

**ON BECOMING:
THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC HEALING JOURNEY OF ONE COUNSELLOR IN TRAINING**

by

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Abstract

Counsellor identity development is a unique and challenging journey which involves both academic training and personal formation. Research shows that who the counsellor is, personally and interpersonally, is of greater impact in the therapeutic alliance than theory or technique. The counsellor's ongoing individual work on self, experiences in life, and growth in self-awareness, empathy, and compassion are important tasks as the counsellor moves from a novice counsellor to a master therapist.

This thesis is meant to add to the body of research on counsellor identity development following the progression of a counsellor in training through this process. Evocative autoethnography was utilized to provide a deeply personal perspective of the process and change that occurred. It was found that spirituality, creativity, and play, as well as the integration of emotional, mental, and somatic parts of self were essential elements of this transformational journey of becoming.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is the intersection and interweaving of two seemingly separate journeys: a spiritual journey and a journey into counsellor identity development. Both are journeys of becoming and both are journeys of healing. Yet ultimately, these journeys are one and the same; this journey is mine.

In considering the numerous topics that could be chosen to research for my thesis, I kept coming back again and again to autoethnography and the process of becoming. This thesis was conceived of to follow the process of counsellor development but quickly became about the deeper reality of the process of becoming. A good counsellor is intricately and primarily a by-product of the transformational process of self. It is out of this self that the counsellor identity flows. Counselling is about healing: emotional, psychological, and spiritual healing for certain but also includes bodily health. Done well, counselling is a process of growth and restoration that involves the whole self. With this in mind, this thesis explores my growth, expansion of knowledge, of the head and the heart, the experiences I have had, and the ways in which I have changed. The intent is to capture a transformational journey as I progressed through the Master of Education in Counselling program at the University of Northern British Columbia.

This process of becoming is something I have been attentive to personally but never has it been a focus for me before in academia, and I find that rather sad and unfortunate. Generally, in post-secondary, the consideration of who a person is somehow gets obliterated by the focus on what they know. Yet, in my life, work, and experience as a woman, student, researcher, employee, leader, wife, mother, and now grandmother, it is

clear to me that who we are as people is of paramount importance as it relates to what we do and how we navigate in the world. *How* we view other people and *how* we are in the world matters. Counselling is a vocation, a profession that demands one's all; self is immersed in and must be brought to the work. It is not simply cognitive, not purely technique or tools, and yet certainly not all emotion; it is a blending of personality, character, knowledge, and instinct. It encompasses spirit, soul, and body. It is art and science. It is truly holistic. To become a better counsellor is to become a better person and I believe to become a better person is to become a better counsellor.

I will be embracing the method of autoethnography from the start and will therefore be weaving my story in amongst the literature and findings of other researchers. This, I believe, is true to the method and will provide a richer, wholehearted connection between myself, as both the researcher and the researched, and the reader.

Significance and Purpose

As stated, this exploration is about becoming. It includes not only my becoming a counsellor and the development of an identity that fits within that context, a counsellor professional identity, but also the becoming of me, a personal identity, and the integration and congruence of these aspects of identity development. Auxier, Hughes and Kline (2003) found that at all stages of the counselor identity developmental process, a solid, richer understanding of identity development was necessary. An oft quoted principle is that you can't take another where you are not willing to go, or expressed in the positive: you can only take someone as far as you are willing to go, or in some cases have gone in your own journey. This principle has been an important companion to me and the reason I have

chosen to embark on my own intentional journey of development so that I can grow in compassion and understanding; so that I can be as healthy as I can be, knowing that this process of becoming is a life-long venture; and so that I can be a better counsellor for those I will be privileged to journey with in the future. I do not want to be the impediment to another's journey, unable to walk along with them because I have not faced my own stuff, and I don't want to be a poor companion to myself along the way either. Of utmost importance in the therapeutic relationship is the competence of the therapist; even more important than method are the personal and professional aspects of the therapist him/herself, and therefore an understanding of the development of the counselor is of great interest (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). My hope is that this thesis will add to the expanding body of knowledge of the experience of counsellors in training and will articulate in various forms this process of becoming.

Personal Location

I am a woman in my mid-forties. I have been married for over twenty-six years and have gestated, birthed, and raised three children. I have welcomed a son-in-law and had the great joy of being present as my granddaughter made herself known in the world. I come to the Counselling program with a few years lived, some life experience, hardships, excitement, trauma, gratitude, self-consciousness, joy, and curiosity. I come with a life-time of working on my own stuff, of self-reflection and, more often than not, self-recrimination.

I am a complex human being (as are all human beings). Until recently, I had done a fairly decent job at isolating myself from the world. For certain I have done a great many things over the years, racked up seeming accomplishments and experiences but I did it all

keeping a pretty firm protective coating around my heart. Then 2012 hit; I turned 40 that year, I had always looked forward to turning 40, my whole life. I cannot emphasize this enough, this call in my spirit towards turning 40 and the promise of freedom inherent in it. I can't tell you why; it was just in me. That year was the hardest, most grief stricken year of my life; it was a deep, dark, night of the soul. And it catapulted me forward in a journey toward freedom and healing, one that I had been meandering down slowly, while getting quite side-tracked along the way, for most of my life.

While many others come to this Master of Education in Counselling program young, which I'll define as younger than thirty, with many of the milestones and thrashings that life is sure to provide still ahead of them, I have 'been there, done that' in many ways. To be sure I too have many life experiences still ahead but I am middle aged with a lot of life lived. I believe this makes for a unique perspective and experience, within the program, and especially in taking on an autoethnography as method for my thesis. Personal experiences, especially hard and painful ones in adulthood, can be used to become a better counselor (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). I find myself wondering what I already have in my counselling toolbox that I am not even aware of.

For certain, some of the tools are personal wounds; I am a wounded healer and as such make my "own wounds available as a source of healing" to others (Nouwen, 1979, p. 4). As I began, I wondered how the personal growth and healing that I have fought hard for would serve me on this journey and how many more untended wounds I would discover; many as it turned out. Through this unique educational program of counselor identity development, I grew and am now able to own the vocation of counselor, to call myself a

therapist, a counsellor, and have it feel like a perfect fit; authentically me. In looking back over the process of this very intentional autoethnographical journey, I see that it contained a deep and meaningful transformation of self.

At its heart, I believe that autoethnography is about the location of self, honouring the self as individual and unique and yet, simultaneously putting out a piece of the whole as an offering to another, to see if there is any resonance, any recognition of experience or emotion that would connect one to the other. This autoethnography is a place that I have an opportunity to put myself on the page, to show up and to be me, to be seen, perhaps to be known; and then secondarily, to hopefully have the pleasure to recognize fellow travellers on the road. I have welcomed and enjoyed the journey amidst the pain and suffering.

Conceptual Lens

Defining my conceptual lens has always been a struggle for me: Ontology, epistemology, phenomenology, hermeneutics; all the big words. This autoethnography has helped me to explore and articulate my ways of knowing, my experience in the world. It answers, in part, the questions: How do I experience the world? What do I believe? Along with Kovach (2010), I take some issue with the word 'conceptual' because it seems to put rational thought, the mind, above such important parts of self as experience, emotion, and spirit. I believe in spirit, soul, and body. My way of being in the world includes each of these and they all work together to form and inform my way of being in the world.

I believe that we each create our own world based on what we believe, how we interpret what we experience, the messages we receive, the culture that we are a part of,

and the relationships that we have. What we do flows from what we believe and the quality of our lives flows from the interaction of beliefs, emotions, experiences, and behaviours that intersect and play off of each other to construct a way of being in the world that is unique from everyone else on the planet. And yet, there are commonalities, connection points between people, both individual and collective. There are ways that we can, in part, understand another. I believe in freedom, I believe in choice, and I believe we are all creators. We are, in my estimation, creating and co-creating all the time. This may best be called a social-constructionist view.

I also believe in God. As it turns out, I believe in subjective, constructed truth and I also believe in objective truth: a both-and paradigm, rather than an either-or, right/wrong, good/bad, dualistic paradigm. I choose non-duality, which isn't to say that there aren't things I take a stand on but I tend to see nuance and find that this is where the beauty lies. It is a basic tenet of my ontology. I am open to the truth of one person or group or culture, the subjective, and I am also open to the notion that there is a deeper reality, which some call Ultimate Reality (Benner, 2018). I am also open to not knowing. So, I observe that we human beings do socially construct our reality. It follows that my way of seeing the world is not necessarily yours but that does not make mine right and yours wrong and neither does it make yours right and mine wrong. It just is. I do believe that within both of our belief systems, the constellation of values, beliefs, and opinions we hold, there may be better ways to view things, ways that are more loving, honouring of diversity, and that embody a more compassionate presence in the world.

I do believe in objective truth, but in my view the only being in the universe who holds objective truth is God; the Ground of Being. While I see that our various views of God are socially constructed, God exists both inside and importantly, outside of our notions as a self-communicating reality that may not fit within our subjectively constructed views. 'God', in my view and many others across religious and spiritual traditions, is the ineffable Source of all that is. As such, we tend to try to find ways to describe this Creator, the Origin, the Great Mystery in language that continually fails us. Throughout this thesis, I will be referring to God by many names because I am just doing what I can to put into the English language which I speak, my experience of this Presence, within my mind, emotions, consciousness, environment, and even body. I will capitalize the name I am using for God and hope that it will be clear to the reader about whom I am speaking.

I cannot separate myself and my journey from God or from my relationship with God. I am entwined with the Creator and the Spirit is entwined with me. As stated, there are many names and expressions for God because as human beings we reach to define that which is undefinable. We want to know, and explain that which is inexpressible; to grasp and hold, even control, something that is not containable. My expression on this earth is a journey to know this One and thereby know myself. God is the only one who knows me completely and since I am made in the image of God, I can get to know portions of His nature through a deeper understanding of who I am. This reciprocal relationship of God in me and me in God, getting to know God and myself in ever expanding spirals is part of the great adventure of my life.

