would deliver me to Brooklyn.

From the very beginning I loved the pulse of New York, a deeply felt energy that made its way into everything, everywhere. I remember a subway

ride in December when the train was filled with holiday shoppers. The subway pulled to a stop; when the doors opened four carolers walked in. They stood in the center of the rocking car and in well trained voices sang acupela carols, here in a culture where people work to avoid one another's eyes. The carolers sang for five minutes before dashing out at the next stop.

On this first subway trip I made it to Brooklyn, but not without unease each time the train rolled to a slow stop and new passengers got on. Yet once we were rolling I loved the people watching. My eyes were unaccustomed to the look of the faces that filled my vision. If America is at all a melting pot, the New York subway is the cauldron in which the ingredients are first tossed. Each face holds a distinct ethnicity.

If you ignore geography, the subway is a magic experience which keeps you occupied while the world above you changes face. When you rise out of the ground, up a wind-tunnel stairway, you might find anything. The long lines of glass and steel shooting straight to the sky of the mid-town buildings around Rockerfeller Center. A sidewalk along Broadway filled with students from Columbia, Barnard, Teachers College. In Brooklyn, the Bronx, Uptown Manhattan more of the same: busy streets, sidewalks full of shuffling people, fruit stands, shops, brownstones. Yet it's not the same. Clues reveal your location: the dress of people, briefcases or shopping bags, the particulars of the trash piled on the edge of the street. When people put out their unwanted items on the upper West Side I often spy things I would like to take home. In other parts of the city, vagrants hover over trash cans hoping to fill shopping carts with empty cans.

It is odd but I felt absolutely safe at night in the city. There were always people around—at any hour day or night. By contrast, my deepest fears planted early in childhood are of being alone, lost in the woods, encountering

something or someone evil on a dark wooded path. But of course, a child must construct her fears out of the world she knows.

Once in Brooklyn I found my way to the district office. Met Hindi and Shelley upstairs and we were soon heading to PS 321 where I was to work with a kindergarten class. The stimuli of any new place is rich. On this day I remember entering classrooms to find the same delicious faces from the subway, discovering the rumble of the subway felt through the classroom floor while children shared their stories with one another. We had lunch at a local diner—reminiscent of my days in England when teachers would leave the insulated world of school for the outside world and return to teach in the afternoon. The waitress slapped a bowl of pickles on the table, asked: “What can I get for you honey?”

Later, I sat on the floor of Carmen Colon’s classroom while Hindi and Shelley looked on. Carmen was a first year teacher and I was to demonstrate a writing session with her first grade students. I don’t know how many languages these children spoke; how many of them had attended school before; what they understood about writing and their relationship to it. I do know that gathering them to sit in a cluster on the floor was a challenge. Half of the class came when I called, settled themselves down in front of me. But the remaining children carried on with their own interests in various spots around the room. I stood, and walked away from my circle to corral these outlayers. By the time I returned, the first group of children had spun away from the circle onto new adventures of their own.

Back at Teachers College when Lucy asked me what I thought I gave her my honest reaction; I was excited by the energy of the children and the interest of the educators like Shelley and Hindi to talk about the craft of teaching. I flew back to New Hampshire having made the decision to come in

the Fall for a year. I never intended to stay for eight.

Once I made the decision to apply for a leave of absence and move to New York Lucy suggested I come down for the summer institute on teaching writing she was leading. This would be a way to acclimate myself to the New York City milieu. This was the first Teachers College Summer Writing Program and in some ways was modeled after the NHSWP. Teachers gathered for half the day in groups to work on their own writing. For the other half day they met in sections devoted to teaching writing. Each day began with a keynote speech given by Lucy and ended with a thirty minute closing which covered a variety of topics, readings from the Staff, talk about professional reading, public role plays of student conferences.

Had I known I was going to teach that summer I might have been hesitant. The setting was strange and I knew nothing about inner city classrooms. Did not yet know enough about them to even recognize the ways in which what I did know was applicable. But when the date grew closer, the institute enrollment was such that Lucy wanted me to teach two sections on the teaching of writing. So that was the way it was.

The staff met on the Sunday night before the start of the Institute. Lucy outlined her talk, listing all the points she would make, outlining the issues we were to extend into practical thinking in our section groups. It was a gut wrenching feeling sitting around the table that Sunday and each afternoon for the following two weeks, listening to the topics, anecdotes, and points I had to scratch out of my notes. Lucy was the front end person. She'd bring the issue to light. We would work with the newly discovered insight. If Lucy was the midwife, we were maternity ward nurses. Feeding and tending our charges to strengthen their ability to survive as they entered the real world of classrooms.

I was assigned to teach in the Tudor Room. This room was small but stately. It held a dozen or so adults comfortably. We sat around a large wooden table. The walls were ornately carved in a dark wood paneling and the windows along one wall were tall and slender. There was an aesthetic to the room. And a history. I was too naive at the time to imagine the educators before me who had sat around that table. Perhaps John Dewey himself had spun ideas into the very air I breathed as I sat in the room now with a group of teachers.

I was afraid. I've never been good at lying, even the innocuous pretend one friend plays on another. So I was in a difficult position here. I was talking about teaching writing, drawing from the only experience I had as a teacher—which was limited to the last two years since I had been educated about these ideas. I was very much aware of how I fell short.

Here's what I mean. My notes were full of things like this—a list of strategies for helping students choose topics. One idea was to take the children on a walk around the playground. When I came to a notion like this in my notes I wondered, 'Do New York City buildings have playgrounds?' Could they take the kids for a walk around the block? What would it mean to do that? I had to consider, do I risk making the suggestion or do I drop this from the list altogether? Will this show me as I am: naive about these settings? How much do I pretend?

Then there were the issues I couldn't screen myself. It was towards the end of the first day in one of my groups when a teacher—a hard faced, opinionated doctoral student of about forty, blurted in the middle of a talk I was giving on students choosing their own topics, "If I hear the term 'Writer's Welfare' one more time I am going to freak!" She proceeded to tell about the way in which it denigrated people on welfare, people who might need that

support for very real reasons. Of course she was right. But it shook me. I had used the term coined by Donald Graves in my New Hampshire setting, and in the small city of Fall River, the only other place outside my own school district I had worked with teachers. No one had caught the negative undertones it conveyed. Moments like these dissolved my faith that I had any knowledge to share.

But I survived the summer. And more. I began to discover how similar work with children was from place to place. That first summer institute was not only filled with city teachers: teachers like Isoke who filled the room with their Blackness who wrote me a poem on the last day of class about the feeling one gets when the teacher can't pronounce her student's name correctly. I had teachers of the deaf, a teacher herself who was blind, teachers from private schools in the city and one from a Navajo reservation. Teachers from the suburbs all around New York. Our work with children in the culture of school was common ground enough to begin a conversation.

The staff worked as a team as we constructed our teaching. Each afternoon we'd meet to go over the day's successes and failures. And we'd brainstorm the activities we might do the next day. We borrowed ideas from each other. Lucy might suggest a role play in which one teacher takes the role of student, while another responds as teacher. Shelley might talk about an activity for helping teachers learn to look at a child's draft. We'd borrow Don Graves' (1983) strategy for asking teachers to list the students in their class, identify areas of expertise for each, and place a check mark next to those students to whom you've confirmed that expertise. In this way I quickly developed a repertoire for helping teachers explore the concepts behind the process philosophy.

Each day teachers handed in logs in which they wrote daily reflections

on their experiences in the institute providing me with a continual stream of feedback. This is one way in which working with adults departs from working with children. The feedback you receive from adults is often more direct. This is especially true with New York teachers who let you know when they are unhappy—an edge that once I came to appreciate I missed when working with teachers in other parts of the country.

In a classroom, the feedback you receive from students is often indirect. You learn to read it in the meaning composed in the physical and temporal space of the classroom. How long it takes students to stop to listen to you or one another. Though non-verbal signs constantly give commentary, work with adults is often accompanied by more overt comments. Betty, a veteran teacher from Massachusetts, handed me a letter on our last day. She must have sensed the power she held when she gave me her words—must have known how much I needed, at that moment, to hear what she had to say: “You are a natural, intuitive teacher. I’m glad I’ve had the opportunity to work with you.”

Where does the authority to teach come from? That was a question I was grappling with myself at the time and a question I grapple with today as I continue to work with teachers in their classroom. I do not adhere to the purists’ belief that you can only teach that which you have experienced yourself. Consider this: I was teaching inner city teachers about designing writing workshops in their classrooms and I had the most limited knowledge of what those classrooms were like. Or this: I was teaching children to write with a limited experience myself as a writer. This is not to say I have always been successful or wouldn’t have had more success had I brought a more complicated understanding of the setting and task.

I mean to say only this: the limits of one’s knowledge do not

necessarily become the limitations of one's work.

Good strong teaching relies on a teacher's ability to know what she knows, and a willingness to learn from that which her students have more knowledge of. I started to understand this seven years ago when a deaf educator convinced me to come to her school as a consultant by responding to my comment that I knew nothing about deaf education. "We have a whole school full of teachers who know about deaf education." She said. "We need someone who knows about writing process."

But that was later, at the moment I had just finished my first bit of work in the city and maybe Betty was right. I must have known intuitively that it was enough to know *something* , and that if I could listen carefully to what the teachers themselves knew, together we could create the kinds of relationships in which we would all learn.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I love September: feel childlike glee as I neatly pack new notebooks into my bag. There are no dog-eared papers shoved messily into my canvas pack, yet. Children come to school with a well iron looked. Light snapping off new lunch boxes, back packs, shoes, even their faces. And the schools themselves gleam. This first September brought forth the same eagerness despite the fact I was displaced from a single classroom, my own. There was still the promise of the year to come. I did not know that in the New York schools and among its teachers a sense of frenzy existed, that class assignments were not always settled until a day or two before school, if not later than that.

I have come to New York to teach writing. I had seen the way it transformed my classroom. How each of us, my students and I, found writing to be a way to place our individual fingerprints onto the learning of the classroom. By the end of my last year I had sectioned off forty-five minutes in the day for independent study. Students used this time to design projects around their own questions and goals. I imagined unleashing this same spirit in the many classrooms I'd visit in New York City. But there was one factor I had not considered: I was not the classroom teacher.

The kindergartens stand out most in my mind: kindergartens in Harlem and District Six in the Northern most reaches of Manhattan where Manhattan takes on the look and feel of the bordering Bronx.

PS 198 was one of the most crowded buildings in the city. It was not unusual to find teachers doubling up in classrooms. One room housed two kindergarten classes. For much of the day each remained on their side of the

room. At noon the children went home and another forty eight children entered for the afternoon program.

Few of the children in these districts had been to school. They hadn't learned such socialized behaviors as sharing crayons, taking turns to speak, sitting quietly while a teacher spoke. In the best classrooms the children played. They played with blocks, in a dress up corner, and they played on paper when I came in during writing time. They fastened stories onto paper through large and tiny scribbles. Changing these stories each time they read them to someone new.

In other classrooms I watch as children sit in chairs arranged in a circle to share news of the day. A teacher listens passively.

"My cousin Jamal. He be coming to our house after school today and we's going to play."

"Uh huh. Next."

"Some mean guy, he fought my grandfather last night and now he be in the hospital. Dead."

"Okay."

Once I watched a young teacher place her face an inch before a tiny child while she yelled at the top of her lungs about something he had done wrong. The five year old child's face was set hard. He already knew how to take it .

The older classrooms were larger, often thirty six students filling a regular sized classroom. Occasionally the class size rose above forty. I felt more at home with these students. Recognized them among the students I had known more intimately at home in New Hampshire.

* * * * *

Public School 125 is a three story building on 123rd street in Harlem. It is a long brick building connected on one end to another brick building which houses District Five's Board of Education offices. The school proceeds from there all the way to the end of the block. Like many schools in New York City this one blends seamlessly into the cityscape. There are the telltale signs that signal a school: a signpost on the street in front of the school say— No Parking Board of Education Only. A stream of children cluster around in the beginning of the day. At 3:00 there are parents meeting their children outside, sometimes groups of adults waiting to get in to begin their own studies, often courses to prepare for the high school equivalency exam. Steel grates cover all the windows. A collection of housing projects tower over it at the front end of the block. Across the street is a narrow open space, a couple of park benches, some huge graffiti littered boulders that builders years ago must have decided to leave.

This is one of the buildings that has been chosen as a site for my work. It is my first year criss-crossing the city and I will work in seven diverse school districts. District 6—Washington Heights, District 5—Harlem, District 9—South Bronx, District 10 Bronx , District 26 and 29 in Queens, District 17 Brooklyn. I am a satellite for the yet-to-emerge Teachers College Writing Project. Lucy is assistant professor at Teachers College, and the person who has been contracted to provide support to New York City teachers in the area of writing process. Shelley Harwayne is a staff developer in Brooklyn's district #15; Marilyn Boutwell, a colleague from my summer course at UNH, is in New York as a researcher in District 6. By the end of the year Georgia Heard will be providing staff development days in the schools as well. At the start of the second year there will be a full fledged writing project. But for now, this first year, I am alone, traipsing in and out of the foreign culture of inner city

schools. PS 125 is one of three buildings I will have as a site in District 5, one of my seven districts.

My first contact at each new school is often the secretary who gives me road directions in her well-defined New York accent. They are always women. I begin at home, five minutes from the jammed pack George Washington Bridge. On a good day, I will only drive into northern Manhattan, or the South Bronx. When I am in Queens or Brooklyn I will hit a second, traffic jammed bridge, and spend six dollars in tolls before I return home. I imagine my car leaving a tiny visible trail as I learn to navigate the city. I do not understand the way in which these districts geographically relate to one another. But by mid-year I find myself crossing old paths. I am stopped at an intersection, only this time I come in from a different direction, turn away from the road that will take me to the school I was at two days earlier. In this way I begin to piece together a map of the city. By Spring I will make my own diversions, deviate from the directions given to take a more creative route.

The commute to PS 125 is a breeze. If I leave early I can make it to Teachers College in twenty minutes. If I am very lucky I can park in less than that. PS 125 is around the corner from TC. I begin in the principal's office. A tall quiet Black woman, Ms. Richards listens as I talk about how I will work with her staff. I speak confidently, but it is a construction to mask my insecurity. I have a number of fears. This work is new and I have no model for how to proceed. Only a hunch of what makes sense. I am afraid she will ask me how old I am. That somebody, anybody will ask. I am twenty-four, know nothing of urban schools or Black culture. Know only something about writing process pedagogy. Had not even proven to myself I knew what I was doing. She listens as I tell her the kind of scheduling I need. I ask for time to

work with small groups of teachers in one classroom followed with out of classroom time in which to talk about the work teachers observed. It is the principal's nightmare to figure out how to make this possible. Sometimes I come carrying treats—promised sub days from the district office. In this district, where substitutes are often difficult to find, the principal must resort to a complicated schedule using cluster teachers to cover classrooms.

Later, I stand in the hall as the principal unlocks the door of the teachers' conference room. Like many of the rooms in a number of the schools, this one is locked until there is a reason to open it. I walk into the empty room; it is dark and the floor is dusty. There is a large rectangular table in the center of the room. I stand at one end. Aside from a tall metal closet at the back of the room, there is nothing else in there. Later I stand at the front; the teachers are seated. They've been called to listen to a woman from Teachers College talk about some work she will be doing on teaching writing.

Where did I get the courage to walk in to this setting? I gave the thirty minute talk I had composed at home on my bed: a yellow legal pad in my lap. During the first year Lucy helped a lot with talks like these. We'd talk on the phone in the evening. I'd update her on my experiences in the school, and she'd listen to the anecdotes about Taylor's oral language development that I wove into my talk, advising me on my pacing.

This workshop at PS 125 was one of my earliest attempts. When I finished talking a hand shot up. A teacher, sitting in the back spoke seemingly for them all, "This sounds wonderful, but what I need to know is this—how can I teach writing without any paper?"

I left that meeting, walked the few blocks up the hill to Teachers College, and plopped myself into a hard wooden chair in Lucy's office. She sat behind her desk and listened as I described the scene and spoke about the

impossible struggle to make things right in these schools. Lucy rose, reached into the drawers of her desk, and pushed paper into my hands. Stacks of paper, letter head and smaller note paper with a faint blue Teachers college logo printed on top. I stuffed the paper into my briefcase.

To think that either of us thought we could fix such a problem so easily. Or even at all.