This autoethnography cannot, therefore, leave this massive part of my knowing, experience, and cultural identity out. As I am more in awe of the Creator, I am more in awe of the world around me in all its complexity, diversity, and splendour whether natural, or supernatural, physical, emotional, or spiritual, and that in and of itself creates more compassion and understanding for self and others in the world. To side-step or ignore this is to deny myself, rendering this whole venture moot. For this thesis then I take the position that I exist and can know myself and my God, at least in part.

Despite the beliefs I hold, my intention is to hold them lightly and to proceed in the world with hands and heart open to unknowing. My intentional stance (not that I always succeed in my intention) is to walk in humility, with the knowledge that I may not know, that I have gaps in my understanding, and that other people or God may at any time invade my worldview to give me a gift of recognition, of revelation I didn't have before. Though I have spent much of my life in education of some sort or another, as a life-long learner, the longer I live, the more I learn, the more I realize how little I know. It seems to me that we make sense of the world based on what we think we know at a specific point in time within a specific context. We piece the learning and experiences of yesterday together and then new information comes and we integrate the new while trying to make sense of any discrepancies. Sometimes we do this well and other times we hold tightly to what we think we know in fear of letting go of the old or in fear that what is new cannot be aligned with the old. Alternatively, we take the new and reject the truths of old, perhaps even vilifying them. I have attempted in this journey to remain open to the new while retaining the understanding of yesterday, able to sense when something must be discarded and replaced

by new truth. I do agree with Pathak (2010) that, “To know is to engage an experience fully with one’s mind, body and heart” (p. 4). Knowledge is fluid; I hold it lightly. This is my epistemology.

Phenomenology is a much more interesting notion to me than either ontology or epistemology. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2018) discusses phenomenology as a study of consciousness, of meaning, from a first person point of view and further involves “various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity.” Therefore, rather than attempt to explain my phenomenology, I will rely on this thesis to show it. I expect that my ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, and hermeneutical lenses are manifest throughout this work. It contains the truth as I know it which is the only kind of truth I have to offer.

Theoretical Orientation

At this point in my educational and developmental journey, I have many different theoretical orientations, lenses, and tools that I use. I take an integrative approach to counselling. I find myself to be very existential and person centered (Rogers, 1961) as well as quite drawn to positive psychology. I much prefer to focus on strengths and competencies rather than pathology. I greatly dislike pathologizing people and so I am naturally drawn to theories and ways of doing therapy that honour the person and see them as complex and dynamic, capable of self-determination. I am certainly still finding my way, there are many different theories and some of these I view as filters that are placed on top of my existential and person-centered lens in order to help the picture express itself.

Some of this is client driven but much must come from the counsellor's own basic orientation and belief system; it must fit me but it also must fit with the client I am seeing. There are a number of theories, therapy models, and seasoned practitioners that I am drawn to including: Emotionally Focused Therapy (Johnson, 2004), Internal Family Systems (Schwartz, 1995), Jungian analysis (Jung, 1933), dream interpretation and archetypes (Jung, 1961/1973; Jung, 1964), and psychological types (Jung, 1971/2017), among others.

My view of people, including myself, is that we are all equal in value and worth, deserving of dignity and respect. I believe that each of us has personal responsibility and choice and that we are sense-making people who construct our view of the world based on our experiences and what we feel and believe about ourselves and others because of those experiences which then largely dictates how we relate to ourselves and others in the world. We are able to be conscious of self, which means that we can observe ourselves and be curious about ourselves, adapting and making decisions about how we will behave in the future. We are responsible for our own actions, beliefs, emotions, and choices and we can do good or do harm to ourselves or others based on our beliefs and power to choose.

I have great confidence in the capacity of people for good. I also observe that we often choose things that do not serve us well. Each of us has immense strength, resilience, and power meant to be used for the good of ourselves, our community, and ultimately the world. I wholeheartedly stand on the premise that individuals have the capacity for change and growth and flourishing. Additionally, because I believe in spirit, soul, and body, I take a holistic view of the client and am concerned not only with their mental and emotional health but also how they are physically and spiritually. This could include considering such

things as food and nutrition, sleep habits, how they relate to their body, and their relationship with God. In other words, I look for a sense of integration and oneness (or disconnection and fragmentation) between these facets of personhood as they all work together, each piece affecting the others. I hold immense hope for our capacity as people to change, grow, and transform, and this becoming process is not only for ourselves, it has ripple effects for all those we are in relationship with. I view the vocation of counselling as a sacred trust; it is beautiful; there is nothing else in the world like it.

There is no singular theory that incorporates all of these views that I hold of human nature hence my integrative approach. I trust that as my own personal identity continues to develop, my theoretical orientation will also change, broaden, and deepen, and along with it my counsellor identity.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The process of counsellor formation is a unique and self-reforming journey that includes formal educational training alongside experiential learning and profound personal growth and transformation. This literature review explores the process of counsellor development, with the ongoing integration of a personal and professional identity, as well as the progression from novice to master therapist. Also included is a consideration of spirituality and counselling. Hogan (1964) sums it up well, “becoming a therapist is fraught with the success and tragedy of becoming and that struggle is to be respected.” (p. 140).

Counsellor Development

The discussion of counsellor development and specifically professional counsellor identity development is ongoing in the research literature and is shown to be of great concern to supervisors, counsellor trainees, as well as experienced practitioners (Gibson, Dollarhide & Moss, 2010; Orlinsky et al., 1999; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Development as defined generally by Orlinsky et al. (1999) is, “a long term process by which practitioners gradually refine their natural talents, acquire technical mastery of their craft, and overcome personal limitations in professional work.” (p. 211) and counsellor development specifically has been found to be a complex, long term process (Reising & Daniels, 1983).

Various developmental models have been postulated, some based on levels (Stoltenberg, 1981); some stages (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992); and some phases (Ronnestad & Skovhot, 2003). Hogan’s (1964) seminal, and very succinct, work described four general stages/levels that counsellors travel through from the level 1 beginning

therapist to the level 4 master therapist. These stages are marked by very specific behaviours, feelings, and approaches to the work of counselling and therefore require a different type of supervisory atmosphere and counselling environment that would help progress the maturing counsellor onto the next stage.

As development inherently requires systematic change over the course of time (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992), the counsellor-in-training goes through an often intense metamorphosis of their self-concept which necessarily includes emotional and cognitive processes as well as experiences throughout the program of study, the resulting outcome of which is a counselling identity (Auxier et al., 2003; Stoltenberg, 1981). This metamorphosis is described as “a recycling identity formation process” (Auxier et al., 2003, p. 32). This process involves three components: conceptual learning (course readings and experiences), experiential learning (supervision, skill development, client contact and group experience), and external evaluation (various forms of feedback from professors, supervisors, peers, and clients) (Auxier et al., 2003, p. 30). The progression of growth often starts with conceptual learning which satisfies for a time but as the counsellor identity continues to evolve, experiential learning and feedback in the form of external evaluation become essential and more informative for the developmental process but also evoke a great deal of anxiety (Chang, 2011; Folkes-Skinner, Elliott, & Wheeler, 2010).

The level 1 beginner is often insecure, method-driven, lacking insight into behaviours and motivations of self and others, yet highly motivated to learn (Hogan, 1964). During this stage of development students experience much anxiety, fear, distress, and lack of confidence as well as feelings of incompetence and inadequacy (Auxier et al., 2003; Chang,

2011; Jordan & Kelly, 2004; Reising & Daniels, 1983; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). The dissonance at this point is striking as conceptual learning gives many theories, tools, and practices, yet the gap for students between theory and practice is starkly evident, causing some to feel they may have made a mistake in attempting to become a counsellor (Chang, 2011; Folkes-Skinner et al., 2010). The realization starts to dawn that the work of counselling is marked by ambiguity (Skovholt & Starkey, 2010); that it is more art than science (Stoltenberg, 1981). Ambivalence and self-doubt are prominent at this point (Folkes-Skinner et al., 2010). As the budding counsellor moves to the next level of development, there is a need for more autonomy but the journey is fraught with struggle. The student is caught between dependency and autonomy, overconfidence and being overwhelmed; knowing what to do one minute and completely lost the next; feeling deep commitment and terrible misgivings (Hogan, 1964).

Building on both Hogan's (1964) and Stoltenberg's (1981) work, Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) outlined several stages (phases) of counsellor development and numerous relevant themes that emerged from their study of one hundred counsellors across their careers. As this data was added to and transitioned from a cross-sectional study to a longitudinal study (Ronnstad & Skovhot, 2003) a refining of their findings began. A key finding of their research was the necessary and progressive integration of the counsellor's personal and professional self over time. At the beginning stages, the external demands of the graduate program, professors, practicum supervisors, and the institution itself, can cause a gap between the professional self and the personal self of the counsellor in training as the student tries to take on new learning and behaviours in ways that are

acceptable to these external forces. This gap closes as development continues and the blending of these two selves is an important marker in the maturation of the counsellor. This individuation process sees the counsellor becoming more grounded in who they are, in terms of values, theoretical orientation, and techniques used while drawing on personal experience, and relational wisdom earned over the years within many layers of relationship including clients, family, friends, and professional associates. Continuous self-reflection is a core element of further development especially after formal training is completed (Goodyear, Wertheimer, Cypers, & Rosemond, 2003).

Intrinsic to this process, and yet a separate component, is the external evaluation which aids the counsellor-in-training in identifying and processing emotion, behaviour, and skills in a way that progresses the development of a blended counsellor professional identity with the personal identity. These components are not linear, but cyclical; the interplay between the conceptual, experiential, and evaluative components continues as the graduate educational program proceeds and each component informs the others (Auxier et al., 2003). This formation of a counsellor identity involving the integration of a personal and professional self includes an ever increasing consistency between theoretical orientation and personality and also the ability to apply personally aligned techniques to the therapeutic work (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Finally, Auxier et al. (2003) found that this increasing autonomy coupled with a self-directive learning style helped students to clarify their personal counseling identity.

As the personal and professional selves of the therapist merge, the therapist is more able to express his/her personality and sense of humour with clients, and a sense of ease in

the work can be experienced. As the therapist is more integrous and authentic to who they are, anxiety begins to dissipate. Authentic expression of self and creativity within the therapist-client relationship becomes more pronounced and important as the therapist moves through higher phases of development and experience (Hogan, 1964; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). This phase corresponds with Level 3 of Hogan's (1964) developmental process where the counsellor now has greater insight into themselves and their clients, has increased self-confidence, and motivation is more stable. This level is often attained in the years following the formal educational program when the counsellor moves out into their own practice.

Counsellor professional identity involves not only professional training in counselling at a graduate level but also personal attributes which both must be integrated and situated in a community of counseling professionals (Gibson et al., 2010). Recognizing this important progression, one of the critical themes identified out of the Counselor Professional Advocacy Leadership Conferences in 1998 was that graduate counsellor education students should develop a clear identity as a professional counsellor and further that students should take pride in this identity (Chi Sigma Iota, n.d.). Additionally, as articulated by Kaplan and Gladding (2011), the strengthening of counsellor identity is seen as one of seven critical needs by numerous counseling associations, though admittedly this specific focus on identity seemed more concerned with a collective identification with the profession of counseling rather than showing concern for and attention to the development of the individual's personal identity as a professional counsellor. Affiliation and identification with the profession itself, collective identity, is important, yet the facets of

individual identity that make up the professional counsellor are of paramount importance at the beginning stages of development and this identity is molded during the counselling education program, with the participation of other professionals in the community (Gibson et al., 2010). There must be a shift from the conceptualization of professional counsellor identity as a construct outside of the counsellor trainee to an internal orientation and conceptualization of the self as a professional counsellor (Auxier et al., 2003; Gibson et al., 2010). This process is aided considerably by the feedback inherent in graduate training during practicum and supervision (Hogan, 1964; Stoltenberg, 1981).

In a large study, surveying psychotherapists from a variety of countries, Orlinsky, Botermans, and Ronnestad (2001), found four factors consistently ranked as the most profound influence for practitioners of all experience levels. They are (by rank): 1.) experience in therapy with clients, 2.) formal supervision, 3.) personal therapy, and 4.) experiences in personal life outside of therapy. The final two factors center on personal growth and development while the first two factors are encompassed within the practicum and supervision experiences of the graduate program.

Practicum and supervision. The importance of direct experience with clients for counsellors in training cannot be overstated. In fact the most profound influence on counsellor development is direct experience with clients in the context of a counseling session (Orlinsky, Botermans, & Ronnestad, 2001; Skovholt & Starkey, 2010); there is no substitute for this and nothing else has more relevance, especially at the beginning stages of development (Folkes-Skinner et al., 2010). Besides the inherent sense of incompetence that strikes the student at this point, there are also times of synergy where the concepts learned

are put into practice and unknown competencies begin to emerge (Chang, 2011). Combined with effective supervision, these client sessions provide invaluable information to the student. Taken together they serve to socialize the student into the therapy context and culture which teaches students to think, embrace values, and act in ways consistent with the profession (Gibson et al., 2010).

As previously stated, anxiety (Reising & Daniels, 1983), insecurity (Hogan, 1964), self-consciousness (Stoltenberg, 1998) and even feelings of frustration and confusion (Skovholt & Starkey, 2010) are natural and expected as part of the process for student counsellors, novice and advanced, regardless of culture or country of origin. This seems a universal experience of the developing counsellor (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Along with this jumble of emotions, the beginning counsellor is self-focused (Leach, Stoltenberg, Eichenfield, & McNeill, 1997), and so it is important to encourage humility, for the developing practitioner to shift focus to the client and to recognize the great gifts that clients have to offer. It is said that counsellors learn more from their clients than they ever teach them (Skovholt & Starkey, 2010). After all, the therapeutic relationship is all about connection and is considerably helped when the counsellor is intent on seeking out and finding beauty in the client (Pipher, 2003) rather than focused on their own performance.

The supervision required at different stages of development changes, and is important to note as the counsellor evolves. At the beginning stages of the counsellor's progression imitation is a significant focus (Hogan, 1964; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1999). The novice therapist is looking to emulate those seen as expert; therefore, watching other more experienced therapists, receiving support and clear suggestions and feedback in

supervision, as well as following prescribed models become the first anchors that students hold onto in their development. As they progress, imitation becomes less important as autonomy is embraced and the student finds their own way during the integration of their personal and professional selves as described earlier. It is an attuned supervisor who can manage to be and do what the student needs at the time their development calls for it.

Auxier et al. (2003) elaborate on the process that students proceed through in terms of supervision and found that the experiential learning of supervisor and peer feedback is evaluated by the counsellor in training against his/her own concept of self and whether the feedback is in alignment with this self-concept. Additionally they found that counsellors in training took the feedback, received and analyzed it, evaluating it and reflecting on it based not only on his/her own self-concept but also on the perceived value of the feedback and the genuineness with which it is offered. This was a careful process on the part of participants and not an easy one, especially when feedback did not align with the current view of self, but involved deciding whether the self-concept was correct or incorrect and whether the perception of the person giving the feedback was valid or not. This process was a cyclical breaking down of self-perception; a peeling off of layers and a deconstruction of self (Folkes-Skinner et al., 2010), that was followed by a rebuilding that was instrumental in the development of counsellor professional identity but also greatly impacted personal identity while moving the counsellor-in-training along the path of autonomy. This developmental progression shows the movement that counsellor trainees make towards evaluating themselves internally based on training and personal experience, a significant change from the initial reliance on external evaluation and one of the transformational

tasks of counsellor identity development, the continual flow towards congruence (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014).

As articulated, these experiences with clients, and in supervision, greatly help in the integration and congruence of the personal and professional selves of the student. Prosek and Hurt (2014) found that counsellor trainees with over one hundred hours of counselling practicum showed greater congruence between their personal and professional identity than those with few or no practicum hours. Additionally, they advise counsellor educators to set the bar of expectation high for counsellor trainees in order to be intentional about students' building professional identity throughout the graduate program and continually working towards integrity between their personal and professional identities.

Practicum and supervision do not last forever, though certainly gathering a peer supervision group together in practice is highly encouraged, the counsellor must be able to self-reflect. There must be an ability to be attentive to countertransference, inner motivations, triggers and shadow issues, for personal growth but also for the health and safety of the client and the therapeutic alliance. Throughout their careers, therapists learn much from their clients but also their personal lives are seen as a rich repository of information to aid in the continual practice of self-reflection and growth (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). As such, experience with clients and supervision can only take the developing counsellor so far, an intentional journey of personal growth is also necessary to grow to higher levels of counsellor development.

Use of self. Counselling is a special type of vocation in which the counsellor uses their own self in the process of helping another heal; the whole of the therapist shows up in

the room with the client, this includes cultural, political, and spiritual perspective as well as the personal issues, struggles, triggers, wounds, feelings, and attitudes of the counsellor (Aponte & Kissil, 2014).

Studies show that who the therapist is, is more important than the method used (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). The intrapersonal work required in this process cannot be overemphasized as the interpersonal skills of the therapist are central to the therapeutic alliance (Nissen-Lie, Havik, Hoglend, Monsen, & Ronnestad, 2013). Reflection is core to this work and is articulated by Ronnestad & Skovholt (2003) as “a continuous and focused search for a more comprehensive, nuanced and in-depth understanding of oneself and others, and of the processes and phenomena that the practitioner meets in his/her work” (p. 29). As the counsellor-in-training progresses on their developmental path, ideally there will be movement from a self-conscious stance which is about self-protection, an overly internal focus on self, and an over-emphasis on being evaluated, to a self-aware posture of reflecting on one’s presence with a client (Stoltenberg, 1998). The counsellor can only be where they are at any given moment; they bring that self into the therapy session with the client and engage with the client from this place, and so the development of in-the-moment self-awareness of the counsellor is essential to the growth of the counsellor, as well as the client they are serving (Kissil, Carneiro & Aponte, 2018). As the counsellor becomes more self-aware, they can begin to work through their own emotional, mental, and somatic struggles. This is important, as Aponte and Kissil (2014) explain, the more the therapist is working through their own struggles, the better they can relate to the client and develop empathy for both themselves and their clients while also differentiating themselves from

their clients in order to avoid harmful effects of countertransference. In addition, Nissen-Lie et al. (2013) found that clients were especially sensitive to therapists' personal distress and that this had a negative effect on the working relationship between the therapist and the client, highlighting the importance of this personal work by the therapist.

As therapists progress in their development, the importance of personal and interpersonal experiences becomes more pronounced and explicitly recognized; the importance of working on self is understood more profoundly and life lived becomes an important fount of knowledge (Skovholt & Starkey, 2010). Some of the best lessons for the counselling practitioner are the experiences of loss, suffering, and recovery that occur for all of us in life (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1999; Skovholt & Starkey, 2010); these provide a rich repository for the practitioner willing to grow in empathy and compassion through their own life experiences.