* * * * *

Betty James was a young teacher. She may have taught a year or two, no more. She taught second grade in PS 36, the primary complement to PS 125. I demonstrated a writing workshop in her classroom while a small group of her colleagues looked on. I don't remember Betty on that day, or two days later when I returned to do the second of a three day launch during which time I modeled helping students choose topics, conferring with students on their writing, early revision, and editing. I was busily attending to her students. It was a typical class: a slew of stories about trips to Great Adventure Amusement Park, stories about cousins, going shopping with mommy, playing in the local park. There were the handful of children who were stuck for an idea to write about. I handled them as usual: didn't rush to solve their problem, let them know that writers often struggle with this most difficult part of writing, suggested a few things they could try (list writing, talking with a friend, seeing what others were doing), wished them luck, and left them alone letting them know I'd check in later to see how they were doing. And the children wrote. I handled the questions that arose as they were trying to figure out what this strange teacher wanted. Questions about mechanics of how to write it (spelling, length, headings, etc.) I tried to put in perspective of

their current task—to compose something that means what they want it to mean. I listened to the beginnings of their stories, showing teachers how to acknowledge the tiny risks students were making (topic choice, spelling, starting at all), and how to elicit more information from the author.

But there was a dual agenda to my work and the other track was to usher the teachers toward an understanding and proficiency of this way of teaching. The demonstration was, after all, for them. But here I was a relatively new teacher myself, in an absolutely new setting trying to figure out how what I knew about working with my students, would work with these students of different cultures in this inner city classroom. More times than not the teachers were a distraction. Not their presence, but the actual task of working with them as sensitively and knowledgeably as I was able to work with children.

By the third day Betty James spent much of my lesson shushing her students, scowling at them from across the room where she stood watching. The model was to begin with demonstrations in which the staff developer was the teacher. I knew little about the classroom culture created by the teacher. I knew nothing of the unspoken rules of conduct that the children had inferred through their presence in this culture. I entered and my presence brought a new set of assumptions. Sometimes the clash of these two sets of beliefs was severe:

In this case my belief—I am interested in you as the authority, might correspond to her belief: listen to me as the authority.

My belief—I want you to show me what works for you, and hers; listen carefully to how you are to do this.

My belief—I view your errors as information that will help me know how to teach you, and hers; take your time and do it right.

My belief—I want to know what matters to you, and hers; I want you to understand what matters to me.

And finally my belief, I recognize that it will take time to develop these skills and I will be patient as you develop: and hers, once I've taught it, you should get it.

I must pause. Want to slide this in quietly and let you read on without feeling the lump in my throat with which I reveal a new understanding. The classrooms I felt drawn to were those in which the teacher looked like me. White, maybe an Americanized Hispanic. My border crossing was a geographic crossing at most. Later, I came to build understandings with Black teachers. But only much later—four years after leaving the project did I begin to understand the complexity of culture and how much culture influenced the mismatch of beliefs I found in Betty's room and the rooms of many, many teachers. Only later was I able to understand how my own culturally situated beliefs unfairly cast Betty's in a negative light.

My ignorance allowed me to act. If I had known what I am coming to understand now I would have entered rooms like Betty's paralyzed. I might not have dared to attempt to import the philosophy I was importing. I would have done more listening; and that listening might have helped to broaden my own beliefs to include the other's. For example:

I want to you to show me what works for you and also help you to understand there may be ways you haven't consider how to do it.

I want to know what matters to you and I want you to understand what matters to me.

Furthermore, in the description of my work there is little evidence that I held the same beliefs for the teacher that I held for children.

Instead here is what happened. After two days of demonstrating; days in which I was able to create the beginnings of a functioning workshop in which most children were at least engaged and eager, I handed this live and kicking infant idea to the classroom teacher. Betty, like many teachers, didn't know how to nurture it. Of course they didn't. Assuming she could do so would be like me trying to finish another artist's painting to their own imagined satisfaction. When I returned the following week, the classroom workshop was fraying at the edges. Betty was yelling at kids when they were off task—a behavior she defined when kids were talking to others, moving around the room, staring into space. She was content to have me confer with her writers, while she maintained the authoritative stance over running the classroom.

It was instances like these that gradually pushed me to a new edge of understanding. It was nearly November of my first year when I realized I had shifted careers. New York was not about teaching writing to children; it was about teaching teachers.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It is early November and already the year feels old. I have been riding in the car for thirty minutes. The heater blasts warm air at my feet, my face, my hands. I am comfortable now that the car has warmed up. Outside my windows streams of cars flow down the arteries leading into New York. I travel the Cross Bronx expressway in the opposite direction. I leave New Jersey, pay the two dollar toll to cross the George Washington Bridge, and am headed into Queens. This stretch of elevated highway cutting through the southern section of the Bronx terrified me when I first moved to the New York area. From the road I can look down onto an active Webster Ave. Store fronts next to car lots, housing complexes, bus stops. A bustle of activity. But the blocks around it are peppered with empty building shells. And on a night ride I can see an occasional trash can fire warming the circle of people standing around it.

When I had been in New York a year or two, a decision was made to put a face lift on these empty buildings. One day the buildings appeared magically to have been renovated. But upon closer inspection one would find fake windows papered—or were they nailed—over the empty window cases. The image was complete with houseplants, shades drawn on some, others wide open. It is true this made the buildings appear less menacing. But the only tension fixed was the one commuters experienced when reminded of the disarray other people had to live with. I was no longer confronted with this neighborhood's plight. Could rest a little easier on my trips through. Did not have thoughts of children growing up in such places linger in my mind as I zoomed by. The paper job, however, did not alter the realities of life for

the children and adults living below that elevated highway. But that was not the intent.

I pass quickly by this stretch to come to a snag of traffic as I ease my car into the too few lanes that let me onto the Throgs Neck Bridge. A dollar fifty this time and I am quickly on the Cross Island Parkway heading closer to the school I will visit today. As I get closer to the school I feel a tension in my gut. Slow the car at a cross walk and look as the crossing guard is holding traffic at a standstill to allow children to pass. These children look the same as children everywhere. Their hands are full with lunch boxes, or the younger hands of siblings. Colorful back packs on their backs or thrown over their shoulders. Some have winter coats left unzipped, dragging heavy-booted feet across the snowy pavement.

The feeling is always the same. I wish I could, for just this day, trade jobs with this crossing lady. Stand in the cold amongst the children. Wish them hello, ask how they are doing today. To have one main purpose: to usher them safely to the other side of the road. I want to trade away the complicated schedule I will be handed once I find my way to the office. Three, maybe four groups of teachers will be planning to meet me at various times throughout the day. They will watch me demonstrate a writing workshop and later sit in conference to talk about what they saw. I do not want to face the pressure of thirty six children I do not know. Their teachers watching to see what I can do that they can not. Or worse, if I have moved beyond my demonstrations, I do not want the messiness of entering a classroom where some short weeks ago the children were writing eagerly, but now the energy has waned. Left on her own the teacher mustered what resources she had but it wasn't enough to pull it off.

"They've run out of topics to write about."

"Some kids only talk and fool around during writing time."

I would trade away all the wonderful moments of listening to a child read the first story she's written, not to have to enter the classroom where the teacher renders her children voiceless.

Sitting at the crossroads, I swim in the regret of not being the crossing guard.

I enter school after school on the many "first days" of my work to meet a group of teachers who have been put together for various reasons. It is best when they come voluntarily; when they know what exactly they are volunteering for. But more often than not they have been chosen to attend my sessions, by a principal who has decided that these teachers need to focus on teaching writing. It may be that the teacher needs help, other times an entire group of grade-level staff becomes the principal's focus. In my notes I have recorded that I worked in over one hundred and thirty classrooms that first year. It is hard to fathom that now. My memory holds only a steady blur of faces, some eager, others hostile. The worse, passive.

There were certain classrooms, on the brink of whose doors I'd pause, take a deep breath before entering. Then there were others: Christina Brady's and Aria Harper's. Two White teachers in an all Black school in the middle of Harlem. Like me these two teachers lived in New Jersey, left lives behind to drive into work each day. Like me they were two of only a handful of white people in the school. Like me. Like me. I suppose likeness is why I found each of their classrooms a comfortable haven upon entering. Funny that race should stand out that way. It did not matter that we were half generations apart. Did not matter that their nuclear family was headed by two females; they were raising Christina's daughter together as a gay couple. There are certain assumptions you make when people look like you. My assumptions

made me braver, less hesitant to say what I needed to say, less tentative to reach out across the gap that divided me from others simply because the gap appeared narrower.

In many ways the Writing Project's work was about bridging gaps. But while bridges are designed to transport travelers in two directions, the bridges we were building were designed mainly to bring the natives closer to our understandings of teaching writing. The missionary quality to our work skewed any consistency there might have been between our beliefs about teaching children and our work with teachers. Think again of three of those beliefs: *I am interested in you as the authority, I want you to show me what works for you, I want to know what matters to you.* To embrace any one of those would have shifted the emphasis of our work which was, at the time, built on demonstration teaching with which we hoped to create for the teacher an image of a writing workshop so the teacher could recreate that workshop for herself.

I make a harsh critique while holding in my head the many times I watched demonstration teaching liberate teachers by showing them a possibility they hadn't imagined for themselves. I make this harsh critique while holding in my head images of teachers who taught me about teaching writing by framing their own questions, offering their own critiques on what they saw happening in their classrooms. I make this harsh critique despite the fact that our ideas on teaching writing developed over time by our collective willingness to incorporate new thinking, to challenge old beliefs. All of this is true, but none of it eliminates the fact that a commodity of ideas existed and were being dispensed across the city.

I would enter a school on the very first day ready to demonstrate. Eight teachers might meet me outside the classroom door where I'd take five

minutes to explain what they were about to see. Inside the classroom they'd watch as I gathered the children to a spot on the floor of the classroom, talk about what writers do, and guide them in choosing topics of their own to begin. My focus was on the children: the youngest ones would often stroke my boots, or gently stroke the pale skin of my hand.

It was like magic. There is tremendous power in listening and these children knew they were being listened to. I had dispelled with their teacher: suggested they consider her invisible. "I am your teacher today." I wanted to free the teacher from distractions, thinking that if she didn't have to field her students' questions, she would be free to listen to the ways her students and I talked about writing. But I also wanted to disengage the children from their preconceived understandings of their roles in the classroom in relation to the role of the teacher. I wanted them to take me at my word when I said, "You're the boss of your writing. If you have a question, ask it to yourself first and see if you can find an answer that works."

A typical scene might go like this: I am seated on the floor or a small chair which still puts me at the student's level. The children are pulled in close around me. I have told them some stories from my life, of the time my Noni moved out of the house she had lived in for fifty years. Of going back to Vermont to help her pack up the pantry and how we stood in the tiny room off the kitchen while I pulled from the highest cabinet a china casserole dish that she and my Nono had received as a wedding gift sixty years earlier. We reminisced about the nights I slept over as a child and how she'd give me a bath in the square metal sink in which she soaked and scrubbed her family's laundry. I told them about Buffy, my dog, and the day the groomer shaved all her hair and how she hid, embarrassed, under the kitchen table. I told about moving to New York, and what it was like to leave my family and friends at

home back in New Hampshire. Then I watched as children whispered first to each other their own stories, and later listened as they told these story ideas aloud to a friend. By the time we were done, usually all but a few children were eager to find their desk to begin to write.

And likely by now I have lost some of the observing teachers. It is so rare to visit another teacher's classroom that there is an overload of input to attend to. I'd catch glimpses of teachers talking to each other, pointing out a bulletin board, commenting on a set of science books along a shelf. For the teacher whose classroom it is, she watches differently still. I am struck by the stories students tell, and she may be equally struck. But it is just as likely that her attention has been on behavior: who spoke, who was silent, which children were "not really listening."

I am also reading the class. Sometimes children's hands shoot up early. "Do we have to write our name? Where do I put the title? Can we start writing?" The culture of the classroom, the defined roles of teacher and student percolate to the surface through these questions. They are evidence of what has been before. I learn about the teacher through her students' response to this new task. Over time I come to discover that student work, behavior, attitude, action all reveal more about the teacher, the setting, the school, than they do about the students themselves. I imagine my classroom in New Hampshire, what might it have revealed about the teacher I was at the time?

In New Hampshire when I first began to drive, I traveled the back road from Concord to Manchester in order to avoid a twenty-five cent toll. Now in New York it shocks me each time I fork out a dollar or two to get over a bridge. But the Throgs Neck Bridge offers a beautiful view of Manhattan's skyline and so I consider it a fee for the view. I look across the inlet of water at the city. It is awesome. A surreal arrangement of geometry. But as I explore

the inner folds of city streets it becomes harder to view it in this detached way. I see the peak of the Empire State Building and then a dip in the middle of the horizon where I imagine the Metropolitan Museum sitting in all its glory. Then, further North where the height of the buildings taper off, I picture the snapshot images of the lives on street level. The too crowded classrooms, stripped vehicles abandoned on the side of the road (Or are they abandoned vehicles stripped?), the shootings—both guns and needles—on streets and in stairwells children pass on their way out of school and into their apartment buildings.

If we are products of our environment then it makes sense that The Teachers College Writing Project would be flavored with the extremes of New York City schools, and of the city itself. I would drive down the Henry Hudson Parkway from the GWB to exit at 125th street in Harlem. At the corner of Broadway and 125th I look either direction and find two of my worlds. One block to the left is the junior high building I work in. It's a large school, I don't know how large a school. I only know to attend to the small cluster of teachers who have chosen to work with me. I hadn't been in a junior high building since I was an adolescent, unless you count the wing of Epsom Central School that houses the sixth through eighth grade students. But these are hardly the same. This building is three stories high and a city block long. That's it. There is no area around the school to play. A small parking lot in the back corner of the school is fenced in and teachers park their cars around the edges of this lot. At three o'clock it is full with the jumpiness of twelve to fifteen year olds.

I love the look and sounds of the city. The chiding you hear among children of this age is done in a cadence unfamiliar to my ears. Haitian accents, southern drawls, city rap beat. These kids have style. Their faces more shades

of brown than I knew existed. And the young women's lips! Full and painted. All kinds of words pushing through the rims of red.

Early impressions of these schools. Eighth graders burst into the classroom, minutes after a school bell sounds. The teacher and I stand in front of the room. They fall into chairs, not bothering to tuck their legs under the desks. Hats on. Coats on. Backpacks stay on backs. What are these kids waiting for? I swear to God it looks as if they are waiting for a bus. Is this my signal to begin?

Another room quiet. Students writing compositions on topics they have chosen to explore. I ask for a volunteer to share. Eyes dart away from mine until eventually one tall girl nods her head and says, "I'll go." I look around the room at the others; some lean back in their chairs, arms folded at their chest. Others lean in signalling they'll listen. I look back at this child standing waiting to read. This kid has courage.

New York children write about their families, their lives. In the Junior High they write about friends who are having babies or are in trouble with drugs. They write about school, staying in so they can get out.

* * * * *

When the light turns green I turn my car right, up the hill five blocks to 120th street where Teacher College extends the length of 120th to fill the block between Broadway and Columbus Ave. Sometimes I see a pan handler walk briskly up the hill from 125th, slowing down, walking stick becomes cane, by the time he reaches 120th street. One day I drive to the college with Taylor. I get out of my car, bundle Taylor in my arms, when a man approaches, "I need diapers for our baby. Can you help?"

It's a struggle to maintain compassion in New York City. And yet to lose one's compassion is to empty one of what it means to be human. Just one of the many paradoxes of surviving city living.

If it is a Thursday I will park at a metered spot in front of the college. Enter through the Broadway entrance and ride the elevator two floors to our suite of offices. My colleagues are gathering for the day. We are dressed comfortably, sit around a large conference table and fill our plates with croissants, bagels, and fruit. We've given the secretary our quarters and she will feed our parking meters during the day as we unpack our impressions of our week in the schools. By my third year the project had grown. On any given Thursday there would be Lucy sitting at one end of the table, Shelley Harwayne and Hindi List to either side of her. Georgia Heard, Ralph Fletcher, Jenifer Hall, Martha Horn, Jim Sullivan, and Karen Howell and I are scattered around the table. Together we create a classroom of colleagues—a tight circle of like-minded thinkers. We are like many city neighborhoods, separate enclaves of ethnicity, holding tight to their culture within a few city blocks.