Personal and professional development is a life-long process that is often slow and erratic (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Starkey, 2010), and yet years of experience is not necessarily synonymous with expertise or increasing development within the counselling profession (Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson, & Benerjee-Stevens, 2003; Skovhot & Ronnestad, 1992). What emerges clearly from the research is the simultaneous and interconnected necessity of the intentional personal growth and development of the counsellor, which involves ongoing self-reflexive practice (Goodyear et al., 2003), alongside clinical experience with clients. Jung (1933) also acknowledged the importance of this inner work of the counsellor delving into the unconscious and shadow sides of self in order come to a sense of self-acceptance or else to be an "unconscious fraud" (p. 235). In fact, personal

therapy in addition to experiences in the personal life of the counsellor were found by Orlinsky et al, (2001) to actually increase in prominence and importance as counsellors progressed in their development.

Many personal attributes contribute to the development of counsellor professional identity (Henderson & Montplaisir, 2013). Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) articulate that being open to learning, able and willing to recognize the complex nature of the work, exploratory, active, and eager to grow are important indicators of a developmental posture. Jennings et al. (2003) emphasize a tolerance of ambiguity, cultural competence, and openness to change as well as emotional and relational health as important characteristics of a counsellor. Increasing authenticity in the use of self is progressive and occurs over years of practice (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003); as such the counsellor's use of self necessarily involves intentional personal, emotional, spiritual growth, and healing thereby freeing up more of self to be available and present to the client in therapy (Aponte & Kissil, 2014)

Attributes and skills. There are innumerable external techniques and skills to be learned that will aid the practice of counselling (Egan, 2006) but of greater importance are the internal skills and qualities of the therapist. Various qualities have been acknowledged in the literature as being attributes of a good counsellor, these include being: sincere, warm, responsible, trustworthy, non-judgmental, accepting, sensitive, fair, and open-minded (Wheeler, 2000). While empirical research is important, a great deal can be learned from those who have influenced the profession of therapy over the years by sharing the wisdom gained from their own practice.

Carl Rogers has had a profound effect on the counselling profession and on the understanding of the foundational skills required to be an effective and personable therapist (Crisp, 2014). Intrinsic to his person-centered approach are some core characteristics of the counsellor in terms of attitude towards the client, such as unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and empathic understanding (Corey, 2016). Rogers (1961) talks about his own progression of development from understanding trustworthiness as doing all the external things necessary to seem responsible and dependable to realizing that the therapeutic relationship was helped most by him being who he deeply and truly was interiorly, to have congruence between the personal and professional self, and in fact recognized this coat of professionalism as a distancing of himself from the client. This meant that he had to recognize his own separateness from the client, his own feelings and worldview, and yet equally recognize the client's separateness; and then to allow himself to have positive feelings for the client and not to be afraid of that positive affect but instead to foster it. He also recognized that he needed to have a helping relationship with himself, that he had to meet himself in ways that he would meet clients, with unconditional positive regard, with acceptance, with kindness, with presence, and then he could reasonably meet clients in a helping way as well. Rogers felt that clients must sense that they can be transparent and real, and they know that it is safe to do this when they feel the counsellor is being authentic and real with them.

Yalom (2002) adds to the skill set for counsellors when he speaks about attending to the here and now, this ability to tune into the space between the client and counsellor and stay with what is happening in the present: in a word, immediacy. He stresses this as

important because what happens between counsellor and client is a relationship, it is interpersonal, what happens in the counselling room within this relationship is a glimpse at what happens for the client in the rest of their life. It is a “social microcosm” (p. 47).

Another skill desirable for continued health as a counsellor is to be able to connect with a client, enter their world, work within it and then when session is over, be able to change focus smoothly and without emotional baggage to the next client; to be refreshed at the end of the day rather than depleted (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Rogers (1961) talks about being able to so see the world through the clients eyes that he loses any sense of judgment. Integral to this is the regulation of emotion, which is an essential skill for all levels of counsellor experience (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

Additionally, having a breadth of practice has also been found to be important; therapists who are influenced by two or more theoretical orientations are assessed more positively within the therapist-client relationship and also generally have a more open stance towards learning and development which guards against stagnation and burnout (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Of course, working towards mastery in all of these personal attributes and skills is a long and challenging journey; it might be helpful to consider what it looks like when one has gained expertise as a therapist.

The master therapist. Assuming that a goal of counsellor development is to progress to a level of expertise over time, it seems pertinent to question the conditions necessary for this to occur and by what process this might be possible. Therefore, along with an understanding of the developmental process of counsellors-in-training, it is equally important to consider the characteristics and values of master therapists as those will

provide points of reference against which progress can be assessed. Jennings and Skovholt (1999), found some characteristics of master therapists to be: an intense love of learning, an embracing of ambiguities and complexities of life, attentiveness to their own emotional health and the effects this has on their work with clients, and attuned self-awareness and openness to feedback. Orlinsky et al. (1999), found that perceptions of experienced growth amongst therapists of various years of experience remain high providing a sense of regeneration within their practice that may prevent feelings of stagnation. The master therapist seems to embrace the paradoxes of life as they present in the personal and professional life of the counsellor (Skovholt & Starkey, 2010). This level 4 therapist, utilizing Hogan's (1964) model is creative and intuitive, having the depth of an experienced artist while embodying the paradoxes inherent in the work.

Jennings, Sovereign, Bottorf, Mussell, and Vye (2005) in their study of master therapists identified the following nine values as essential to the ethics and ethos of these seasoned counsellors:

- relational connection - with themselves, friends, family and their clients was of utmost importance;
- autonomy - which includes the recognition that all people have an innate right to make decisions about their own lives;
- beneficence - the draw to help others make positive change and growth from pain and suffering;
- nonmaleficence - always being mindful of the power of the therapeutic relationship in order to minimize harm;

- competence - continuing to grow skills and pursue training;
- humility - understanding their limits and intentionally staying aware of their weaknesses;
- professional growth - embracing life-long learning, their own therapy and peer supervision;
- being open to complexity and ambiguity - knowing there are no easy answers for life's issues; that the unknown is greater than the known; and
- self-awareness - a deep understanding and awareness of the need to continue to work on their own stuff, the triggers, shadow issues, defenses, and growth needs that we all have.

Expertise in counselling is in itself paradoxical and ambiguous; it has been described with terms like creativity, intuition, and wisdom (Hogan, 1964; Jennings et al., 2003) as well as the balance of opposites such as having a “drive to mastery *and* never a sense of having fully arrived; ability to be deeply present with another *and* often preferring solitude; great at giving of self *and* nurturing of self” (Jennings et al., 2003, p. 66). Arguably a master therapist in his own right, Rogers (1961) sums up the sense I have of my own journey when he shares, “if I am to facilitate the personal growth of others in relation to me, then I must grow, and while this is often painful it is also enriching.” (p. 51).

Spirituality and Religion

If we are to truly live and do our work as counsellors within a diverse, poly-variegated society, in an inclusive, culturally-sensitive, and attentive way, we must be willing and able to take into consideration multiple perspectives (Shafranske, 2016).

Unfortunately, spirituality and religion, especially religion, have been seen as taboo and a subject often provoking downright hostility in our secular society. This frequently bleeds into psychology and counselling as well (Harris, Pargament, Sisemore, & Brown, 2014), even into counselling education (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). As Burke et al. (1999) point out:

Counseling has long been influenced by the secular sphere of medicine, the rationalism of the scientific method, the agnosticism of Sigmund Freud, and the church/state separation... Thus it has eschewed fully recognizing spirituality and religion... counseling has been inclined to conform to and draw support from the ideologies of current intellectual giants and established professions, even if these ideologies undervalue the spiritual dimension of human life that counsellors know to be important. (p. 251)

Though some deny, and even vilify, any connection between counselling and spirituality and/or religion (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000), there is a growing body of research showing their deep interconnectedness as they relate to therapists' personal lives and their work with clients (Bilgrave & Deluty, 2002; Smith & Orlinsky, 2004). The evidence is mounting that many of those in practice hold personal religious and spiritual beliefs, and believe that these are beneficial in sessions with clients (Bilgrave & Deluty, 1998). Additionally, many clients would like to discuss this important dimension of their lives in therapy with their counsellor (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2018) and yet feel apprehension in doing so, fearing that their religious and spiritual views and values will be denigrated (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000).

It would seem that though the profession of counselling may be seen as secular, many practitioners hold spiritual and religious beliefs that deeply impact their work as therapists and that there exists a reciprocal relationship whereby their work with clients also impacts their personal spiritual beliefs (Bilgrave & Deluty, 1998; Smith & Orlinsky, 2004). Yet, most counselling graduate programs spend little to no time preparing students for the practice of working with those with various spiritual and religious beliefs, let alone being attentive to their own religious and spiritual beliefs, whether that be within formal coursework or supervision (Shafranske, 2016); this despite the evidence of its relevance to clients and positive outcomes (Harris et al., 2014; Oxhandler & Pargament, 2018), and the importance of sacred moments within the therapeutic relationship (Pargament, 2014).

Harris et al. (2014) point out that spirituality and religion are interrelated and rely on each other; while spirituality can be seen as the individual's quest for connection to the divine, the transcendent and the sacred; religion is a container in which this quest can occur. Just as spirituality and religion are difficult to separate, so are spirituality and psychotherapy. Spiritual struggles impact mental health and psychological functioning impacts spiritual health (Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Tarakeshwar, 2005). As Jung (1978) so poignantly observed, "Everything to do with religion, everything it is and asserts, touches the human soul so closely, psychology least of all can afford to overlook it." (p. 337).

Often, in academic circles, even if spirituality and religion are acknowledged, they are generally reduced to a melting pot of generic ideologies as if they are unidimensional and blending them all together somehow helps to articulate the deeply held convictions of a particular individual or group. Having said that, it must be acknowledged that the mature

branches and forms of religious tradition have many things in common, not the least of which are the common questions they grapple with (Benner, 2018). For all these reasons, the cultural competence of counselling professionals cannot be overlooked and must necessarily include religious and spiritual culture (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2018); and the counsellor must be very aware of their own spiritual and religious beliefs in considering their approach to working with clients (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000).

Christian spirituality. My particular spiritual and religious culture is a Christian culture; my spiritual identity rooted in a contemplative Christian spirituality. The premise of an authentic Christian spirituality is that we are in relationship: with God, with ourselves and with others (Bourgeault, 2013). We are born for connection and designed by Love, to love (Benner, 2015). Smith (1987/2017) in speaking of Meister Eckhart (a 13/14th century Christian mystic) shares a perspective that resonates, he states:

He realized, above all, the question of God is at the same time a question about Man. I cannot know God unless I know myself. Religion has its origin and its meaning in the human heart. Therefore, when the outward forms cease to satisfy, it is only by returning to the human heart that we can resolve the crisis. The sublime and glorious reality that we call 'God', is to be sought first and foremost in the human heart. If we do not find him there, we shall not find him anywhere else. If we do find him there, we shall never lose him again; wherever we turn, we shall see his face. (p. 4)

Cozart (2010) speaks passionately about her own journey to reconcile her Christian spirituality within the Black Church with her role in the academy. I feel the same rending

she describes, recognizing the disconnect and disintegration that results from keeping parts of self separate and the call in my spirit to reconcile and to live whole, to stop the “self-marginalization by entering the discourse about spirituality and education” (p. 266). The integration and individuation of a unified self, which includes the merging of a personal and professional self, must also incorporate our religious and spiritual selves. When these parts of self are not integrated but kept separate, there is a “warping of the soul” (D. Benner, personal communication, September 23, 2018); it does us harm and to live in wholeness requires a reconciliation, a coming together to live in harmony; integrous; true to who we are.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Qualitative Introduction

There are two general approaches to research inquiry: quantitative and qualitative. I know this now, but I didn't always. Most of my post-secondary educational experience has revolved around both numbers and people so when I did my Master of Business Administration degree, the ability to combine these two utilizing a quantitative method in my final project was fun and exciting for me. Adding to my excitement was the opportunity to delve into a topic that I was passionate about, specifically how we treat each other. At the time I had no idea there was any other way to inquire about the research topic, quantitative was *the* way. Interestingly I always felt that I was only getting a very small part of the story. Sure, I could take the numbers that I had crunched, spout off percentages and compare and contrast people's responses by reducing them to hard figures. All this, I was assured, could then be applied to the general population, it was statistically significant, not to mention had reliability and validity; but what of the actual people and their individual stories?

It always sat with me uneasily, a partially completed painting, an unanswered and seemingly unanswerable question. It haunted me really, if I am honest. I thought of the stories that some wrote in the comments section of the survey and I pondered, wondering, wanting to plumb the depths of their experience, to sit with them as they told me their story, to connect with them in their pain and anger. Yet, this was not the way of quantitative inquiry. The implicit, and often explicit, assertion being that to leave self and story out of the research was the most valid form of knowledge acquisition (Pathak, 2010).

As Wall (2006) states “Traditional scientific approaches, still at play today, require researchers to minimize their selves, viewing self as a contaminant and attempting to transcend and deny it. The researcher ostensibly puts bias and subjectivity aside in the scientific research process by denying his or her identity.” (p. 2). It did seem like a denial to me, I was denying my inherent curiosity and my instinct that there was so much more; I had but scratched the surface. Then, I started this program and the eyes of my understanding flew open as I discovered that there was indeed another way. Qualitative inquiry was the key to filling in the missing part of the painting and adding the detail that was so sorely needed.

Qualitative inquiry, rather than attempting to be objective and separate from the research, acknowledges the researcher as part of the process and as such expects researchers to be critically reflective about their own values, attitudes, and beliefs as it relates to the subject to be researched as well as the participants involved in the study (Pitard, 2017). A form of qualitative inquiry that allows the researcher to also be the researched is autoethnography.

Autoethnography

Luvaas (2017) articulates my intuition of autoethnography and why it called to me as the method of choice for my thesis. He says, “Autoethnography is a research methodology that employs conscious *becoming* as a strategy for producing academic knowledge” (p. 1). In my case, I am in an educational program that is meant to produce counsellors and yet counselling flows from who the counsellor is, as a person, and as such cannot be reduced to a commodity; it is not a product, it is about relationship, process, personhood; it is a

becoming for the therapist as much as the client. As such, I felt that it deserved to be honoured, this process, this journey, and what better way to honour my family and community, my past and future clients as well as myself, than to find my voice and embark on an intense, very intentional journey of becoming as I progressed through the counselling program; and what better method than autoethnography?

Autoethnography and counselling have many things in common, not the least of which is ambiguity, reflexivity, being conscious of self, and anxiety (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Cho & Trent, 2006; Muncey, 2010; Skovholt & Starkey, 2010; Wall, 2008). Muncey (2010) alludes to this connection when she links the role of counsellor and the corresponding role of client, with the researcher as researched in autoethnography. She adds, “there is no distinction between doing research and living a life” (p. 3). Indeed, the lines of distinction blur and each role informs the other. McMillan and Ramirez (2016) do a beautiful job of demonstrating this cohesion in their co-constructed autoethnography of healing from trauma which they describe as “uncomfortably transformative” (p. 452).

Autoethnography is meant to be a blend and balance of self (auto), culture (ethno) and, research and writing (graphy) (Wall, 2006; Winkler, 2018). It is a weaving together of self and culture, theory and story (McMillan & Ramirez, 2016). In other words, it is representing a personal perspective within the context of culture around a specific topic of research. Muncey (2005) speaks of this method of research as a celebration of the individual story. Ultimately, I have chosen autoethnography as my method of choice for this thesis because I needed to allow my heart to be present (Ellis et al., 2008; Pelias, 2004); and I would say my spirit as well. I needed to heal, to be honest, and so it was necessary to

intentionally and consciously engage with the process of becoming a counsellor. There was this call within me to become more deeply human (Benner, 2011; Hoppes, 2014); a person, working on her stuff, and thereby to perhaps earn the privilege of accompanying others on their own healing journeys. I take seriously the adage that you can't take people any further than you are willing to go (Aponte & Kissil, 2014), this is true in counselling as well as the spiritual journey, and as such I felt this sojourn was imperative and autoethnography was the research method of best fit. Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis (2015), articulate it this way, "Autoethnography is a way of caring for the self. We often write to work something out for ourselves..." (p. 62). Denzin (2006) writes, "In writing from the heart, we learn how to love, to forgive, to heal, and to move forward." (p. 423). This beautifully describes the integrated autoethnographic journey of counselling and spirituality.

Autoethnography is disruptive. This process is and has been excruciating, the vulnerability is raw and I found myself having to dig into this courageous core that I am not always sure I have. The process itself, the inevitable offering of myself to others to judge and adjudicate has me full of fear and trepidation. This is autoethnography; it is like someone asking me to walk into a defence of my life – naked, where the risk of humiliation feels high and the messiness of life is exposed, and the person asking it of me, is me. I was heartened to find this same sentiment articulated by others (Ellis, 1999; Forber-Pratt, 2015; Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003). What am I thinking? Why would I put myself through this? I am living these questions right now, hoping an answer will emerge. I find solace in Hoppes' (2014) words:

Autoethnography is a kind of meditation that teaches us to sit comfortably with questions that have no answers and to meet ourselves with kindness and understanding, even when we are hurting, anxious, or afraid. Autoethnographers are invited to meet and accept their lives in all of their messiness, joy, and sorrow. (p. 70)

As I walked this autoethnographical journey and I found myself in the future, in the past, and in the present all within moments, seemingly the same moment, time converged, looping back on itself. My language in this thesis may at times reflect this. I am at once writing an autoethnography and living one, which ties deeply to the past, grounded in the present, with great hope for the future. This iterative process is what autoethnography is all about, we are not static people; we are ever evolving and growing, changing, morphing, going backward and forward, regressing and progressing, ascending and descending. The interplay of light and dark, playing in shadows, being attentive to my shadow, this is what autoethnography is for me. All of my experience and my hoped for experience, informs my now, and my job, my task and challenge in this journey, in this thesis, is to be in it, to live it, reflect on it within myself but then to somehow reflect it outwards as well, to share it and to connect with others through it. I offer myself to others in the hopes that they will reach back over the seeming chasm and reciprocate, to inform my understanding of myself and my experience, to connect with me and in knowing me, see themselves. I dream that the reader will relate, resonate with something, and express our interconnectedness, our oneness; individual and separate, yet communal and together. My hope is that in articulating my healing journey, there would be an explosion of recognition within myself,

that I would become very at home and accepting of who I am, that I would see myself, and at the same time, at minimum, that a spark of knowing would occur in the other, something, some flicker of recognition, that would alter and enhance their own knowing of themselves.

One of the features of autoethnography that distinguishes it from other forms of writing of self, such as autobiography, is that the researcher intentionally focuses on culture and the interactions, and implications of culture on the researched (self) (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography is a reciprocal process of “experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience.” (Ellis, 2007, p. 14). Culture in one’s life has multiple layers; it is “complex and multi-dimensional... a web of self and others” (Chang, 2008). Culture can include: family culture, the culture of different friend groups, work culture, school culture, societal culture, and spiritual or religious culture, but culture is not just ‘out there’. Culture is also ‘in here’. Chang (2008) articulates a non-dual view of culture that embraces the collective and group nature of culture and also the notion that culture is an individual and not solely a collective phenomenon, that “individuals are cultural agents....are not prisoners of culture” (p. 21). I have been attentive to this interplay, what I consider *my* culture as it relates to these various layers of external culture and what that means for me, some of this is implicitly shown and some explicitly stated.