When visitors come, and there are many over the five years I am there, Lucy invites them to listen but tells them in clear and certain terms they are not to talk. They can not join our inner circle. This is true for a parade of interesting educators who come from around the country. Lyn Rhodes and her colleagues from Colorado, Ralph Peterson from Arizona. I meet Svante Kristeonsen from Sweden and John Logan from Chicago, two people I will work with in the years after I leave the Writing Project providing staff development for teachers at their own sites.

Others are invited to enter our enclave as teachers. We are poised to learn from them: Nancie Atwell, Jerome Harste, Brian Camborne, Myra Cohn Livingston, Priscilla Lynch, Marni Schwartz.

Thursdays are a remarkable gift. I drive into the city full of expectation. Lucy understands the value of ritual and each Thursday begins with the ritual of sharing Learnings. The first half of the morning revolves around the learnings we have culled from our work in the school. The talk is rich. Fluid like water. My colleagues' ideas fill the hollow spaces left open by my own fumbling understandings of the meaning of my work.

I enter a classroom to have lunch with a teacher. She is seated at a table talking with a colleague from across the hall. Fried chicken from the corner shop spread before her. They talk. I sit somewhat uneasily. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich in a brown paper bag. Annette is cracking open a chicken bone, sucking up the rich marrow from its center. Time is so limited in schools and I wonder how to turn the conversation to the agenda of teaching writing. I will work with her class after lunch and wonder how it has been going. I want to talk about it, but she doesn't bring it up. I have the feeling I often get: I care more about this work than she does.

On Thursday when Ralph talks about bringing sticky sweet pastries to an after school meeting and the importance of sharing food, I re-consider the lunch I deemed "nonproductive", wondering if my desire to stay on task distracts from other important aspects of working with teachers.

How often do teachers have an experience like these Thursdays? Open space. Open agendas. Our talk meanders, is not meant to add up to anything, necessarily, though it almost always does. Small anecdotes snipped from the larger fabric of our work in schools paint a mosaic as they are pieced side by

side. We begin with what we've learned, what we say we know having experienced another four days in a wide collection of classrooms, and we end with newer insights, fresher questions to carry back into our work.

The ritual matters because the life raft of our community sustains me when later in the week I find myself afloat in the sea of complexity of the New York City schools. The learnings appear to me earlier, while I am in the midst of an experience. This happens because there is an audience for the discoveries. Think of what teachers lose by the lack of an adult audience for their work?

Audience was an important factor in my learning to teach. One day Shelley shadowed me on my school visit and later handed me a three page list of notes divided into two columns. On one side was list of things I did well in my staff development; on the other side was a list of conditions and situations that made the work difficult. It was her portrait of my work in the context of a school. In addition I visited my colleagues and did the same for them. My first such visit was to Brooklyn to watch Marilyn Boutwell in a school in District 17. Sitting along the edge of a classroom as one of eight teachers observing, I felt somewhat voyeuristic. Because I had been in her place so often I knew what she was attempting to do, how she might proceed. This inside knowledge made it somewhat intimate; I was privy to that which was usually a solitary act. Watching her work provided a backdrop against which I could reflect on my own actions.

I learned as well from the presence of the hundreds of teachers who watched me teach and listened as I explained myself to them. The design of my work gave me the opportunity to draft my teaching over and over again. I did not wait until a new September to retry a start. Every time I walked into a new setting, another group of students and teachers were fresh to begin.

Learning to make bread requires multiple attempts at a single recipe, adjusting the temperature of the water, learning to read the texture of the dough while you knead. Each time the experience varies a little due to elements unique to the moment: humidity of the day, temperature of the house. The astute chef pays attention to the nuances, reflecting on the single experience at hand within the context of the trail of experiences behind her. Learning to read the texture of the classroom, I came to understand much about teaching and children, both in general and within the particulars of the moment.

The teachers at work in these classrooms, in turn, became a tremendous source of learning for me. To observe, literally hundreds of teachers was amazing. I recognized when I was in the presence of a teacher more gifted than myself. Could see the ways in which other teachers fell short. These unknowing demonstrations by others, pushed and stretched my image of teacher until it was broader, more textured than any image I could have created on my own.

The conditions were ripe for learning. There were all sorts of input: ideas from other educators that came through conversation, texts, example. There was an unrestricted opportunity for output: draft upon draft of my own teaching, the crafting of workshops out of my learning. And most importantly, there was built in time for reflection; every time I explained myself to a group of observing teachers I had to reflect on what I was doing and why. Thursdays stood solidly in place as a day to devote my energy to making sense out of my experience. It was on Thursdays I learned how to raise and study questions about teaching. The fact that Thursdays came regularly allowed me the continuity to let an idea take root, grow, change shape, deliver me to a new understanding or another infant idea.

And all of this was made possible by the structures set in place by a visionary educator, Lucy.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It is December of 1994 and I am standing on the edge of a crowded classroom in the basement of Morrill Hall when a woman pulls me aside and says, "I have one question I'd like to ask you. What is Lucy Calkins like?"

I have just finished talking about my experience in the New York public schools and my response to Lisa Delpit's critique of process pedagogy. This woman must see me hesitate because she adds, "Lucy's taught me everything I know about teaching writing."

It is a complicated question and I fumble around for a few minutes before I realize I've totally botched it. The setting calls for only the most superficial answer; I might have said, "She's incredibly high energy, charismatic, and a visionary thinker." I could have left it at that. Instead I felt the rush of emotions pushing at the flood gate; let some of them seep through.

"She's intense. Complicated. I learned a tremendous amount from her..." I stammer on. "Outrageous, gutsy." It's getting worse as I talk and finally I apologize for not really answering the question. The woman smiles and says, "Oh, you've answered the question quite well."

Why begin here, a moment in the present where I attempt a response to a straight-forward question? I want to signal to the reader that from this point on there is nothing straightforward about my experience in New York City. Early in my first year of doctoral study, I sat in Tom Newkirk's office explaining to him my goal to use this time to make sense of my experience in New York. I wanted to reflect on the work I had done. It is four years later,

and though I have reflected on aspects of this work, there are others I have yet to tackle.

So here I am, beginning with a moment in the present, and with a person, two people really, Lucy Calkins and myself. If any single person is central to my development as a teacher, it is Lucy. She recently reminded me that during my early years in New York, we were both young, inexperienced, and unknowledgeable about the city. It is true that Lucy was just entering her second year as an assistant professor at Teachers College, but I didn't see her as any of these: young, inexperienced, unknowledgeable. She was an intellectual elder in my eyes and I took her as my mentor.

I first met Lucy at the NHSWP. She was my instructor for the teaching of writing section. She spoke fast, with an authoritative clip. Her thinking was sharp. I was a teacher who had come with some very real questions, and her seemingly endless list of answers was like magic. She modeled a story about getting her haircut to show how to help students select their own topics for writing. I listened and wondered to myself, "Does her hairdresser know how lucky she is to be cutting this woman's hair?" There was a star-like quality about her. I was twenty-two years old at the time, but I've since watched as thousands of other teachers, twenty-two to sixty-two, fall under the spell of her aura.

Lucy was the source of all my growth over the next five years. Maybe even beyond. I do not exaggerate. This is not to say that she was the single influence, only that everything contributing to my development was a ring of influence expanding from this original source. And one needs to understand her chutzpah to even fathom how it is I came to be working in New York City at all.

It was during the forever days of February when winter had lost its surprise. Instead of feeling delight by over-the-night snows, I trudge each day out of my warm New Hampshire kitchen to start the car. Return to the kitchen. Give it five minutes to warm up. Dash from house to car again. Settle in and drive, often sleepily, the ten minutes to school. Park my car, lift the heavy canvas bag from the back seat and proceed inside. Once inside, I get settled in the classroom. Take papers out of bag. Return folders and journals to their places so children will find them when they come inside. Write information on the board. Get a cup of tea, find Lori, and have a conversation in her room or mine. Shoo a couple kids out of the classroom back onto the playground. Wait for the bell to signal the start of the school day.

In November, when Lucy and I were together at NCTE, she asked if I was interested in consulting. In February I decide to call and see exactly what she had in mind. I am standing barefoot on the linoleum floor in the kitchen, leaning over the sink. Out the window I can see the faint outline of my garden beneath the snow. The white lawn stretches back until it fades into field and then woods on all sides. Maybe it was deer that ate the vegetables from our garden all summer.

Lucy listens as I tell her I'm interested in consulting. She's quick to respond, "The problem is that the work I have is here in New York. I just got off the phone with Jack Isaacs from the Board of Education, he wants me to do a bunch of days around the city, but I told him I didn't have the time. Come to New York and I can give you all the days you want."

I may have surprised her when I said I'd consider it. I don't recall. The surprise for me comes now, in looking back at how serendipitous this phone call was. My whole life (career, marriage) was to turn on that single phone call. Lucy had never seen me teach, yet somehow had confidence enough in

my ability to enter this foreign world and to make a difference. It was to be the first of many doors she opened.

As a mentor Lucy had that capacity to imagine more of me than I could possibly imagine for myself. I was twenty-four years old when I came to New York, having never set foot in an urban classroom. Three years later she put me in charge of directing the Teacher-as-Researcher project in which I led grant-recipient teachers in designing and implementing classroom-based research. A year after that, left me in charge of administrating our week-long summer writing institute. She was the person who said to me, "You have to go on and get your Ph.D."

In the spring of 1985, not quite two years since arriving in New York, I gave my first talk at the International Reading Association's national conference in New Orleans. We flew together from New York, and I watched Lucy fine tune her talk in route. Her handwriting scrawled across the pages of a yellow legal-pad. She spoke her writing. Listening to the sound and cadence of the words as they hit the air. Over and over she'd say a line, cross out a word, tighten a phrase. By contrast, I had sat at the new computer in the office, printing out draft upon draft, reading the text, only guessing at the effect it would have in its oral form. It seems simple, but sometimes it is the underside of simple things that are never exposed.

Proximity. Lucy was a fine teacher. But I was more than her student. I was a colleague, and also an employee. These roles were seamless, all couched under the affectionate cover of friendship. I took courses with her but was privy to more than the surface of her teaching. In phone conversations she'd talk through her considerations of how to arrange students into response groups. Again, the underside of teaching made visible. I listened to her give speeches, crafted out of the casual conversation we'd have on the phone or

around the Thursday table. I watched her problem solve her way around multiple scenarios during those staff meetings— how to deal with a resistant teacher, an overbearing principal, a superintendent who wants to spread the staff developer's time too thinly across schools. All of us would think out loud, offer strategies for dealing with such situations, but Lucy's thinking was particularly sharp, cutting through to the heart of the matter. And she knew how to handle difficult situations. Occasionally I would watch her take these thoughts into action. Sitting next to her in a superintendent's office, I'd listen to her present our needs packaged in the other's desires.

Later, when I sat in a principal office without her, I could hear her emphasis, sometimes even her words coming out of my mouth. Lucy was a sharp teacher, and I was a quick study. The situation was ripe for such a partnership to develop. I was in need, often distress that first year, and she was always able to help sort things out. She believed in me, and I believed in her. So much so that the image I held of myself was the one cast in her eyes.

After my talk in New Orleans at IRA, Andrea Butler, a teacher educator from Australia, approached and asked if the talk was to be published. It was exactly what her teachers in Australia needed to hear. I mention this to reveal the edges of this image I held for myself. It did not occur to me to go back and write up the talk for publication. I did not even offer to mail her edited notes from the talk I had given. I could not envision that role for myself, yet. And it had not been made for me by Lucy, as many others had been. It was enough to fill up the image she had of me. This image of teacher. Later, I would bust the seams of this garment, but for now, there was room to expand.

It was disorienting to lose my self-contained classroom and continue thinking of myself as a teacher. All that I knew of "teacher" was lodged inside the physical space of a classroom, caught up in relation to a roomful of

students. I see now how an image of teacher can transcend both physical and temporal worlds: I carry my teacher self with me into the relationships I build with my own children, my colleagues, with earlier selves who live inside of me.

And then there is the image of "classroom." I once drove three hours across a New Mexico landscape to a Navajo reservation where I was to work for a week with teachers. My eyes soaked up the foreign mesas and open spaces vaster than any I'd seen before. But inside the classrooms, the landscape was remarkably familiar. What is it about schools that contributes to such sameness, such mediocrity? From what well springs the resiliency to deny the individual nature of the children that live within them? Is the historical image of classroom we carry in our heads so indelible that it resists a new image taking shape.

I had no such template to shape my work with teachers. I built one from the ground up, first out of conversations Lucy and I had about my work, and later out of the conversations around the Thursday table. At the Writing Project we were reconceptualizing a classroom in which teachers could be learners, and I was learning to be a "teacher" in this new kind of classroom. My "classroom" was peopled with students like Christina, Aria, Elizabeth, Dawn, Artie, Susan, Anita—all eager, "getting it-buying it" kind of teachers. Then there were others—Betty, Eugenia, Hildred—who for some reason, culture, personality, philosophy, were not "getting it-buying it." The "classroom" for their learning cut a broad swath through each of our worlds. It comprised their classrooms, their schools and district office buildings, the college, our homes, as well as the long histories we each brought knowingly or not to new experiences. The ability to build and sustain relationships became central to this image of teacher precisely because there was no physical

space in which we remained together. We met infrequently, for brief encounters, and so our conversations remained on-going across all aspects of our lives. Mothering was good training for the demand of carrying at once multiple conversations in my head: I learned how to drop the thread of one agenda, enter the worlds of other classrooms and concerns, and return a week later to pick up where I had left off.

We were not coralling teachers into classrooms at the university, nor were we recreating those university classrooms in their schools, or community. We were reconfiguring the classroom altogether. Teachers were learning in their own classrooms, in the contexts of conversations with other teachers, within the often mentoring relationships that emerged with the staff developers. Pushing it beyond a defined physical space. We were broadening the context in which teacher learning occurred. Conditions within the school culture and the teacher-principal relationship were essential. So our work reached out to touch these.

Who is this elusive "we," who unbeknownst to the reader has lurked for pages of drafts in the shadows of the determined I? When I let go; the "I" slips off the page, and it is "we" staring back at me again.

One day during my second year in the Writing Project Lucy read a draft of an article I had written about my work. She looked up from the draft as if to comment more generally, "You know JoAnn, I notice you use the 'I' a lot, you need to learn to use the 'we' more." I was young, insecure. I will not try to reconcile those qualities with the courageous woman who called from her kitchen looking for work. At the time, I felt only dwarfed by the hugeness of our task. I relied on Lucy's unflagging confidence in my ability to work with children and teachers. My first reaction to her comment was to cower. To think, 'Who am I to suggest I have done any of this alone?' I backed down,

learned to haul the party line, and watched while the "we" of the Writing Project was constructed out of all of our stories, all of our learnings.

It was both a strength and weakness of the Writing Project that it grew into a circle of like-minded thinkers. The like-mindedness helped us shape a strong set of ideas, but over time it became a problem as individuals felt the need to speak in diverse, often conflicting voices. When I finally left the project five years after first coming to New York, it was to rediscover my "I." The kind of growth I was seeking was all about voice.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I operate a jack hammer: pound away on the crusted version I hold in my head of my New York departure, tear up chunks of concrete to get beneath the surface. This is no fine tuning. It's about opening crevices, forcing apart seams. The first writing on any aspect of my history is a shaking of the soil. Sifting to see what emerges to the surface, I lift the artifact image, sound, or smell and begin the archaeological work of piecing together an existence from these objects. But here I shift from an image of shaking the soil where rocks, under some natural volition, continually erupt to the surface, to a jack hammer metaphor which suggests that this experience has been sealed over. To render it requires breaking up the formidable concrete with which I have entombed those memories.

How do I depict the slow, difficult process of leaving the Project, of breaking away from my professional family, my mentor? Three moments crystallize it for me. The first: fall of 1985, my third year in New York, two years since other educators have joined the Writing Project. By now, people have started grumbling about Lucy. I am sitting on the stairway of Main Hall during a Thursday lunch break talking with Ralph Fletcher, a fellow staff member. He recounts a conversation between some of my peers including a comment of Aida's, a trainer from district 15 who participates in our Thursday staff meetings. "Don't tell JoAnn anything; you can't trust her."