Not the least of the questions that nag at my subconscious, briefly making an appearance here and there on the landscape of my mind, is: am I a self-indulgent narcissist or a self-reflective and vulnerable (courageous) life-long learner in search of wholeness?

(Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; Pathak, 2010; Winkler, 2018). The answer might be 'yes' to both but I'll leave it as an exercise to the reader to decide for yourself. I can only be where I am at any given moment and I believe this thesis reveals much about where I have been, where I ended up in the end while giving some clues of where I may venture in the future.

Evocative autoethnography. As I wrote this thesis I felt caught between the realm of the objective and the subjective, art and science, research and personal narrative. As I wrestled inside feeling that I had put too much of myself onto the page and should be utilizing more of others' research, I opened *Evocative Autoethnography* (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). There I found the liminality I was feeling; that a focus on writing in a purely social science perspective misses the in-betweenness that evocative autoethnography occupies as method; art and science, thinking and feeling, others' research and writing, and my story. I cannot remove myself from it and interact in pure objectivity, I am a "vulnerable observer" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 66); I am in it. Evocative autoethnography is vulnerable and intimate; it is an invitation to be known. The reader participates in this dance by their response, whatever that happens to be.

My mind returns to my MBA thesis and my grandfather's response after he read it. He said (in essence), "I have no idea what this means, no idea what you are talking about." My grandfather obtained two Masters and a Doctorate in his lifetime; it was the quantitative jargon that was the barrier. Therein lies one of the major drawbacks of quantitative inquiry, it can have the effect of separating people rather than bringing them together. Not so with qualitative inquiry, not so with autoethnography, and especially not

so with evocative autoethnography. My great hope is that the reader will have a very different reaction to this thesis, that evocative autoethnography will bridge the space between, and though my grandfather won't be able to read it and give me his feedback, I believe if he could, he would connect to my heart this time.

Ethical Concerns

Though autoethnography is primarily about self, our lives, my life, is inexorably linked with others, their world affects my world and vice-versa. Ellis (2007) speaks of three kinds of ethics: procedural ethics, situational ethics, and relational ethics. Procedural ethics is concerned with how to structure research at the start in order to ensure ethical processes, such as confidentiality, informed consent, privacy concerns, and protecting participants from harm. Situational ethics are the ethical considerations that arise in the course of research, those decisions that must be made on the fly, in the field, for the best of the people included in the research. Relational ethics pertains to the dynamics of relationship between the researcher and researched, and how relationships and people are depicted in our research.

An autoethnography is an interesting method as the researcher is the researched and attention must be paid to how one speaks of oneself for certain, but in addition, autoethnography is also about culture and culture is situated in community. This means that there are many relational connections with "intimate others" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4) that must also be given serious attention; therefore relational ethics are incredibly pertinent. In considering relational ethics, it is important to deeply ponder how to speak about and

represent those who I am in relationship with and would like to include in my research (Ellis et al., 2008).

How does one balance protection, care, and love for intimate others with the vulnerability and authenticity that is part of an autoethnography? The answer, I think, is: carefully; an embracing of paradox that is imperative for any good counsellor. I have, as much as possible, obscured the identity of those I include in my research by using general descriptions or roles rather than names, using composites, and by speaking indirectly. I have attempted to protect myself, and thereby those I love, by only sharing what I feel I am able and in a way that limits exposure. I have attempted to take differing perspectives, to consider how those who will show up in this thesis might feel and react to their inclusion. Some key traumatic events as well as discussion, expression, and communication of some of my closest relationships, have not been discussed or have been articulated creatively and in this I hope to convey the emotions without explicitly languaging anything too revealing.

Mainly, I have tried to speak my truth in a way that puts me in the place of responsibility. I have “interrogated” my own role and the motives I have for both the inclusion (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 150) and exclusion of particular parts, as well as *how* to include something I felt was necessary. My intent has been not to blame or rail (Ellis, 2007) but to inquire and discover my own journey as I looked back, all the while protecting and caring for those to whom I am in close relationship. At the end of the day, I need to be able to live with myself and those I love; I need to feel comfortable with my ethical decisions, however uncertain and messy to sort out, and to stand by what I have presented (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). This is a task I have taken very seriously. What I have found is that I write

very little in this thesis about my most intimate relationships, perhaps that is my way of keeping these close relationships private, sacred. Still, I believe that what is presented is authentic and vulnerable and true.

Research Process

How does one plan a becoming? I'm not sure it is possible to plan one, but I have found that I can be open to what comes up, to be intentional about my own healing, and to deeply desire to learn and grow. I can create optimal conditions, like taking a seed and combining it with earth and moisture and then exposing it all to sunlight. I can't make the seed sprout but I can create some conditions that would make it possible for that seed to become all the things that are in it already to become. When self is the seed, then the optimal ingredients include self-observation, self-reflection, and self-analysis (Chang, 2008). That has been my research process in a nutshell, to attempt to create optimal conditions from which my own personal growth can occur, to become what I have the potential in me to become.

My research process included capturing some of what happened over the period of time that I was in the program. I attempted to be self-aware throughout this process of data gathering and did my best to chronicle, in one way or another, what was going on for me so that I could process it not just in the moment but later as I reflected on it and worked through the data analysis portion of the thesis. The data gathering included the capturing of thoughts, feelings, experiences in the form of journals (Ellis, 1999) and various other creations over the course of the program. It included memories of the past and hopes for

the future, so that past, present and future were interweaving and playing off of each other creating a non-linear process; one that I hope has provided a rich account (Chang, 2008).

I have been periodically journaling since the start of the program in September of 2016 but in April 2017 I started in earnest to be more intentional at capturing aspects of my journey. I started several different journals that each focus on a key element of my growth. They include, among others: one for personal reflections, two for practicum (one for client sessions and another for supervision), one for spiritual development, and one that tracks significant dreams. I have continued to document, analyze, and reflect, expressing my feelings, thoughts, intuitions, and experiences across the pages of these journals right through the whole process.

As we are highly encouraged in the program to seek out our own therapy, I attended personal counseling and spiritual direction sessions and recorded these experiences as well. Though Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) found personal therapy ranked third in importance as a catalyst for growth amongst therapists of all experience levels, I found the experience of being the client very informative for me both personally and professionally at these crucial developmental stages. According to Prosek and Hurt (2014), a counseling student with few practicum hours, in their first year of study is a novice counsellor trainee, whereas an advanced counsellor trainee has at least a hundred practicum hours. This thesis tracks my progression from a novice counsellor trainee to an advanced counsellor trainee and the development of a counsellor professional identity along the way. It also implicitly highlights the congruence of my personal and professional identities. The research process is primarily meant to capture experience, emotion, thought, action, belief, and change as it relates to

my own view and experience of self. I have been keenly interested to see how my relationship with myself, others, and God has been impacted and how my worldview has changed through this process.

The data includes my reflexive journals and creative works but also includes dreams, prayers, scripture, and other aspects of my relationship with God, as well as other forms of data that were relevant and informed this journey of becoming. The research process was very much a dialogue with self, and an interplay between self, others, and God. It was an opportunity to experiment with creativity and play, and the data collected was an ongoing conversation and unveiling of a person continually in process. It represents snapshots in time, it is not all; how could it possibly be, but hopefully, it is enough.

Data Analysis

Chang (2008) provides some strategies for the analysis of data which include: looking for recurring patterns and themes including cultural themes, connecting the present with the past, spotting exceptional occurrences, and analyzing relationship with self and others. Following this advice, I took everything that I had written, created, produced, and experienced over the period that I was in the program and then read, coded, organized, and themed the data.

Specifically, I took all of my google docs and downloaded them to Word then I printed them all after putting page numbers and a header with the Journal title in each document. I realized after I printed them all that I really should have narrowed the margins to give myself more room for coding. There were over 220 pages of data, just from the journal entries.

I gathered coloured pens, pencils and highlighters; read up a bit on qualitative inquiry and coding to refresh my memory and to find some sort of path. None appeared, so I just dug in. I wondered about starting chronologically and reading along while eclectically coding as I went, which is pretty much what I did. This process was inductive and ambiguous. I decided to get a sense of the chronology of each journal so I arranged them all by rough chronology so I could see which journals were relevant for which time period. Turns out I had 22 different journals ranging in length from 1 page to 93 pages. I see that I started journals when I felt a particular topic or process (such as practicum) deserved its own focus. In actuality, it seems that I put a lot into the main personal journal but the other ones helped fill in some gaps. As I proceeded with data analysis, I also tried to capture my process as well as reactions; to reflect on what I was doing as I was doing it.

In my view, the data also included my perception of transformation or change as well as the ability to recognize it in the data. These informed each other. Some stories or experiences that I felt would be told, haven't been, and some stories that weren't even in my mind, resurfaced from the recesses of my memory and tied themselves to a theme I saw in the data. As I coded the data, I found many themes or threads as I like to call them. These threads help to make up the tapestry of the experience and the real transformative journey. I have taken these threads as they have presented themselves and I have woven with them. I hope these stories, painstakingly woven together, will be interesting and instructional for the reader.

I have continued to document and process my own reactions and interactions with the data and within myself in order to create somewhat of a feedback loop, a recursive

process that I believe has provided a deeper and more personally relevant experience than simply taking data and looking at it. I have continued to reflect and record my reflections as I work through the analysis as this is all part of the work, grist for the mill as Yalom (2002) would say. I have also continued to express my interaction with the data through creative works of various kinds, some of which have been included.

Evaluation of the Study

Qualitative research has long been the target of concerns as to the reliability and validity of this type of inquiry (Cho & Trent, 2006). Of course, these terms arise from a quantitative paradigm in which objectivity and lack of bias are seen as imperative.