Summer of 1986. The second moment takes place around the small kitchen table in the Beck house on Block Island off the coast of Rhode Island. There are five of us: Georgia Heard, Martha Horn, Jenifer Hall, Ralph Fletcher, and myself. Lucy has sent us on a retreat. We've finished our dinner

of fresh grilled tuna and Jenifer begins a conversation that will earn her the nick name, "can of worms." She talks about her role as the "kid sister" in the project. The talk evolves until we've defined each of our roles and are left with the admission that we're part of (as well as contributing players in) a somewhat dysfunctional family.

The third scene. Spring of 1988. I am on the stairway again at the college, only this time I am sitting with Lucy, each of us on our own separate step. "Why are you being so difficult?" She implores. Tears stream down my face. I say what I can: "I don't understand it all. I know I've been difficult. I'm sorry."

I am the middle child. I arrive in New York as the Writing Project's first child, but my middle child personality is all I own. Like many middle children, I learned the social skills of negotiation and peacemaking in my family. I learned how not to force my needs into a situation shaped by the contoured edges of the oldest son, and the youngest daughter. I was the easy-going child who never needed anything. As a mother of four children, five if you count the child within I am learning to nurture, I now know such children do not exist. Instead there are children who have learned not to assert their needs, who have the social savy to understand that a way to gain acceptance is through compliance. The underside of this is that all conflict is thrown in contrast to compliance, even the positive and necessary conflict that occurs when individuals hold their own against one another. As peacemaker, I learned to be a responsive listener, a skill that serves me well as an adult. But that skill was caught short by the desire to avoid conflict. I could not turn that repsonsive ear upon myself without uncovering my own needs. To do so would create waves in a sea I took pride in keeping calm.

* * * * *

The Writing Project hosts three Saturday workshops a year. These are open to area teachers free of charge. The buses roll in from the suburbs early in the morning. City teachers flock to the college via subway from their own New York addresses. The halls of Teachers College fill and we are there to greet them, handing out programs for the day's workshops, cutting donuts, cleaning around the coffee pots. After Lucy's keynote address we all give workshops, often two or three into the afternoon. And Lucy has clear instructions that we mingle with conferees over lunch. We are not to find a quiet space in the office to collect our thoughts; if she sees us sitting together in the cafeteria, she shoos us along to mingle with teachers. Other members of the project question such acts earlier than I. I am enamored of Lucy. Work hard to do a good job. When I first hear grumblings I try to stay clear of what I perceive as negativism. Aida recognizes this and doesn't trust me.

We are becoming like a family, and the siblings are starting to spark, feel resentment when one receives more attention from the parent than another. I am the sibling most loyal to the parent, the "peacemaker" not unlike the role I played in my birth family. In the Project I accept the parent's authority, trust it enough to ignore indications that at times it comprises my own autonomy.

But all "good children" come to a time when they rebel against the controlling parent. As an adolescent I did it in an underground way, by creating a life of my own, outside the gaze of my parents, in which I could act in line with my own desires. This response came with a price; a dual life (however small) creates tremendous guilt and insecurity. "*They wouldn't love me if they only knew.*" I wasn't making the normal demands of an adolescent. Had I been, I might have built the necessary confidence of a person who sees herself as worthy of getting some, if not all of her needs met.

The Writing Project gave me a second chance to grow more productively into adulthood. All this despite the fact I was now the mother of two sons, coming up on the ninth year of a marriage that I was slowing coming to see as unsatisfying.

Summer of 1986. Lucy has arranged a week long retreat for the staff of the Writing Project on Block Island. We have just finished the Summer Writing Institute, Lucy is home having her first child, and Shelley is on the road consulting. She and Hindi have each said they might join us for a day or two, but in the end it is just the five of us: Georgia Heard, Martha Horn, Jenifer Hall, Ralph Fletcher, and I. The Project secretary has found us a house through the real estate section of the New York Times. Martha has been to Block Island and prepares us for what we'll find. A short ferry ride from the main land will deliver us to a quiet undeveloped island. There is one stop light on the entire island with only a few cars operating as taxi cabs. We'll rent bikes and explore. Swim. Relax together. And work. Good soldier that I am, I bring my briefcase full. I am the only one. In the end I won't need it; the work we will do is emotional.

Take five people who know each other in a most limited way. We are professional colleagues having worked together as a group for one year, each in our own separate districts across the city, coming together to talk about that work on Thursdays. Some of us have other ties: Ralph and Georgia had studied together in the MFA program at Columbia. Martha and I had met in her classroom at Atkinson, New Hampshire for a teacher networking meeting four years earlier. Put these five people into a three story Victorian house, half-hidden behind a tall hedge of bushes on a deserted road. Watch what happens.

At first, it is difficult for the cab driver to find the address we give him until finally he drives down a narrow dusty road to deliver us at the edge of a hidden lawn.

As he stops the car he inquires, "Why didn't you tell me you were staying at the Beck Mansion?" We had only an address, and no other reason to think this house was known by another identity.

"This house is haunted." he says and we laugh. I look at the lot of us, fresh off the boat, imagine this as a native response of resentment toward outsiders. He tells us about the ghost, "She's not a mean ghost, just a lady who died in the house years ago and appears in one of the upstairs bedroom windows rocking in a chair." He points up to a room on the right hand side. "I think it's that one."

We ask him to come in and show us the room. He laughs as he backs away toward the car, "No way, I haven't been in that house for fifteen years, and have no intention of going in now."

"Come on, " we chide. "We'll tip you another five dollars." We play along but he won't budge. He slams the trunk and takes off down the dusty road. We're left looking up at our home for the week.

I haven't thought much about ghosts. Am not sure I even believe in them. Am certain he is trying to scare us. The scene is too perfect. This house could well be the set of a horror movie. We pick up our bags, pile into the house, and explore the first floor. Inside it is an ordinary house with one extraordinary room. Off the kitchen is a long narrow dining room with floor to ceiling windows on two adjacent walls. A wooden dining table, large enough to sit maybe twenty people comfortably, fills the room. There are no lights, just a candelabra hanging from the ceiling. On one narrow wall are two

portraits. A man and a woman, dating back to the turn of the century, look out at us.

The second floor is ordinary enough. Four or five bedrooms are scattered over two wings. The third floor is locked. We spread ourselves out around the various bedrooms on the second floor. But it isn't long before we find ourselves spooked. Little things happen; I turn a light switch off and the light remains on. Within an hour, all of us women have dragged our mattresses into the bedroom at the top of the stairs, away from the wing where we detect kinetically charged air. We will stay together all week, while Ralph maintains a healthy dose of skepticism alone in his bedroom down the hall.

Put five strangers together into a potentially haunted house and they'll get to know each other fast. None of us are strangers, but there are aspects of each of us that emerge in this situation that lead us quickly to deeper understandings of who we are as people. And as we open up we talk, for the first time, about our prospective places around the Thursday table. We are out of the gaze of Lucy, the demanding parent, and each of us is feeling somewhat wounded by our experiences. We are sitting around the kitchen table in the Beck house when we acknowledge to one another the duress we each feel in our work at the Project. It is knowledge that binds.

I did not return from Block Island having made the decision to leave the project. But over the next year there were many changes, both professional and personal. Charlie and I separate, and I stop playing by the old rules at the Writing Project. How could either have been otherwise? I was a different person from the one who had entered a marriage at twenty, or a mentoring relationship at twenty-two. Each of these had their own edge of growth nudging into new territory, but leaving the Writing Project felt

remarkably similar to leaving home. Both came at a time I was individuating from an old self. When I hold these side by side, I see them as connected: leaving the project a second draft of leaving home to enter the world as an adult. This time I was trying to do a better job, and I know I did, because the labor pains were real.

ACT FOUR

ACT FOUR - PRELUDE

Ralph is piling Joseph and Robert into the blue van to drive them to day care. I pack myself into the Honda to head into campus. I follow him out of the driveway, up Canney Road, onto Bagdad, and come to a stop at the new stop sign recently placed where the road forks. Ralph has just returned from a week long trip and during his absence, Joseph, just shy of two, has developed an awareness of our possible routes into town. For the last four days he has emphatically announced the direction he wishes to take at the crossroads. Each morning as we reach this point in our journey his voice stabs the frosty air, "This way!" a pudgy finger pushing forward to motion straight ahead.

On this morning I sit apart in the Honda which idles behind the Van, and watch as Ralph slowly turns the car to the left. As they speed away I think to myself, 'I know what is going on in that car right now.' I hear Joseph's protests, his indignation that Ralph hasn't listened, his lack of understanding that his father has yet to learn this new routine. I make my choice, drive forward, and consider that the reason I understand this is because I have been there.

Autobiographical writing gives me the chance to "be there" in my own life: to let the present moment resonate fully throughout the sheer depth of lived experience. The autobiographical act allows the writer to experience herself in the flow of time, and in doing so lays out a foreshadowing of what may come. Agency then begins in the imagination, when we muster a range of possibilities for where we are headed.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

During the three long years between my break from the Writing Project and my decision to return to graduate school, Ralph and I spent the time fitting together the pieces of our lives. There were a jumble of pieces, each resting against another. Move one, and the others tumble down. We were tired of the frenetic pace of the city, but moving away meant leaving the consulting base each of us had built into full time jobs. Still I had been thinking about graduate school during all this time and our family was getting too large for our house. One day I walked into the living room to find Robert half-stuffed under the couch. He had rolled himself the short distance from the middle of the living room to the edge of the room. Only his bare legs were visible with his tiny squirming toes flailing in the air. The rest of him, stuck fast under the upholstering. We needed to move somewhere, but where to go?

It was during my first semester at UNH that I realized I had been a student here exactly half my life ago. I had started college as a seventeen year old; now at thirty-four, I walk the same campus, a bag of books slung across my shoulder. I love the perfect symmetry of it; my life folded back on itself allowing me to get re-acquainted with the person I was at seventeen. I can stand and take a good look at someone I knew well a long time ago. There's the long moment of appraisal--'how you've filled out and your hair, you've grown it long.' The moment of searching a face for traces of baby features now melted into a face distinctly new.

But my gaze goes beyond the search for physical details. That freshman year I was old enough to have been a mother, was shuttling from being

coupled to uncoupled and back again: grasping for my own path into adulthood. Seventeen years later I am more centered: rooted to a landscape I have created that includes my three sons and a partner with whom I inhabit an understanding of how to build a secure and healthy relationship.

It was a gift to find myself a full-time student after nearly fifteen years of being employed. I set up my office in the living room—nearly the heartbeat of the house. Its central location puts me in close proximity to the family while I work. In my office is a new computer, a book case, and a long credenza that sits adjacent to my desk. Inside the credenza are two file drawers. At first I wasn't sure what to put in these drawers; how much moving forward of old files I should do. I have trouble parting with anything. So upstairs, in one of the bedrooms, remains my old filing cabinet positioned in a corner of the room. Pull open any of the drawers in this tall cabinet and I can walk my fingers across the surface of my life: file labels read Thursday Notes, Author's Lives, Staff Development, District 5 Planning, Teaching Teachers, Poetry, Notes from Conferences, Picture Books. The list seems endless. Prior thoughts labeled and tucked into hanging files. Inside each is a sampling of papers: typed notes, articles, newspaper clippings, hand scrawled messages. I always begin new work by looping back into the past to rediscover what I may have thought and said before. Rarely will a file itself get usurped for the present. Instead, I make a new file and leave the earlier file to stand intact, a monument to a plateau of past thinking.

In the end, very few of my upstairs files made their way downstairs to be entered in these new drawers. Instead, one drawer quickly filled with the work of my graduate studies. New labels define this: Ph.D. Program Information, Doctoral Seminar, Portfolio Stuff, Articles to Read. The other

drawer is set aside for the little teaching I continue to do: Rochester Course, Handouts, Michigan talk.

It was an unsettling feeling to be a student at first. Most of my time was spent between home and school. How far had I come from that child of the summer playground who lost her sense of agency as she entered the classroom door? In what ways does graduate level work resemble or depart from that process of enculturation that happens when you first enter school. Certainly there is a shaping hand to schooling at every level. I read, wrote at my computer, and then entered the classroom to situate myself within the thinking of my fellow students and professors. Sometimes we met in the classrooms on campus, other times we met in Don Graves' study on the outskirts of town. Once, seminar was held in my own living room/office. The classes were sometimes large, twenty-five or so students; the best were the small circles peopled with colleagues from one of the doctoral programs in the English or Education department. These classes had the feel of a Thursday at Teachers College, only it was not the city schools we were intent on understanding, but the theories of Dewey, Rousseau, Eisner, and others.

The unsettling disquiet was lodged in the tension between the knowledge I was gaining, and that which I had brought with me upon entering the program. How would this new, highly theoretical knowledge, filter its way back to my work with teachers? I see myself as a river, two tributaries emptying from their own distinct sources into my coursing essence—practice and theory. During my first year in the graduate program I continued to work as a consultant to a district in New Jersey. I'd wake at 5:00 am, shower and dress for a day in the schools, slide myself and an overnight bag into the car, and drive the fifty minutes to Manchester to board a plane to Newark airport. For each of the handful of trips I made that first year, I dipped

back into the file drawers upstairs. The new files remained silently pressed against one another in their darkened drawers downstairs. I did not know how to integrate my new understandings: how to talk with teachers about Lisa Delpit's (1988) critique of the very process they wanted to employ. Did not know how to frame the questions we were looking at together to include the historical dimension that would have allowed us to bring Dewey or Rousseau into our conversation. I relied on what I knew: how to work with students, anticipate and answer the teachers' pedagogical questions about teaching writing.

It is not totally true that a distinct line divided the before and after of my studies at UNH. I shuttled new and old ideas back and forth across the divide. I let past experience inform my understanding of current reading while new thoughts became a filter to older experience. Still, the unsettling feeling was the schism that occurred between new thinking and my action in the world: action is always slower to follow.

As a full time student I read and wrote both constantly and eagerly, but at times worried that a lack of grounding made it too easy to compose theories without accountability. I felt I had gone underground and prior to re-emerging I was rendered voiceless. (*Is every step of movement a movement toward voice?*) I spoke words delivered in the isolated setting of the academy, not yet able to actualize these words in my work with teachers. The more I learned, the less I felt I had to teach. My understandings of teaching and learning and my relationship to both were becoming more complicated.

The shape of history is recursive. The autobiography of my particular life finds its loops situated in changes of settings and roles. I moved toward autonomy as a classroom teacher, and then as a staff developer. As a new graduate student, I began another cycle that has comprised the last four years.

Now at the end, I listen to a new voice emerge both again and for the very first time. It is the voice that is speaking now. The default pattern of my life seems set toward a willingness to acquiesce, to begin on tentative footing, and then to grow toward realization. I know there are other loops ahead. What they hold remains unseen, but I do not proceed without some understanding of what the movement will feel like.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Before I wrote a single word of this autobiography I sat in Paula Salvio's office and over a period of three weeks narrated a story to her. It was not this exact story of course. It was an oral telling. In a straightforward manner, I barrelled through my life along a linear time line. There were momentary diversions—a flash forward, a pause to reconsider a more distant past. And there were all the ponderings; the questions I delivered into incubator air where they remained warm and moist until they could grow into more fully formed understandings.

When I listened to the taped recordings of those conversations, and later made them manifest on pages of transcripts, they demanded a new level of attention. It was a shock to see certain words written down. Early in the conversation I said to Paula, "I had bigger ideas for myself than becoming a teacher." These words flashed at me like neon raiding night of its darkness.

I have struggled more than ever, these four years in graduate school, to understand my relationship to the title, teacher. It has been a time during which I hesitate when people ask, "What kind of work do you do?" because the answer; "I'm a teacher," does not say enough.

Is "teacher" not manifest in all my varied roles: consultant, speaker, graduate student, mother? Is teaching not carried on in the lives of those who teach in the context of their families or careers, at Sunday school, boy scouts, etc. Still, the meaning of a word shifts when it is pushed into the realm of the professional, and yet I rarely hear the word "professional" attached to teacher. We speak of professional athletes to distinguish one from those who play for recreational purposes, the professional writer from one who writes in a more

private realm. There is a stature given the professional. The fact that we do not use the term "professional" reflects the lack of stature given to teaching in this culture. My comment, "I have bigger ideas for myself than to become a teacher," also reflects this limited vision of what it means to teach. Though teaching may be a noble choice, it is not always a highly regarded one. Still, what does it take for one to say, 'I am a teacher.'

In a doctoral program the identity of teacher can be seen in an even bigger mess because of the other roles one embodies—namely student and researcher—against which "teacher" is thrown into relief. I have heard among my colleagues: "I'm a teacher, not a researcher," and experienced a similar feeling of fragmentation when in New York one of our writers-in-residence listened to me talk about Toni Morrison's book, Beloved, before remarking from across the Thursday table, "This is the first time I've heard you talk as a writer instead of as a teacher." Did she think she was paying me a compliment? I wanted to resist then, and again in the setting of graduate school to say: I am not compromising my teacher self by being a researcher. On the contrary, I'm enriching my definition of teacher by giving it more contexts in which to find its shape. Still, how do I answer the question when one asks: Are you a teacher? There is the teacher in who and what I am, but I feel first a graduate student, while inching my way slowly toward naming myself a professor. Both roles encircle the teacher in me; but I want to mark an arena large enough to describe teacher as all that entails being a reader, a writer, a student, a mother, a consultant, a scholar. I would like to think I have grown up to fulfill those bigger ideas for myself by outgrowing my own limited view of what it means to teach.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Sitting in the family, our three bodies etch an obtuse triangle. Taylor and I anchor down two points on opposite sides of the couch, while Ralph is in the old leather rocker across and to the left of the two of us. My parents had brought the leather rocker to our house when we first moved to New Hampshire. We had left our tiny cape in New Jersey for this much larger four bedroom colonial. For months we had lived with a single couch in the family room, the living room a wide open foyer for the kids to race around in. When my parents brought the chair I saw nothing of the drabness of the brown-gray leather, the years of wear that had popped one of the cushion buttons permanently. The chair filled the hollow of the room with memories from when I was young. Once I had been a small enough child to rock recklessly while sitting side by side with my sister. Had pressed my bare summer back to the cool leather of the seat, head hanging down, feet straight to the ceiling while she pushed the chair from behind. Had rested on my father's warm lap while listening to a story.

I looked to the chair now and listened as Ralph told Taylor and me, "Someone once said, 'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over, while expecting different results.'" I looked at Taylor and back at Ralph; how is it I had moved so little, while coming so far.

Taylor is thirteen, has been going to junior high dances for a year and a half now, and is one of the last hold outs of his crowd of male friends who have yet to dance. After one of the earlier dances I responded to a discussion about not dancing with the question, "Well, did you ask anyone to dance?"

He shot me a glance. "Are you kidding. I don't want to dance with anybody!"

But he continues to go, and increasingly finds himself enjoying the whole scene more and more. Once I asked, "What do you do at these dances?"

"It's great! I walk around and around the edge of the gym and watch people." He answered.

The image of Taylor as a two year old comes forward. On our trips to the park he was drawn to the sand box where children were playing. But unlike other toddlers who jumped in to play, Taylor would stand, two fingers in his mouth, and watch. Almost joyfully. When he attended a preschool program as a three and then four year old, his teachers observed his tendency to stand on the edges of things, a need to analyze a situation before entering into it. It does not surprise me that as a preadolescent he circles the dance, watching others engage in this adolescent play.

Ralph is rocking, leaving space for me to respond. Inside I think, "You've named it. It is insanity." I think of the string of conversations Taylor and I have had as a result of his lack of organization: letting homework deadlines pass, forgetting the sheet he needs to get a job done, not delivering notes to teachers or going to the nurse for a prescription on time. I'm trying to find the balance between helping him organize his life and leaving him to his own devices. It occurs to me: I know nothing of how to parent an adolescent child.

It's odd to find myself here; I have been a parent for thirteen years, a confident one for many of those. I have seasoned arms for comforting a fussy infant; when the cradle of my arm isn't working, I know to rotate him securely to face outward, to pressure the tender abdomen with a warm hand, jiggle in a slow rhythmic fashion. Or sit the child upright, his padded bottom

in the cup of my hand. Years of experience has taught me options and brought a precision with which I can read the infant's language. I have an accumulated bank of knowledge. I know to slice grapes in half leaving a flat edge to allow air to pass if it sticks in the throat of a toddler. I know that real kids like real toys—pots and pans, the telephone, plastic scoops in a tub of rice. I know how to distract a toddler from an object of desire. I understand the importance of routine, and the need, above all, for flexibility; carry in my gut a desire to discover in each child his or her individual propensity toward being in the world.

This desire is born out of knowledge gained as a parent: the most recent lesson lodged in my image of Taylor circling the dance floor until he dissolves into a toddler at the edge of the sand box. I found that the learnings from parenting were recycled into my teaching when Taylor started school himself. To know him as a child seated behind a school desk caused me to wonder what spilled outside my view of another mother's child. When Taylor came home from first grade with his phonic worksheets in which he identified the short a sound, I wondered how long it would take for his teacher to discover he could read. When we sat around our tiny kitchen table and I listened to him tell of the story he had written about the dead bird he and Ralph had found and buried in the backyard, I wondered about all the parents who were unable to read their children's stories because I had stressed to their teachers the importance of keeping all work at school to mark growth over the school year. I did not understand the significance of the natural audience for a child's writing until I became that audience myself. In many ways being a parent challenged my assumptions of what I had come to believe about teaching.

The understandings I have acquired through parenting slowly filter their way into my teaching. Understanding is not, for me, a straight line forward, but a recursive looping backwards. I sit on the couch, Taylor, on the other end, his body a spring winding tightly, edging toward the moment when his growth spurt will jerk him forward--I know growth does not happen smoothly.

Taylor's four year old brother, Robert, asks about this as we drive to his friend Alex's birthday party, "Each time you have a birthday, you grow a little bigger don't you?"

"Well yes," I say. "But sometimes you can't see it because it happens so slowly." I can imagine Robert looking carefully at Alex to see how much she grew this birthday. Someday soon, Taylor will shoot up overnight, like a weed sprouting out of untended turf. It will not happen just because I have tilled the soil around him. Now he sits on the couch, this tightly wound spring, nearing the moment in which all this stored energy will be unleashed on us, on him. I do not know how to parent this child.

I am back at square one, being reborn as a parent. I take comfort that there is no finality to knowing how to do this difficult task. It is an ongoing process of learning how—of finding a way to make what you know fit with the situation at hand. Each child or newly emerged aspect of a child brings a new beginning. And each new beginning is shaped by the ones that have come before. Adam, Robert, and Joseph each come to experience their brothers before them in unarticulated ways that are inscribed in the way I parent them—my parenting having ultimately been shaped by the particularities of their older brothers as I transform old understandings with each new circumstance.

It is no different with teaching. When I stand for the first time in front of the junior and senior students in my reading class in the basement of Morrill Hall I am an airy figment of the teacher I have been in another place, with other students. Once again, I am learning to teach all over. But this teaching is not totally new—is any experience ever new once we have breached the darkness of our mother's womb? I stand before my students, a new teacher at age 37, equipped with a history rich with insights for the asking, if only I am capable, and willing, to do the work. I know this now.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The student evaluations from my first pre-service course arrived in my mailbox in mid-summer, but I put them aside. The course had been a difficult experience and Peggy, my co-teacher, and I had left on the last day of class with the plan to read them together when they arrived. We said we'd meet for coffee or, with the humor one applies as a healing salve, a stiff margarita. We knew they'd be tough to read, but neither of us were expecting the flurry of anger that poured itself out on the pages.

"(The teachers) seemed to contradict each other too often to be effective in their teaching."

"(This) course should not have been team taught. They were two opposites trying to pretend they had the same beliefs."

"I thought I would love co-teaching, I hated it! I felt like these two teachers seemed to have no idea what the other's beliefs were, and they continually disagreed with one another, which made it difficult to have my own stance."

"Peg was kind but flighty, while JoAnn was often testy and tended to negate the beliefs of students."

Grading was never clearly stated or explained. I felt we were left in the dark throughout the semester.

My natural tendency is to want to explain away these comments. To fit them one by one into my personal understanding of what took place. But to do so I would pass on the opportunity to complicate the vision I hold of myself as a co-teacher of pre-service students in the context of a university classroom. It is easy to suggest that the problem lies with the students: their overemphasis on grades, over reliance on the teacher as authority, inability to recognize a double perspective as intellectual rigor. But if at the heart of good teaching is an ability to develop good teaching relationships, these comments and the fragmented relationships they reveal suggests that my teaching failed for these students.

* * * * *

After two and one half years of being a full time student I had prepared to teach my first pre-service course at the university. The class would meet for two mornings a week from 8:00 am to 11:00. When I was first offered the course I wondered whether I'd be able to get there on time on days when Ralph was travelling. And what if one of the kids was sick altogether? I'd decided it was too much to take on and asked Peg, a colleague and recent graduate of the doctoral program, whether she had any interest in teaching the course herself. I'd come to pick up nine month old Joseph, a weekly routine since we'd started swapping child care two months earlier to give us each a little free time to ourselves. We had been standing in her doorway when she suggested we co-teach it. I loved the idea. Between us we had seven children, five of whom were under six. Co-teaching would provide us both with insurance for the conflicting, often unannounced demands of parenting,

while giving us the chance to work and learn together. We had stood in Peggy's doorway chattering excitedly about the idea of co-teaching the course. In the end it felt nothing like what we had imagined that day.

Peggy and I had spent many afternoons at her place or mine selecting our reading materials, composing our syllabus. We drank tea at her dining room table, stacks of books piled around us as we charted our way through the course. It felt great to be teaching again—a long awaited return to that image of teaching that comes complete with students and a classroom. We were in the time and room schedule which meant we had both--time and space--and a roster of students to call our own. I had grown accustomed to an alternative mode of teaching. My work with teachers had more the shape of parenting: living side by side in classrooms, caught up in the dailiness of school routine, conversations taking hold in any nook and cranny they could find.

If meeting the student is a large part of teaching, it isn't done in the design of the course or in the selection of the materials, though certainly this belief can be supported by each of those. It happens in the moments of contact that occur between teacher and student: moments that turn on the clarity of purpose and the ability a teacher has to listen far beyond the words a student may share—to understand the learner's intention, to untangle unspoken assumptions (imbued in conversations, written work, actions in the classroom). Given the centrality of such a relationship, the presence of two teachers complicates that process. I hadn't anticipated this. I was naive to the way in which this new configuration would influence my own ability to enter into effective teaching-learning relationships with the students.

I'd arrive each morning at 7:45 in the basement classroom of Morrill Hall. By five minutes to eight students would begin to arrive. Stylistically

Peggy and I were different. I knew I needed to talk informally with students as they arrived to class; this sets me at ease before taking on the public persona of teacher. It helps me understand how students are engaging as learners. Peggy seemed more centered in her own space. She might be seated at one of the round tables, reading notes or looking at a book. I felt awkward talking with students while Peggy remained seated. I suspect that like me, she was doing what she needed to get centered for the day. At these moments I felt an unnamed tension between being present with the students or making myself available and present to Peggy. In planning to co-teach we had not anticipated such moments and likewise hadn't established a way to talk about the feelings generated in these instances.

In some ways I was as fresh and naive as when I assumed my first teaching job in the fourth grade classroom in Epsom. I knew as little about college juniors and seniors as I did about ten year olds. I knew little of the dynamic of power at play between a teacher who wields the authority to give the desired grade and the student intent on graduating with honors or to earn admission to graduate school. I did not recognize the dislocation of the teacher's ability to define her own destiny due to the influence of the larger structure of the institution. When students were disoriented by the lack of letter grades (though criterion for final evaluation were clearly stated in writing on the syllabus), we gave them out as mid-semester indicators. When some students expressed indignation at receiving less than an A, we followed a search into the department and found that such grade expectations had been established outside of our course. There is nothing surprising about this: how often have I said to teachers, "Students come into our classrooms with expectations of student and teacher roles that have developed over their long history in school." But I have always been one who learns through

experience. My words turn back on me now in full-bodied notes, only having a place in which to hear them echo.

By late spring when the semester was coming to a close, the class was straining to maintain a level of decorum. Students were stressed, and we had given up hope of creating the kind of environment that would have allowed honesty to exist between any of us.

Together Peg and I could unpack some of the trouble spots. For instance, we hadn't worked hard enough to help students connect to us as individuals. We might each have taken primary responsibility to mentor half the students, assigning each to one of us as a sort of home base. By choosing to respond alternatively to their written work we disrupted the conversation that carries over the oscillating pattern of a teacher's response-student's action, student's response-teacher's action. Teaching and learning is pulled forward on the backs of such conversations. And we might have done more to value student self-evaluations to help shift their acute attention to grades away from a desire to please. As long as they were trying to please the teacher, they were stuck not knowing which way to turn.

Peg and I came to these understandings as we reread our evaluations. I develop more insight still as I write about the experience. But this is not the final word. There will be more. There are words housed in the ticklings in my gut, the specific twangs, aches, and itches of discomfort I felt throughout the entire semester that only now I can begin to recognize. At the time I was unable to fully tend them. Now, from the present moment, there is the possibility to move backwards to read them.

At the same time I was teaching in this new context I was also returning to the familiar work of teaching teachers in the context of their own classrooms. But as I re-entered the classroom I had come to know best, and

the students whose concerns I understood (practicing teachers), the work felt different. It did not feel slick and easy and smooth the way aspects of my work in New York had felt where I entered a building as the "expert." Now I hesitated to be the "teacher," recognizing that an attitude that once felt somewhat missionary didn't fit anymore. It was like cleaning out a closet and hanging onto certain clothes in the hope of wearing them again someday. Years later I pull a garment out of the back of the closet, try it on and find I can still zip it comfortably. But standing in front of the mirror, I see it doesn't "fit" me anymore. In meeting an old self I see the ways in which I've grown.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A day of teaching. McCellan Elementary School, Rochester, NH.

It is an odd confluence of events. Sitting on the sofa along the back wall of the teacher's room I listen to Bonnie talk about how difficult it was to lead the book discussion in her second grade classroom. It was harder than usual when students come together each with different books, where she feels her role is to sit back, listen, and follow the leads of the children. Nancy, her colleague, is listening too, and she asks the question I am thinking, "Why can't you still sit back and listen, follow the leads of the children?"

"Because they were all reading the same book, I spent a lot of time thinking about what I wanted students to get out of this discussion. Maybe that's why I was leading them with my own questions." Bonnie suggests.

I join in the conversation. "There were times when students shared things you might have followed up on. For instance, when Brian said his dad gave lots of speeches and Jaye added that her mom did too. I wondered how that connected to their understandings of the speeches Martin Luther King gave. Maybe it could have been their doorway into a deeper understanding of the biography. But then, I also heard you ask some fine questions. Still I know what you mean."

I do know what she means. I had felt the same way earlier in the day when sitting on the rug in Davita's classroom I had led a small group discussion on an Amelia Bedelia book. A group of six first and second graders made a circle on the rug. I was part of the circle. So was their teacher, Davita, and Kim, another teacher from down the hall. Kim's visiting student from the University was there as well. A lopsided sort of circle with one whole arc

weighted down with teachers. But these teachers remained silent as the children and I talked about the book. Like Bonnie's students, these children had been meeting together for the first half of the year each toting their individual reading book. In the circle each child shared his or her book with the others, some summarizing the story, others sharing a favorite page. Then in ritual fashion they asked for questions or comments, the favorites being, why did you choose that story and what is your favorite page? The students replied in predictable fashion.

The idea of having discussion around a central text had come out of two after school course sessions during which time eight teachers and I considered ways of improving the quality of children's talk about books. So there I was, the demonstrating teacher, in a small circle which up to now had been a student led discussion group. Finding myself at the center of this discussion, I felt oddly like the traditional teacher leading a basal lesson. I hadn't realized this until I heard Bonnie share a similar feeling. I hadn't even written myself into the scene as I sat in Bonnie's classroom, a then silent teacher around her circle, taking notes on the discussion she was leading. In this second setting I observed her shift toward the teacher directed discussion group and make marginal notes to share with her later that addressed this tension between teacher-directed and student-centered groups. I scrawled a last note on the edge of my paper. It read: *In circle, how to lead in a way that ushers student into role of self-directing.*

Bonnie was struggling with these issues herself when she observed, "It seemed as if most of the talk was moving between the students and me, not between students themselves." As an observer, I had been able to shift my focus to the whisperings between Danny and Brian. Leaning into Brian's second grade body, Danny whispered, "I'd rather be an Indian than a Black."

The comment was spoken before the group as a whole had unpacked what it meant for blacks to have separate drinking fountains, to be told to sit at the back of the bus, what courage it took for Martin Luther King to stand up and say, "These laws are wrong!"