Qualitative research must be measured by different means than quantitative research, since they are qualitatively different. In qualitative research, especially autoethnographic research, bias is expected and subjectivity is embraced (Ellis, 1999). It is understood that an individual perspective gives important and relevant information to inform a subject of research and by our very nature, we can only see part of the picture, we have a particular perspective and it is valuable; it is not all, not whole, it is partial and that is important (Ellis, 1999; Frankl, 1959/2006).

Forber-Pratt (2015) suggests a few ways to evaluate autoethnography in the form of questions, such as: does it make sense to me?; does it make sense to someone who knows me well?; does it make sense to someone who doesn't know me well?; and does it make sense to an academic? I appreciate these questions and it seems valid to evaluate my autoethnography utilizing them. Additionally, Ellis (1999) posits verisimilitude, the

believability of the writing or story put forth by the researcher as a substitute marker of validity. Chang (2011) aims for a “credible and evocative” account (p. 409).

In considering these perspectives then, first and foremost, this thesis must make sense to me, it must say what I am trying to convey and be true to my experience and perspective. Next, it must make sense to someone close to me, such as my husband or a friend. Some additional questions that might be tied to that viewpoint are: does it sound like me, congruent with who you know me to be?; does it ring true from what you know of me?; and do you recognize my truth contained within? The other two questions are covered within my committee and so I will look to them to tell me if it makes sense to them as some on the committee don’t know me well and yet all I consider to be academics.

Additionally, reflexivity is an essential characteristic of reliable and valid qualitative research (as well as a good counsellor) and it requires the reflection by the researcher on their own behaviours, thoughts, attitudes, emotions, assumptions, culture, and even their unconscious (Darawsheh, 2014; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Pitard (2017) provides a wonderful observation when she shares from her own autoethnographical experience that it, “requires for the researcher to take the time to be still, to listen to the internal dialogue and to probe for reactions that are stirred by experience with the data.” (p. 17).

Transformational validity is a method discussed in the literature, that relies upon the reflexivity of the researcher and the ways in which participant’s consciousness is increased and is liberated and empowered by the research for positive change (Cho & Trent, 2006). This will be an important aspect of valuation for me, the question being: has transformation taken place? In the end, the result of this thesis must be relevant not only

to me within my various cultural contexts but also to others within theirs. Transformation should be recognizable.

In that vein, considering my spiritual culture, the way I tend to evaluate positive change in my life is by observing how much I feel I have grown, as well as my felt sense in two areas: increasing measures of freedom and evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. I look for the work of God in my life by these two core Christian concepts for me. One is based on 2 Corinthians 3:17 (New International Version) which reads, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom”. For me, this means that when I am in touch with the Spirit, the evidence of the work of God in my life will be increasing measures of freedom which translates into interior freedom. I look for the marker of internal expansiveness and liberty to know that change and growth has occurred. I look for areas where I feel newly found interior freedom, where before I felt trapped, wounded, constricted, or helpless. The other is based on Galatians 5:22-23 (New International Version), “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” For this area, I look to see if I can detect increasing measure of any of these fruit in my life. Increasing in these qualities is a sign to me that the Spirit is at work and that I am in cooperation with that work. I may still have a lot of areas that are not showing these qualities, areas of stuckness, so I don’t ever look for perfection, this is impossible, but I look for movement, I look for positive growth and change. These will be important personal culturally and spiritually relevant growth markers and signs of transformation.

My becoming, my grounding in my identity and therefore my counsellor identity must be integrous, authentic, culturally relevant, and transformational for me and by extension, those I serve.

Summary

Much of this thesis contains the written word but also, as Kovach (2010) puts it, I have welcomed “the entrance of visual, symbolic, and metaphorical representations of a research design that mitigates the linearity of words alone” (p. 41). There are many different ways to tell a story (Ellis et al., 2008). I have played with form and content to find ways to express myself, some of which has been familiar and others brand new to me.

This thesis follows the progression of my development as a counsellor which has included personal development, professional development, and spiritual development, and has propelled me along the path of healing. The focus on becoming has caused my route to be more intentional and the method of autoethnography has both informed my maturation and brought the process to the fore. This thesis is meant to add to the qualitative body of knowledge of counsellor development for the individual as well as the integration of spirituality and religion in that process.

This thesis journey has contained creativity of many sorts: attempts at play and creative expression, knowledge creation, experiential learning, writing, and ultimately, I would say, becoming... the ultimate creative act. I have set out to tell stories of my life imbedded in layers of culture, but as Jung (1961/1989) so brilliantly stated, “I can only “tell stories”. Whether or not the stories are “true” is not my problem. The only question is whether what I tell is *my* fable, *my* truth.” (pg. 3).

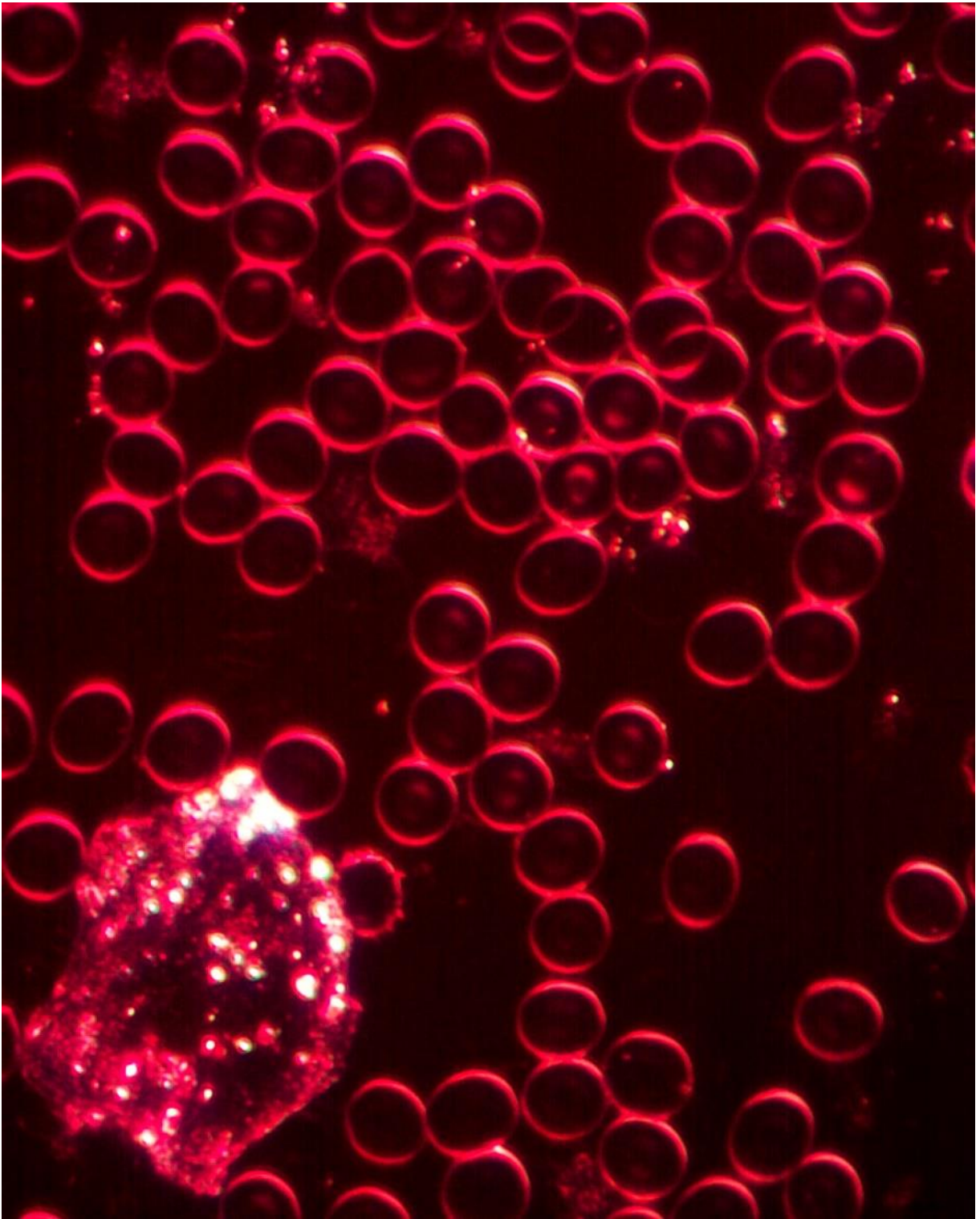


Figure 1. Inner Exploration

Chapter 4: Gestation

I am well into this process when I realize that I am trying to protect the reader. I want this to make sense to you so I try to explain too much. Maybe in that I am also trying to protect myself, wanting so much to be understood yet hoping that I haven't exposed too much. I hope you can appreciate that I can't be too overly concerned about you. I need to tell my story, my way. I remind myself that I can't rescue anyone or make them understand; I must leave that entirely up to you, dear reader. "In order to be understood by another person, it is necessary not only for the speaker to know how to speak but for the listener to know how to listen" (Gurdjieff, 2012, p. 7).

This chapter contains snapshots, moments of a life; it isn't necessarily linear or logical, neat, tidy, or rational, chronological or sequential. Some of these snapshots might be hard to appreciate if you engage only with your head. I ask you to engage with your heart as well, try not to judge it, and just allow it to be; a wonderful stance for a counsellor. I hope also that you find some internal resonance in these pages and a connection to me in these stories; my eyes flit around tentatively seeking a returned gaze.