Bonnie and I sit on the couch while Nancy sits in a chair across from us. We make our own small circle of students now, as we talk to understand what we have learned from watching Bonnie work. I am here as their teacher, but I feel I am in a better position to learn. But it is this juxtaposition of being both teacher and student and the continual shuttling back and forth of these two perspectives that makes me a better teacher.

Yesterday morning, Robert was curled beside me in bed. His middle two fingers jammed in his mouth, his blanky scrunched up to his nose. With a smack he slid his fingers out of his mouth breaking the suction.

"I like school where the kids sit down on the mats and the teacher reads a book to them better than the other kind of school."

"What do you mean, the other kind of school?" I ask.

Robert answers, "The kind where the kids sit up in chairs and line up and the teacher is in front."

Robert is not yet five. He has spent almost three years of his life in a day care setting where children play with sand, water, and paint, build with blocks, craft space ships out of boxes, spill fantasy play into every corner of the room. Yet he has also managed to soak up an image of school that startles him. *'I do not like that other kind of school.'* His message is clear. In this other kind of school the teacher and students have distinct roles. Even my claim that to be a good teacher requires being an equally good learner is bound by this dichotomous language of student and teacher. The dictionary writes that to teach is "to cause to acquire knowledge or skill." The list of synonyms

do not hint at the learner dimension of teaching: discipline, educate, instruct, school, train.

Pull back from the words and I see they are anchored even more firmly in the larger context of schooling. Is it because these roles have been assigned in the institution of "school" and inevitably are narrowed by the construct of the institution? The challenge remains for teachers, and those of us who work with teachers, to inhabit this image of learner within of schools.

I take pleasure in knowing that Robert's image of school, though prevalent in places still, is not the shape of the classrooms in which Bonnie, Nancy, and I are enacting the work of teaching. In our small circle we are figuring out the questions that will guide our learning. My scribbled comment, *How to lead in a way that ushers students into role of self-directing*, came out during my observation of Bonnie's circle. The question emerges like a comet, its tail comprised of a trail of elements sweeping an expanse of time as wide as the night sky: my own circle discussion in Davita's class, a conversation with Ellen about Jerome Harste's literature circles (1988), memories of last year's reading students and our discussion of Palincsar and Brown's reciprocal teaching strategy (1983). And beyond even still: the physically rooted feeling of sitting on the inside curve of the kidney shaped reading table, my first year teaching. With the teacher's guide close at hand I led my students through someone else's well-orchestrated discussion of our story of the week.

But that question, penned in my notes before listening to Bonnie's discomfort or Nancy's quiet but exquisitely placed question, "Why couldn't you still follow the student's lead?" has evolved even still. What I see now is this: the assumption behind my question is that the teacher has a role beyond sitting back and following the student's lead. There is a teacher's lead. So the

question becomes, to what end? What are we trying to do here? How does this fit with the bigger picture of helping children develop as readers and writers? I share my question, and use our small circle as a place to formulate a shadow of an answer.

“Bonnie, you were doing a couple of things in your group. First, you helped students develop an understanding of the particular content of this book—Martin Luther King’s life. Second, you helped them develop a concept of the genre of biography, building expectations for the next time they encounter this kind of writing. But beyond that there is another thing; you’re always working to develop their abilities as readers. And to this end there were lots of good reading strategies being displayed by the students. Danny’s probing questions show that reading involves asking questions of the text while you read. Brian’s attention to the illustrations shows that meaning is lodged in the pictures as well as text and that good readers use pictures to help figure out the meaning. Pointing out the reading strategies they are using is a way to make explicit the work of reading.”

I sit here now, more in touch with my own questions and understandings than those of Bonnie or Nancy. I worry sometimes that this makes me less than an effective teacher. But I know something else: Bonnie will enter her classroom again, this conversation in tow, to sit around the circle of young readers. Nancy will do the same. At some point, either of them might experience the same confluence I did. Having once been an observer of another’s teaching, now they begin to observe themselves more closely as they take on the role of “teacher” in circles of their own. The cloth from which good teaching is wrought requires, like all fabric, both warp and woof. The warp and woof of teaching comes in the continual shuttling to and fro from teacher to learner and back again.

* * * * *

Sharon and I have a string of conversations that comprise our work for the day. It begins in her classroom. I tower over the children busy with their snacks in various places of the room. Some are sprawled on the carpet, others sandwiched between a book case and the outside wall of the classroom. Many are seated at their desks. I walk in and Sharon rises out of the rocking chair to greet me.

"I was thinking," she says, "about those children who haven't yet seemed to connect to the task of writing. You know how some children sit and write and others, well..."

"They use the time more as art time, drawing time..."

"Yes, without a sense of crafting a story for an audience. I'm wondering about those kids whether or not it'd make any sense for me to write for them?"

"You mean like a language experience approach?"

"Yeah."

I remember the journals Sharon shared with me last week. We had sat in the library and she showed me the changes that had occurred since she added a simple skill sheet into the back of each journal. The sheet lists a couple of skills: capital letters, punctuation, spaces between words, and each time a child exhibits a skill she records it in the back. By setting these expectations Sharon encouraged a number of children to use print where before they had only been drawing. I couldn't answer Sharon's question, but I sensed we could begin to get closer to an answer if we asked it in the specific

context of a child. The journals might help us develop those portraits, so I asked her to bring them when we met to talk at noon in the library.

An hour later we meet in the library. And this time we look at journals of the specific children she is wondering about. One of these children is Kristen. Her journal pages are often wide swatches of color, messily crayoned on the page. Occasionally she'll have an abstract looking figure. One such page had an irregular crayon drawing, the closed spaces filled in with colors. Next to the drawing were the words—crazy helicopter in her own invented spelling. Sharon explains that this kind of entry still doesn't come close to the task at hand. The journal is meant as a place to write to Sharon. Sharon reads and responds to the children in writing, providing scaffolding for their emerging concept that print is meaningful, transgresses time, and is permanent. For children whose concepts of conventional spelling are beginning to form, she provides models of the very words they are approximating in their messages. Kristen's journal use is more immediate and self-centered. Sharon's question, "Would it help me to take down her words?" doesn't seem to fit this particular situation. Her inventive spelling suggests she can write; she just chooses not to. We decide that in our class time today, I will talk with and observe Kristen further. Then Sharon and I can talk together with even more shared knowledge of the child.

Our work continues in the classroom and then later in the coffee shop in Dover, where Sharon and I are waiting for others to join us for our bi-weekly writing group. I can not say what Sharon learned today, or what I taught. I am relieved we are not bound to objective based lessons, a practice I was taught in college. We did not come to conclusions about what intervention, if any, Kristen needs. But we have a plan of action: Sharon will set a standard for Kristen's journal use, one we feel, after observing her today,

she is capable of meeting. In writing workshop, we agree to let her continue to structure her time and task and for now, consider that her developing sense of reality along with her concept of writing needs will benefit from time, experience, and the intervention happening outside writing workshop.

Sharon still holds her original question as a tool to further probe her learning and teaching. There are other students to consider as we have Kristen. There is still Kristen, whose continual output will inform our understanding of her as a learner, and the tentative premises we are holding right now as her teachers.

Teacher education needs this proximity to teacher's work. The curriculum needs to be drawn from the emerging questions that arise out of practice. And these questions need a context in which to remain in the air—to lay themselves out across the time and space of the teacher's world. It requires a space--whether inside the teacher's mind, or in the interior spaces of relationships between the teacher and an other, be it a colleague, student, administrator, parent, professor, in which to grow, take root, double back on itself, reemerge.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Old Lesson

I am walking down the long corridor to the primary wing of the school. On the hall to my left is a rough twine rope stretched across eight feet of the wall. It is tacked to a small strip of cork board about six feet off the ground. Handwritten reports are clothespinned onto the twine. Pencil drawings of wolves and other animals. I stop and lift one report. They are all at adult eye level. This one is three pages thick, the edges curl slightly, pencil dust muddying the white of the paper. I let the pages fall, standing back, then look ahead to the open door of the classroom just beyond: Karen's room, the place I am heading. Inside the children will be engaged in authentic reading and writing amidst the more-than-average clutter of a classroom

Before I move from my spot I think of Doreen, my British supervising teacher. Four tacks to post a student's work. One on each corner. Mounted first. Title the display. Make it inviting for others to read.

Martha Horn is coming down the hall. She is teaching a similar course with another ten teachers in the building. I smile as she approaches. A full ten years of my history is tied up with hers. I first met Martha on a Saturday afternoon gathering of teachers. Most of us had met during the University of New Hampshire Summer Writing Program. Martha was new to our group and we were sitting in her magnificently organized classroom at Atkinson, NH, the school where Donald Graves (1983) did his ground-breaking research on children's writing. Since that day we had shared our New York experiences around the Thursday table, had organized and co-taught summer

writing institutes around the country, had spent the last year sharing our experiences as doctoral students in separate programs.

I watch Martha smile at me from the other end of the hall and wait until she reaches the place I am standing in front of the student work display. I know she will understand the struggle I am feeling. What does it mean to enter a school as an “expert”? How can we share our expertise without imposing our values onto others. A part of me wants to say to Karen, “You need to handle their work differently than this.” Doreen shared her value system with me, and I appreciated it at the time. Still, I feel uncomfortable raising these issues in the context of this course on reading and writing. Karen is a fine teacher, doing a remarkable job within the often harsh conditions that pummel the public school system. It seems such a specific conversation, disconnected to the questions she is asking about helping her students learn to read and write. Maybe it is; maybe it is not.

There is an irony in this. Not long ago I joked to my colleagues, “Telling a teacher that a beautiful room is important and expecting her to change, is like someone trying to change me by saying, “Gee, you should do something about your clutter.” I see my clutter. Have made numerous decisions to rid my house of it. Once, I even bought a book, Clutter’s Last Stand, hoping to read my way out of the problem. My clutter is as essential to my being as the position I take to sleep at night. I won’t be changed by the mere mention of its presence.

So change starts from within; but the process is long and slow, unsteady and difficult. A companion can make the journey more vital and productive. Learning how to be that companion is the work of learning to teach. Standing in the hall, I recognize myself teetering on the edge of my own developing expertise.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

During my first semester at the University of New Hampshire I took a philosophy of education course in order to re-acquaint myself with philosophers I might have read years earlier during my preservice course work. It's funny the way learning is portioned into distinct containers. I read philosophy as a junior in college and hadn't gone back to it until finding myself a first year doctoral student. For many of the thirteen years that separated those academic pit-stops I was enacting a seldom articulated philosophy. When I supervised teaching interns during my second year of graduate studies they expressed to me their distaste over philosophy, and more generally, all the theoretical readings professors assigned. "It's not that I don't like it," one of them said, "only that it has so little to do with the real work of teaching." A set of questions I bring to my teaching today has to do with this relationship to theory expressed by these preservice students (often echoed by teachers I have in my inservice work): What is the relationship between theory and practice in teaching teachers? How do we help teachers and students strike a proper balance? Does such a thing exist?

In this course I read Dewey again, this time with the benefit of my teaching experience, and discovered a philosophical framework for much of the practice I had enacted. I read a variety of voices—Rogers (1983), Peters (1973), Noddings (1984), Delpit (1988), Plato [1987 (1955)]—letting each echo through my work until I was able to formulate my own articulated understanding for what I was doing. By the end of the semester I took up the challenge of putting it into writing.

I began with this anecdote:

A friend of mine recently called to talk about her experience selecting a kindergarten for her oldest child. Jenifer lives in New York City. Her daughter Emma is four and will start kindergarten this fall. Jenifer talks fast as she's telling me all this. She visited a public school that has a fine reputation. "They have this good gifted class. I don't really like the idea of gifted but anyway...the building was huge. It was monstrous. And the cafeteria was in the basement! I could never send Emma there." She explored private school options. "The Friend's school is nice for the lower grades but the upper grades are awful. Then there's another possibility, but it's so academic. And all the schools, that say they're doing whole language, but they do basals too. They try to do everything." About her classroom visits she says, "I find myself wanting to know every little thing the teacher does in there." Out of breath she exclaims, "What am I going to do?"

Listening to her, my head reels. She's not asking for advice. But as a parent of three children, two of whom are in school, I'm thinking about the compromise she'll have to make. You find the best situation for your child, the best that there is, not necessarily the best there could be. And in making the decision you inevitably fall back to the question; "What matters most?"

Sixteen pages later I concluded, having listened for the answer among the images I constructed about my work:

I hear myself dwell in the depth of the relationships. I am not surprised. Life is comprised of relationships—relationships with people and with our environment. We negotiate meaning through these relationships. To my friend Jenifer who is searching out the best possible school for her child I would say, look for the place where relationships run deep. Where teachers want to build a relationship with Emma on the foundation of

Emma herself. Listen for crosstalk among students. There should be a strong web of relationships in which Emma can begin to weave new relations of her own. Be attentive to what these schools and the people within them want to know about you and your daughter. When teachers begin in a fresh way with each new student you can be assured the teacher is learning today. One must. There is no other way to begin.

I wrote these words almost four years ago and I believe them even more today. Teaching implies being in relation with others. It is about learning to meet the student and then negotiating a way to dance together inside increasingly more complicated scores. Teaching ten year old students, twenty-one year old students, or fifty-one year old students each holds the same move toward engagement while being characterized with the differences that come from context (an elementary classroom, a university setting, a classroom designed by the teacher's own work) as well as life course. In similar fashion the familial, cultural, and political influences that write their way into my autobiography are present in the relationships a teacher builds with his or her students. Nothing exists in isolation. The work of teaching is paint on a canvas of life. Painters know how to prepare a canvas: to spread Jesso over the surface to make it ready to hold paint, to work the raw hue of the canvas into the dynamics of the painting itself. Likewise, teaching depends on a respectful, delicate handling of the learner.

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

1993 was a wonderfully long cold winter. After a hiatus of years during which winter limped along like a less than eager child, it came hard and fast like the winters I remember from my childhood. Snowstorms followed in one another's wake. Snow banks barely muddied grey before they were whitewashed with new snow. Such a winter is the perfect complement to the feeling I have in late pregnancy—a feeling of containment, to be a landscape of one's own bundled in by the skin. During a winter storm and before the driveway is plowed I have the same feeling of containment; all of the world is held within this home. Sometimes I pull on my heavy coat, scarf, mittens, and hat and trudge through the clean snow to walk around the muffled neighborhood. Snow makes me feel safe. I am impenetrable; no one or nothing can get at me.

I had prepared for this birth for twelve years. Beyond even that. The seed was planted in the story my mother told of her younger sister's birth. Born at home during my grandmother's seventh month of pregnancy, she was no more than a pound and a half. The doctor told my grandmother to wrap her in cotton batting and oil and place her in a warm oven, that she probably wouldn't live, and he'd be back the next morning to do what was needed.

All the years of my childhood I played with this aunt's three daughters every Sunday when our families got together. When I told my mother I would have this last child at home she smiled and said, "It doesn't surprise me."

Sitting in the midwife's office, Mara asks Ralph and me to prepare to tell the stories of our births. To do this we must first listen to the women who were there. And inevitably this leads into the birth stories of others—each of us knots marking our place on our intertwining strands of genetic matter. Both my mother and father were born at home. In choosing to have this child at home I have come full circle.

My grandmothers were born in a time when women were still central players in the birthing process. Before doctors and the medical profession stole their place. Before women were conditioned not to trust their bodies, or themselves. To feel the need to back away from the experience, to anesthetize themselves so as to disable them from taking a central role. It took me four pregnancies to reclaim my agency in this process. And even then concerns about safety echoed in my head. Mara's comments helped put these in perspective.

"Childbirth is risky business regardless of where you do it. Different settings carry different risks; you need to know the risks that come in each setting and then choose the ones you can live with."

The message behind these words is to let go. Take precautions to have a healthy pregnancy. Be on the look out for signals that something may not be right. But in the last minutes, you never know whether something will go awry. There will always be the margin of error, and there are no guarantees anywhere that in the odd chance of an emergency it will come out okay. A labor room is still a long number of minutes away from being under the care of a team of specialists in an operating room. There is the illusion that the hospital setting can save you in a crisis. I willingly trade that shaky peace of mind, for my role of being in control.

So there it is again: letting go in order to take control. If it is true that only a few life lessons exist for each of us, the work of living is learning these lessons again and again. They are lessons big enough that you can't take the whole of it in all at once. Rather you pull yourself along the continuum of growth inch by inch, claiming the same lesson over and over and over. This is one lesson defining my lifeline.

* * * * *

It is March 21st and we are still getting snow. Heavy flakes fall steadily outside the window and I watch from inside. I am in my nightgown half sitting on the couch, legs stretched outward toward the warm wood stove. I have been in labor since five-thirty in the morning. At nine I pull on layers of sweater and a wool cape and take a walk outside. Ralph on one side, my mother on the other, we walk on the road toward Roselawn Farm. Slow steps down the center of a snow covered empty road. The stillness of the world a sharp contrast to the struggle inside my body. At 11:30 I know it is time to go upstairs. And it is here, walking up the stairs into our bedroom that I feel frightened for the first time. I have not seen my room since Mara set up her supplies; oxygen tank, birthing stool, crock pot for heating small squares of towel. But that is not it. I recognize it now, *as I write this here*, as transition: that shortest stage of labor during which a flood of self-doubt and fear wash over you. I have experienced it three times before. And yet it took me nearly two years to understand the impetus of that fear, to read the experience in order to dislodge that knowledge. How similar this is to all growth which has at its critical moments that unsteady reaching forward, of being ready, but not ready; of being asked to be, for a while, someone we feel incapable of being.

I deliver Joseph, a ten pound four ounce baby in our upstairs bedroom. Or should I say we? It seems Ralph is part of me sitting as he is, my back in the bowl of his body, his arms reaching around to hold me steady. I embrace this "we." It is not the "we" in which I slowly dissolve to nothing. This "we" holds me intact. Myself. Peopled by others, by lessons learned from Taylor, Adam, and Robert's births before this. From Mara, Dr. Leiberman, my mother, and her mother before her. Myself. My self. The self I am claiming. I take the word slowly, pull it open to reveal the meaning caught between two tiny words.

PART TWO

NOTES AND FURTHER RUMINATIONS

ACT ONE



NOTES

page 9 My father is nine years old. He doesn't know it yet but he will walk home from school today amidst the hushed voices of his peers

Why is this story, so clearly from the past, rendered in the present moment? An autobiographer experiences both the potentials and problems of constructing a text. The problems, many associated with the desire to connive the reader in the telling (Steedman, p. 22), force us to feel bound by specific cultural expectations about narrative (Newkirk, 1992)). Yet these problems are balanced by the potential of language to provide a doorway into experience. Although my choice of present tense may serve the reader by allowing him or her to experience the moment as it is happening, I made this choice to shape my particular journey into the past. My father told me this story many times as I was growing up. It's a seminal story of the personal history I carry with me today. But in writing it here, I wanted to see my father as a child in his family before his father died. I wanted to hold still the moment before this tragic event to have access to a history that undoubtedly influences on my own.

What expectations did my father carry with him into the world of school each day. A child of Italian immigrants, he was not allowed to speak Italian at home; my grandparents' desire to assimilate into American culture was strong. For Italians, who occupied a particularly low status among Western European immigrants, the effort to do so was particularly challenging (Janzen, 1994, p. 349). I feel drawn to

speculate. My Nono, while he was alive, may have seen the schools as the great equalizer. In sending his sons there he may have relinquished certain authority, along with his particular cultural ways of being, to the school. How does this contribute to later perceptions I would have of myself in school? How might the shadow cast in my father's lifetime influence my own willingness to grant the institution of school the authority to define who I will become?

You will note my tendency to use present tense while depicting the past on numerous occasions. Know that while it alters a reader's experience of the text, it has likewise altered my ability to perceive and render my experiences.

page 13 What did I learn to love about school? The alliances formed between rows of desks. Finding the sweaty palm of David Coullaird in a square dance during a third grade gym period ...

Central to the work of autobiography is a willingness to dwell in the specificity of objects. In this paragraph I take up the objects of the classroom—square pink erasers, moistened powder paint in jars, smell of a fresh mimeograph—and it is through these objects that larger issues are revealed, issues that illuminate the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of experience. A theme arrives in the surprise of the line—*I loved my space at school—the two feet of desk that belonged to me*. The issue presents itself as I read the words I have written.

Janet Varner Gunn writes that autobiography is “the cultural act of a self reading” (1982, p. 8). There are two moments in which reading occurs: the moment when one reads the life, and later when one reads the autobiographical text. Attending to the surprise of the line led me

to uncover the theme of agency that was developing in my story. By illuminating the classroom I came to understand how very little of school I could call my own. What did this mean for me as a young adult deciding to become a teacher, or later, as a beginning teacher myself. By detailing the landscape we unpack our presuppositions allowing us to escape our own implicitness and scrutinize our own point of view. "We are better able to change what is by considering what was and what might be" (Diamond, 1990, p. 65).

page 17 This is but one explanation among many for why I entered teaching.

It surprises me to find the term "explanation" in the text since I have worked dilligently to resist the desire to present explanations. Certainly one can not write of story without acknowledging narrative's function to shape our understanding of the world; to provide a way to explain the acanonical (Bruner, 1990) or as Vivan Paley (1993) says to "explain the individual to the group and the group culture to the individual."

James Earle (1972) writes that autobiography is a way to illuminate and clarify life as it is lived. This relationship between illuminating and explaining has been critical to me as an autobiographer. When I come to offer explanations, however tentatively (and I will give a total of four explanations to describe my decision to enter teaching), I am able to do so only because I have attended most carefully to illuminating experience. It is a common problem among beginning writers to tell the story before they have listened to what the story has to tell them: to offer an explanation untethered to an illumination that would allow them to linger long

enough in a scene to experience it in a new way. When we work with teachers and students around autobiography, it is critical to recognize the way in which our use of time can affect how quickly they are drawn into explanation.

page 22 I feel the tug of other memories rushing forward to align themselves with this one

In his text, Making of a Poem, Stephen Spender (as cited in John-Steiner, 1985) shares this view of memory: "Memory is not exactly memory. It is more like a prong, upon which a calendar of similar experiences happening throughout the years, collect" (p. 71). The image of myself as a defiant adolescent sitting in the front row of "The Fish's" classroom works as a trap door. It drops open and experiences from the past rush forward illustrating the way in which narrative time differs from actual time and most aptly captures the manner in which one lives in the world as a temporal being (Brockelman, 1985).

The significance of an event is not in when it actually happened, but where in the narrative we consciously and deliberately place it. Steedman (1987) writes: "The point of the symbolic scene lies at the moment of its use, not in historical time" (p. 74). In this case my experience as a four year old with the razor helps me interpret a future action: my decision to enter teaching. Looking at the particular clusters of memories, or as Spender might suggest, the various prongs which we make as place holders, is part of the interpretive function of narrative.

page 27 In the whole spectrum of possibilities maybe this isn't a bad formula for growth. It requires imagination and guts..

An astute reader must hear the jungle of voices that echo behind my words on the page. The authorial voice with which this story is constructed is "socially embedded in the theories and narratives of others." (Franzosa, 1992) Robert Kegan's (1982) evolutionary model of adult development has influenced the telling of this text. His constructive developmental framework portrays an individual as negotiating a series of evolutionary truces. Each new truce involves a newly constructed self in relation to a newly constructed world of the other. My particular story rests less on those moments of balance during which time I am comfortably situated within a particular truce; instead it represents in detail numerous moments of being betwixt and between an old and new self. I see this in the swatches of life that find their way into the text.

page 37 To tear away the veil of sedimented meaning first I read.

Patricia Hampl's (1990) insightful discussion of the importance of reading helps me understand the importance of reading the draft. She writes:

The truth of many circumstances and episodes in the past emerges for the memoirist through details, but these details are not merely information, not flat facts. Such details are not allowed to lounge. They must work. Their work is the creation of symbol. But it's more accurate to call it the recognition of symbol. For meaning is not "attached" to the detail by the memoirist; meaning is revealed. That's why a first draft is important. Just as the first meeting (good or bad) with someone who later becomes the beloved is important and is often reviewed for signals, meaning, omens, and indications." (p. 100)

ACT TWO



NOTES

page 40 The landscape of hills and hollows threaded with water touched a place deep inside of me. A blood memory. I was home.

My use of the phrase “blood memory” is a reference to Rilke. In Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties, John J. L. Mood (1975) describes Rilke’s use of the term “blood-remembering” in which he argues against the idea that all one needs is to experience things in order to know them.

For the sake of a single verse ... it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves—not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them. (p. 94)

The notion that experience “turns to blood within us” suggests the way in which our being in the world is sustained and nourished by the grist of the past. Like the poet’s attempt to bring life to language, an aesthetic dimension of autobiography asks the writer to attend to such remembering.

page 46 What can I make of the fact that while I sit to write I have trouble placing myself in the classroom?

A colleague recently said to me, “I could never write an autobiography. I hardly remember anything about my past!” The work of autobiography is to attend to the way in which memory presents

itself; the reading of the emerging text is as essential and informative as the continual act of writing it. My reflexive eye attends not only to the memories that come forward, but to the white spaces around those memories. What does it mean that I can not place myself in the classroom? A question like this can uncover that which up to now has been implicit, ushering the writer (and reader) toward more explicit knowledge he or she can hold, own, and manipulate.

page 47 But as the first year slips into the second, and then the third, less of me is reflected. Instead, the plan book holds more of the stuff of school: the textbooks, marked off planning periods, the tests.

On the role of autobiography in teacher education:

Autobiography offers a way to uncover questions teachers can pursue with passion. I might ask why less of me was reflected in my plan book as the years progressed? Why did this happen instead of the reverse? This leads me to further consider how the institution of school shapes teachers upon their entry into the profession. When our questions come out of our lived experience we begin with an enriched perspective deepened by an understanding of our own subjectivity.

A concern for audience makes it difficult to pursue all the presenting questions in the text. I wanted a story that moved fast enough to engage readers in their own autobiographical stories—inviting them to consider the unique questions anchored in their own experiences. At moments like these, the reader experiences my use of writing to discover, rather than to inform. Consequently, an autobiography, like any text, remains with an inexhaustible potential to be read, interpreted, and further theorized about.

page 49 Thoughts while peeling apples.

I include this kind of passage—where the subject seems less the story of a teaching life, but the story of how I am coming to write such a story—in order to illustrate a ruminative quality of autobiography similar to the free association of ideas in the Freudian sense. In 1788, Freidrich Schiller (as cited in Corrao, 1994) defined the nature of meaning within such a procedure.

... a thought may seem very trivial or very fantastic; but it may be made important by another thought that comes after it, and, in conjunction with other thoughts that may seem equally absurd, it may turn out to form a most effective link. Reason cannot form any opinions upon all this unless it retains the thought long enough to look at it in connection with the others. On the other hand, where there is a creative mind, Reason—so it seems to me—relaxes its watch upon the gates, and the ideas rush in pell-mell, and only then does it look them through and examine them in mass. (p. 39)

This autobiography came out of the daily exercise of digging with pen into a life.

page 54 She added thickness to the intimacy of my life.

What does it mean to describe life as thick? I borrow on Paul Brockelman's (1985) notion of the thickness of personal identity. He writes:

...personal identity is both a continuity with its past and a breaking with that past by actively seeking to be more....this temporal extendedness or thickness of personal identity means that "I" am neither simply a sheer continuity (a same and single "me" over time) nor simply fragmented into a series of different "me"s, but both. Because each temporal action is solid with coreferential ties to the past and future and can be recalled as such, there is about the flow of my temporal experience a continuity which is "me." At the same time, however, that overarching personal identity binds together a series of discontinuous and different "me"s, e.g., "me" at twelve,

twenty, twenty-five, and thirty years of age. The series of different personal identities are strung together and yet maintain their difference by the attitude toward life which I am presently actively seeking to bring about. (p. 64)

I can revisit a self, both continuous and discontinuous, within the relationship I had with my Noni over the thirty-three years of my life during which she was alive.

page 54 Why do we say, growing up, it should be called growing out?

A philosophy of education emerges as one writes about teaching. It allows the writer to articulate what he or she believes today. Autobiographical writing is not about the past; it is about the present. As Janet Allen Gunn explains, it is about placing ourselves—making visible the ground. It is about location, not only who we are, but where we are. In Carolyn Steedman's (1986) terms it is about "landscape" coded in the "displayed self" (Gunn, 1982) or "authorial voice" (Franzosa, 1992).

page 55 Even the child who appears most like us—in race, sex, temperament—is a culture all her own.

This observation has its root in a conversation I had with two African-American teachers about Lisa Delpit's critique on writing process and their experiences in the New York City public schools. Isoke Nia spoke eloquently about her understandings of what it means to know the learner (Curtis, Harris-Martine, & Nia, 1994, p. 71).

page 56 We are seated in rows and I am amazed at the feeling of constraint that comes from being surrounded on all sides by other students.

It is interesting that schools are not designed with spaces for teachers to learn. If the view of teacher as learner was a more prominent one, we might recognize the need to redesign the setting of the school.

page 62 I want to blurt these images simultaneously: the image of attending to Jeff, and the image of attending to myself. I do not want the reader to linger, even for a moment, with the notion that I was distracted by my own life separate from the classroom.

Murray (1994) writes that good writing requires a disloyalty to the subject. When the writer is the subject, honesty demands this disloyalty to the self. Had I been loyal to myself I might have concealed the fact that I was distracted by my life, certainly a less than desirable temperament for a teacher. Though an awareness of audience creates this tension (someone is listening), I also take courage to write such things by convincing myself that, by the laws of human nature, many in this audience are more like me than not.

page 66 I knew from these preserved objects, that my Noni worked. That women could do that.

The memory of Noni's uniforms hanging inanimately in the closet is drenched with a child's fear. But I wonder here if it is only an innocent child's fear or another feeling replete with an adult understanding of the unresolved tension women experience when they push themselves out of the home.

page 73 These conversations pushed me below the surface where the philosophical tenets of the pedagogy were lodged.

This section reveals a way of coming to a philosophy of education. When I step back to read my text as a teacher educator I

might ask whether I provide the kind of opportunities that ask new teachers to get below the surface of their teaching. In my story I recognize the same strong urge to attend to the dailiness of teaching that I often see in new teachers with whom I work. My text begins to address the questions I have about the relation between practice and theory. It was through enacting a practice that I came to uncover a theory.

page 73 My student Ian lived in a two hundred year old cape; took baths in a tin tub in front of the wood stove that heated the house.

Though Ian did indeed live the life I wrote, it was Cynthia Rylant's fine rendering of her childhood in When I Was Young in the Mountains (complete with the description of a tin tub) that echoed in my mind as I wrote this description. Her attention to the rhythm and sounds of language was with me through much of the writing of my text.

page 75 The classroom was somewhat bare. The bulletin boards were empty, the furniture only temporarily arranged.

I got the idea to start the school year in this way when a colleague told me a story of a teacher she knew who began the year with all the furniture piled high in the center of the room. She did this despite the fact that it angered the school board who, on the eve of the first day of school, make their yearly tour of the classrooms. Every teacher needs at least one colleague when they first begin teaching—someone with whom they can share the passion of their work. I was fortunate to have three: Lori Bresnahan, Debbie Cook-Hamer, and Janet Liptak.

ACT THREE



NOTES

page 95 Where does the authority to teach come from? That was a question I was grappling with myself at the time and a question I grapple with today as I continue to work with teachers in their classroom.

The work of autobiography involves reworking old questions. The ruminations I offer at this moment in the story might be seen, in Gunn's (1982) words as a landing rather than a hovering. She writes:

[Autobiographical] perspective can never fill out or complete the canvas of one's experience, because that canvas is always moving and changing...and just as placement must be understood as placing, an ongoing rather than a settled process, the autobiographical effort at possessing one's life must be understood as a movement toward possibility as much as a turning around to the already achieved. (p. 12)

I take up this question of authority, and while it is true I have asked this question at numerous points in my life, I ask it more and more as I appear more firmly settled in a place to claim authority. My writing delivers me at the answer: *the limits of one's knowledge do not necessary become the limitations of one's work*. In landing here I am not settling the issue once and for all. Rather, I have composed an answer that gives me confidence to move forward—to face the situations I will doubtless encounter in my future as I teach in new settings and parent new aspects of my developing children.

page 102 To think that either of us thought we could fix such a problem so easily. Or even at all.

How I read (and consequently render) this scene has to do with the voices of others I've taken on over the years. Lisa Delpit's (1988) work on exposing issues of power highlight the irony of this attempt to solve the problem without building broad enough coalitions that include teachers, parents, and administrators from within the school system itself. The fact that I carried my concern away from the very people that might best have informed me is indicative of the lack of dialogue Delpit cites as disabling those in power from fully understanding how to best educate other people's children.

page 103 But there was a dual agenda to my work and the other track was to usher the teacher toward an understanding and proficiency of this way of teaching.

A typical challenge would be trying to initiate a productive conversation with the teacher. I remember sitting in a kindergarten classroom where the children were filling page upon page with fat marker scribbles. I sensed the teacher's anxiety as the paper stack slowly disappeared before her very eyes. Meanwhile, I'm watching the children fascinated by the energy with which they tell a story. They move quickly stapling together wads of paper, each bearing the same minimal red or blue squiggle. I want the teacher to ask about a child's intention, recognize those who stand at a threshold ready to cross into the world of print. But too often I end up offering answers to questions a teacher hasn't yet formulated. My role is to help the teacher articulate his or her own questions, but I don't see this at first. My sights are set

on the child. It wasn't until later that I recognized that the challenge was in understanding the teacher's intentions or the particular threshold over which he or she might be ready to cross.

page 104 Later, I came to build understandings with Black teachers. But only much later—four years after leaving the project did I begin to understand the complexity of culture and how much culture influenced the mismatch of beliefs I found in Betty's room and the rooms of many, many teachers. Only later was I able to understand how my own culturally situated beliefs cast Betty's in a negative light.

The article "Crossing boundaries: Voices from the inner city" by Curtis, Harris-Martine, & Nia (1994) illustrates the way in which I began to unhinge myself from the perspective I had taken during my tenure at the Teachers College Writing Project. Dawn Harris-Martine opened up her Brownstone to me while she and Isoke Nia entertained me with their wisdom and good humor in an evening of conversation about their experiences as African-American teachers working with white staff developers from the Writing Project. They shared their experiences as teachers and mothers, talking about the struggles of raising children in a society whose structures are often held in place by covert racist perspectives.

page 108 There are certain assumptions you make when people look like you. My assumptions made me braver, less hesitant to say what I needed to say, less tentative to reach out across the gap that divided me from others simply because the gap appeared narrower.

The difference between a memoir, which I will distinguish from an autobiography for specific purposes here, is that a memoir needn't tell the whole story while an autobiography spans an entire life. Ultimately it is up to the autobiographer to determine what constitutes the beginning, end, and various significant moments of that life. In

writing this autobiography I have had to order a life. A memoir would have allowed more freedom to focus on a smaller part without shimmying it in relation to the whole.

But an autobiography has the advantage of helping the writer listen to recurring themes in a way a memoir may not. This piece of text returns to the complexity that exists in the relationship between the self and an other. In writing about my first year teaching I wrote, "If you are a young teacher this close contact occurs at a time when your own intimate world is opening up for review—a time at which you may be little equipped to recognize, appreciate, and tolerate another's difference."

Rexford Brown (1991) writes that "literacy's most profound function is to help connect the individual to larger and larger circles of reference, which ultimately come to constitute the meaning of his or her life" (p. 56). I can read one moment of my text against another. Together they tell a story of learning to see myself in relation to others; how as a young adult I recognized my perspective as being influenced by unique familial and social contexts. When I find myself a new teacher educator in New York the issue of connecting to the learner surfaces again. This time I recognize the strong current that holds me to a center, causing resistance to reach out to connect to the wider circles of reference Brown writes about. Later I will break through some of that resistance. But the central question remains for me as a teacher in relation to the learner: where am I, where are you, what does that mean for how we will work together?

page 109 All of this is true, but none of it eliminates the fact that a commodity of ideas existed and were being dispensed across the city.

I want to read this experience at reform against Freire (1973). It's complicated because on the one hand we were bringing a pedagogy that many would say liberates the student by creating a context for their voices to be heard. But given Freire's position that to teach begins by entering into dialogue with the learner in order to connect with the learner's reality, I'm not sure that our dialogue with teachers was open enough to be influenced by the teachers' realities. I remember Seymour Sarason's (1982) sentiment—to change another you must be willing to be changed by them—being shared around the Thursday table. Each of us felt the impact of such an ideology daily in our work in schools. Our ideas about teaching writing and teaching teachers were constantly evolving as we responded to the realities of our work. Still, there was a way in which teachers continued to look outward for the knowledge that was being generated by this skilled team of teachers and writers at the college.

I suspect some of our limitations were inherited from the particularities of process pedagogy itself. We were importing into the urban setting a pedagogy that had defined itself mainly within white, middle class America. Rural to boot. Our work was blemished by the same flaws that have led to current critiques, namely Delpit's charge that process pedagogy does not address the needs of children from outside the culture of power and Willinsky's (1990) critique that it does not engage students in a critical enough practice of their own literacy.

page 114 On any given Thursday there would be Lucy sitting at one end of the table, Shelley Harwayne and Hindi List to either side of her. Georgia Heard, Ralph Fletcher, Jenifer Hall, Martha Horn, Jim Sullivan, and Karen Howell and I are scattered around the table.

There were numerous other writers, researchers, and teachers that filtered in and out of the Writing Project. The individuals listed here are those who spanned most of the years I spent there and consequently became my closest circle of colleagues. In addition to these individuals, I especially valued Marilyn Jody and Suzanne Gardinier for the new perspectives they brought to my work in the schools and my presence in the community of the Writing Project.

page 115 How often do teachers have an experience like these Thursdays? Open space. Open agendas?

Perhaps you have already discovered the irony of my words. The scene I describe immediately preceding these lines shows me trying to wrest from teachers the very experience I am here saying they need. I have not rewritten the irony out of this moment because I want to illustrate the way in which narrative inquiry is never completely finished. I did not recognize the irony as I wrote about this experience. I did not see it during my own rereadings or discussions with other readers. It appeared to me in the middle of a talk at the University of Rochester as I read aloud the excerpt to a group of faculty and students. There it was staring me in the face so blatantly obvious that I couldn't imagine how I hadn't seen it before. Of course this leaves me with the unsettled feeling that there is no end to the work I might do with this single text I have written. Carolyn Steedman (1992) writes beautifully about the tension between the autobiography on the page and that which is embodied in the person.

In the autobiography, or in the telling of a life story in a pub ... the person there, leaning up against the bar, or in another place, writing a book, is the embodiment of the something completed. That end, that finished place, is the human being, a body in time and space, telling a story that brings you (wherever the teller actually ends the story) to this place, here and now; this end. And written autobiography has to end in the figure of the writer. I am talking about the simple physicality of writing, nothing more than that: that the story is told by someone here, now, in time. And of course, I do know that life goes on after the writing, that other tales will be told, and that there is a more permanent ending. (p. 47)

page 116 Think of what teachers lose by the lack of an adult audience for their work?

Personal stories can point to broader implications, in this case my experiences as a developing teacher point to implications for teacher educators. While I don't presume to be prescriptive—my experience is not necessarily the same as others'—writing about this community helps me understand an important way in which I learn about teaching. It asks me to consider this in terms of my work in schools with teachers, and in the university classroom with students learning to become teachers. It causes me to consider the quality of community and uses of space and time I might engender for these learners. Not to mention, quite importantly, the way in which it helps me create the conditions I need for myself in order to continue to learn about teaching.

page 121 In February I decided to call and see exactly what (Lucy) had in mind. I am standing barefoot on the linoleum floor in the kitchen, leaning over the sink. Out the window I can see the faint outline of my garden beneath the snow.

I entered this project with a question in my mind: What is the role of audience in writing an autobiography? The question is made complex by the dimensions of audience that exists which include the audience in the writer's head and the audience in the flesh—readers who talk back about the text they have read. When Martha Horn, a colleague from the Writing Project, read this section she said to me, "It really is quite remarkable that you picked up the phone and called Lucy. I never would have done something like that!" She's right in a way. I must have had tremendous courage or drive, desire or confidence to have done such a thing. Through the rendering of detail, the possibility exists to see oneself more vividly. And when you see through the lens of another's reading, you see a more comprehensive image of yourself, one constitutive of others' perceptions of you.

Carol Wilcox, a teacher and doctoral student colleague, remarked about my student teaching work in England, "How did you know to teach that way?" Her comment helps me recognize that not all student teachers innovate on their experiences as students, and that I may have had different influences as well as different tendencies towards things. The way in which my story departs from other people's remembrances of their own experiences helps me see the uniqueness of my self.

I was initially intrigued with how audience shapes the writing of the text. But instances like these ask me to consider the way in which it also contributes to the educative value of autobiographical work for the writer. In conversation with readers I discover both the similarities and

differences that exist between my life and theirs. What we learn about ourselves from our own stories is influenced by the communities in which our stories are read.

ACT FOUR



NOTES

page 135 I pack myself into the Honda to head into campus.

Nancy Mairs (1994) writes that autobiography is “at once easier and harder to write than a biography—easier because the writer doesn’t have to do a whole lot of research, except in the archives of memory, which stay open longer hours than many of us would wish...” (p. 33)

Mairs’ comment suggests an answer to the reader who questioned why I have included so many scenes that take place with me driving. I find it curious as well. But then consider this: a mother of four sons spends plenty of time in the car. Driving can provide a moment of refuge from the many demands placed on me during a normal day. If Mairs is right, and my experience tells me she is, the archives of memory are always open and driving is one time I feel drawn to visit.

page 138 How far have I come from that child of the summer playground?

There are a number of places in my text where I refer to the boundaries between home and school. The felt sense garnered from my experiences is that these boundaries are too often impermeable, and in many ways the culture of school works to make them so. Anne Haas Dyson (1993), in a study of young children learning to write in an urban school, illustrates the way in which the multiple social worlds of children operate within the classroom. Her work recognizes the

potential to create a classroom where these boundaries become permeable and jointly negotiated by teacher and students.

page 139 The autobiography of my particular life finds its recursive loops situated in changes of settings and roles

The unique shape of my story leads me to question the particular way in which other teachers might construct their own stories. If mine is sectioned out in shifts of roles and geographic locations, what of an outstanding teacher like my friend, Patti Seifert, who has taught kindergarten for 25 years? What becomes the markers: a particular student, class, administrator, a personal or professional experience?

This question might be answered by reading a collection of teaching autobiographies in relation to one another. What similarities might exist between the shaping of my story and Patti's? How would the similarities appear if I read them through the lens of Robert Kegan's (1982) where he identifies "evolutionary truces" in which an adult continual defines and redefines his or herself in relation to others? Might other autobiographies be characterized by moments of being in and out of balance as mine seems so inclined to be?

Autobiography is both a process and product. As work (process) it has the potential to educate the writer. As a work (product) it has the potential to educate the reader.

page 141 When I listened to the taped recordings of those conversations, and later made them manifest on pages of transcripts, their physical form demanded a certain kind of attention.

I recently presented a colloquium at the University of Rochester entitled, The Spiral of Story: The Educative Value of Autobiography. Following my presentation Warren Crichlow asked about the

differences between writing an autobiography and giving an oral history. His question opened for me a new line of thinking. My experience in Paula's office provided an immediacy with audience that is absent when one sits to write a text. Paula's presence was a shaping influence in the telling through her visual and auditory responses, impacting, for instance on such things as pacing and elaboration. From the earliest stage I was interested in the role audience was to play in the writing of an autobiography—a story one might mistakenly think offers an explanation mainly to the self.

There were other ways that the oral narration set a particular process in motion. Using talk to ruminate, I discovered the value of digressing and revisiting an idea at various points in the telling. I carried this process of investigation into the writing, using writing to explore, rather than report; and in the end having experienced the recursive quality of the telling, I attended to the use of shape as a form of substance in the final written product. (Bruner, 1990)

In the shift toward a final version (as final as any version can ever be) the act of writing differs from the experience of providing an oral history by making visible the issues involved in constructing a text. An oral history doesn't hold still the construction process long enough to study until it gets written down, and then, it may be the listener, not teller, who has access to these issues through working with a written transcript. Because words, once placed on the page, beg precision and revision, the autobiographer is able to theorize about the problems and potentials of constructing a text—the pull of cultural narrative templates, concepts of self made explicit in the text.

page 151 I knew little of the dynamic of power at play between a teacher who yields the authority to give the desired grade and the student intent on graduating with honors or to earn admission to graduate school.

The presence of two teachers challenges the already complicated issue of power at play between the teacher and students in the classroom. In one evaluation a student wrote: *"Peg and JoAnn are both intelligent and insightful and do provide great criticism, but we often felt like a ship without a captain..."* The metaphor of the teacher's role to direct a voyage where passengers proceed from one destination to another suggests a willingness (perhaps desire) for students to elevate the teacher to position of all-knowledgeable. A number of students commented that we often contradicted one another and were actually "philosophically opposed to one another." These comments surprised us since we felt little ideological tension between us in relation to the subject matter. We would, however, contribute to one another's discussion as a way to further illuminate a topic. It seems that for some students this dialectic between two instructors challenged their expectations of the culture of a classroom, while creating a discord with a particular epistemological perspective.

Andrea Lunsford, in a talk at the University of New Hampshire, spoke of the paradoxical emotions both students and teachers have toward the teacher's position of authority in the classroom, and of student resistance toward a teacher's move to relinquish that authority. It seems that effective co-teaching requires explicit understandings of the assignment of authority between teachers and students and in the way co-teachers negotiate their shared portion.

page 152 At the time I was unable to fully tend (the ticklings in my gut, the specific twangs, aches, and itches of discomfort .) Now, from the present moment, there is the possibility to move backwards to read them.

Steedman (1992) writes that in order to begin to construct a history (and an autobiography is, after all, a personal history) the writer has to make two movements through time.

First of all, we need to search backwards from the vantage point of the present in order to appraise things in the past and attribute meaning to them. When events and entities in the past have been given their meaning in this way, then we can trace forward what we have already traced backwards, and make a history. (p. 20)

I feel the ticklings in my gut today and with this felt sense I re-explore the experience hoping to write my way into some understanding. Because I am writing a personal history this understanding seeks a relation with what has come before and what I know now to have come after. I hold it against my experiences as a brand new fourth grade teacher and as an experienced mother facing the new challenges of parenting an adolescent and a pattern has begun. James Olney (1980) recognizes this "pattern-making creativity" as the work of "the individual historian cum cultural autobiographer cum poet" (p. 38).

page 157 The challenge remains for teachers, and those of us who work with teachers, to enact this image of learner within of schools.

Deborah Meier (1992) suggests that the work of reforming schools necessarily includes reinventing teaching. She writes, "What we need is a particular kind of job satisfaction that has as its anchor intellectual growth. The school itself must be intellectually

stimulating—organized to make it hard for teachers to remain unthoughtful” (p. 602).

page 161 Teacher education needs this proximity to teacher’s work. The curriculum needs to be drawn from the emerging questions that arise out of practice.

The course described in this chapter is part of the Learning Through Teaching program at the University of New Hampshire and provides one example of a way to bring the intellectual rigor Meier writes about to the setting of a school. In this program a school district works with a University instructor to design a course around the curriculum and pedagogical concerns of a specific group of teachers. The course takes place at the school and includes a variety of experiences: classroom visitations, classroom-based demonstrations, coaching, and out-of-classroom workshops. Working collaboratively with the instructor and one another, teachers take a reflective stance, first generating and then studying the questions that emerge from their on-going work.

page 164 What is the relationship between theory and practice in teaching teachers? How do we help teachers and students strike a proper balance? Does such a thing exist?

The work of autobiography has the potential to situate teachers on the fault line between the two. As educative experience autobiography adheres to the conditions Dewey (1963, 1938) sets out— the principles of continuity and interaction. Autobiography’s plunge into the depth of life’s experiences takes up Dewey’s principle of continuity that asks that “*every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after*” (p. 35). At the same time Dewey’s

principle of interaction that *"assigns equal rights to both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions"* (p. 42) can be found in autobiographical work that asks the writer to use his or her internal, subjective world of experience to theorize outward while bringing external theory to bear on internal reality.

Dewey offers a full account of the principles of continuity and interaction. I include here his discussion on the inter-relatedness of the two.

The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. They intercept and unite. They are, so to speak, the longitudinal and lateral aspects of experience. Different situations succeed one another. But because of the principle of continuity something is carried over from the earlier to the later ones. As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. (p. 44)

Autobiography, with its potential to usher the writer (and reader) into new areas of exploration and ultimately toward positive growth embodies the critical union Dewey established between the two.

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