So it starts

As I sit with my 'data' stacked around me, pages and pages of journaling, the thoughts, feelings, and dreams poured out over the past two years, I feel overwhelmed. What do I do with all this? How do I take it, all of this experience, and shape it into something meaningful for the reader? I turn to Christie's autoethnography (Wittig, 2013) and feel better instantly, thankful that someone has gone ahead of me. Just start Sage, just start.

Weeks later I continue to struggle. I read through, coding and theming, and then get caught up in a memory, a particular part of the journey, something specific that happened, and I write about it. After a while I stop and get back to the data and continue on but I am seeing that there are significant gaps in the data. I remember realizing as I went through that I didn't write when I was in the most pain. Those very painful times along the way are not the times that journaling helps or at least they aren't the times I turn to journaling as a resource to assuage my pain. For those times I need to rely on my memory and on my embodied experience to remind me. I still wonder how to do this.



Figure 2. A Start

What If....

The first portion of writing chronologically is a piece I called Surrender. I don't recall writing it but it is prescient. It is from June 2016 and serves as a prelude to my educational journey which started in September of that year. It is a foreshadowing of what is to come as well as a clear description of where I was at, at that time. As I read it, waves of chills sweep over me. I realize that it is a description of the journey I have taken. It lays out some of the important threads that the Master Weaver has been weaving with over the past two years (and more): mystery (unknowing), surrender, faith, brokenness (healing), and detachment. I started the journey with a prayer of surrender, knowing that I was stepping into a major transitional period but having no idea what it would actually look like. Only knowing that it was necessary and that I had a subtle inkling that God was trustworthy and would lead; one step at a time. The slow work of surrender – it can't be rushed and it can't be done according to somebody else's timeline.

Surrender, June 2016

What if God is good? What if God knows what I need far better than I do? What if He doesn't want a life of unfulfillment and drudgery for me? What if He has wonderful adventures for me wrapped in unlikely packages? What if I can trust Him?

Surrender is a hard concept in our society that honours the 'self-made man' (person) but it is a foundational tenet of my faith. I continue:

Surrender, June 2016

God uses everything. He uses the things he has taught me in the past to move me through the current wall. I feel stuck. It is an overwhelming feeling of stuckness and uncertainty about what I am to do and where exactly this is leading me. It is season of major transition and I can't see the path ahead. I must trust in the goodness of my God. There is doubt and uncertainty but God is good and his mercy endures forever.

Beginnings & endings

I walk into my very first class, Group Counselling, and all the chairs are arranged in a circle. Some of the seats are already filled with fellow classmates. I pick a chair, have a seat, put down my stuff, and slowly look about at the faces of those around me, smiling tentatively when I make eye contact with someone. I feel awkward and unsure; nervous, excited, and a bit overwhelmed; my stomach is churning. After what feels like an eternity, our prof comes in and has a seat. This class we will be learning about group counselling by being in a group, he explains. I love the idea, immersive education, learning by doing, sounds amazing to me... and also terrifying! At some point in the warm-up, he says something about someone being an accountant. I think he is talking about me but I say nothing. I find myself checking out, disassociating, off who knows where, and then coming back into the room. I'm self-conscious, wondering if he feels I shouldn't be here, if he has already made up his mind that I don't fit and that he doesn't like me.

The accountant. The problem is the title of accountant doesn't fit me. I never wanted to be an accountant. I went through the CMA program, purposely choosing the option that had the least to do with actual accounting, the one that focused on strategy and management, solving business problems; the fun stuff. It was a legitimacy move, I recognized later; the last great hurrah of my 30's desperately trying to get somewhere, to be someone, through all the wrong means. I graduated in 2012, the year I turned 40, just before my hysterectomy, seems fitting somehow.

Personal journal, April 11, 2017:

I never wanted to be an accountant and I don't feel like an accountant plus I don't actually want anyone to identify me as an accountant. Counsellor feels like an identity that can fit me and fit me well. Accountant never fit. This becoming is hard...

In the summer of 2017, mid-practicum, I hadn't paid my designation fees yet because they are pretty expensive and I wasn't working as I was doing a full-time practicum along with full-time school. I was unsure how I was going to afford them and whether I really wanted to. As if to penalize my indecision, they added an additional late fee onto my already unpayable bill and then I was really in a pickle. I called to enquire what I could do; they suggested applying for a reduction of fees since I was in school, so I did. It was approved but they wouldn't budge on the late fee citing that "it wouldn't be fair to everyone else". "Oh brother", I thought with a pretty fierce eye-roll, "how do they possibly judge one situation to another to determine 'fairness'?" The short answer is: they don't. It's a rigid rule that means nothing. I didn't pay and then they continued to nag me to send back my designation certificate; I finally did. I am no longer an accountant... not that I ever really was.

Personal Journal, July 9, 2017

I am giving up my CPA designation. It's time to give it up. I never wanted to be an accountant anyway. I know that taking that program, though I really enjoyed it, was a legitimacy play, for sure, no doubt about it. I never wanted to be an accountant, I am not an accountant. I always cringed a bit when people referred to me that way because it never had internal resonance with me. I guess it's time to let go of the old, the ill-fitting and the stuff I will never wear again. Still, I find it hard to let go of. I'm not sure why.

Order & chaos

I'm not a particularly neat or organized person, another solid reason for not being an accountant, but I do love bringing order out of chaos. I learned this about myself in the context of work. I found that I loved going into a place with dysfunction and disorder and bringing peace to it; getting it organized and working, flowing again. Kind of like a river blocked up and stagnating, then clearing away the debris and seeing life flow again. This, I love. Now, hire me to sit and make sure that river stays flowing and I have no interest. I'm not good at maintenance; routine kills me. It's a death knell. Which is why if you come to any place I live you will not find it impeccably spotless, maybe not even tidy (if I didn't know you were coming), because how boring. Life is messy. I've learned to accept that but it need not be chaotic. That is a different thing altogether.

Process Journal, October 17, 2017

I am reminded that God has used me numerous times in my life to bring order from chaos, to set up systems, to bring things back into a usable process for people and then once it gets to maintenance mode, I lose interest. I like to take all the random, chaotic pieces and get the system in place, organize it, bring peace to it and then hand it off for someone else to manage and refine.

I had the privilege of being with my sister in labour for two of her children. After the birth of her first she commented on the peace I carried in the room. This added to my knowledge of myself. A carrier of peace, ah, I like that. To me this is a gift from God; pretty cool and goes with bringing chaos into order. It surprised me because my nephew was born 4 days before I turned 40. My grandfather had passed away, after a somewhat rapid decline due to Alzheimer's, only a few weeks prior. My aunt, my mom, and I sat with him

bedside for hours upon hours in the days leading up to his death. I was really hurting inside at that time and felt a lot of internal chaos but somehow I was able to bring peace externally.

Growing up, life often felt chaotic. My mom and adoptive dad had a tumultuous relationship. My mom put up with a lot. She grew up in the home of an alcoholic and had me just before she turned 19. I was an unplanned, unwanted pregnancy; she wasn't at all convinced that she was going to keep me. I was born on a cold day in February in a hospital known for pressuring girls into giving up their babies. They whisked me away before my mom even saw me and put the boob binder on her - how archaic. At some point she decided she had to see me, and once she did she couldn't give me up. This is the story I have heard over the years. I have only recently really taken it in and started to believe it. As I was growing up, my mom would call me her rock. I supported her, helped her, was there for her; I brought her peace. There was plenty of chaos. It became my way, to be an all but invisible force attempting to bring calm; a pretty big load for a kid.

Fast forward to family counselling class and we have been arranged in families, and given counselling scenarios to practice with each other. Groups are having fun being the family, diving into their roles with gusto, fighting, arguing; leaving the group acting as counsellors to sort out what on earth to do with them. Since we had multiple people in a group, we would take turns being the counsellor. One day, we were counselling a mom and son along with the mom's mother, the grandma. They were arguing, it was escalating, as I sat back watching the mom and grandma arguing and fighting, I felt what it was to be that kid, stuck in the middle, with two important women in his life, fighting over him and just

wanting it to stop. When it was my turn to step in, I asked a question of the child about what it was like for him to see mom and grandma fighting - suddenly things shifted. I felt it, chaos had calmed ever so slightly; perspectives had reoriented. Amazing how even roleplaying scenarios feel real, the chaos, the empathy, compassion, and care can all be there. One of the people on my team commented on it, that I had stepped in and brought some peace to the situation. It felt good. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9, NIV).



Figure 3. Order & Chaos

Internal chaos. Although it isn't a requirement of the program, we are encouraged to find a counsellor and engage in the process of getting our own counselling. I dutifully obeyed. I felt it was important for me to feel what it is to be a client, to experience different counsellors' styles and techniques, to learn more about counselling by being in counselling. I might have also had a few things to work through.

Personal Journal, Feb 3, 2017

I had my counselling appointment yesterday and we talked a bit about congruence and transparency, authenticity. That was interesting; then he challenged me to talk personally in a bit of a roleplay around what I might say to a client and what they might say back. Then he seemed to push me to give more than I was willing to or even knew what to give. He asked me something and I answered very innocuously and he said 'what if I told you I was dissatisfied with the answer'. I found myself recoiling, not sure what that meant, what he wanted, what he was expecting. I felt simultaneously a pulling back as well as a sense of someone wanting me to jump through hoops and also, at the same time, a need to push away from, a sense that I didn't care what was being asked of me. I felt very vulnerable and could feel the pain welling up in me and I wanted to run away but I am too stubborn for that. I let myself talk about it a bit and I cried. I was aware that it struck something deep related to past trauma. I was in pain the rest of the day because of it, on the verge of tears. I have learned to hold my emotion pretty well and to stay fairly straight faced even when my eyes are swimming with tears. I am not sure what the pain is but it exhausted me to walk around all day like that. I had a nap in the afternoon, shortly after my session and then I went to bed shortly after getting home from my class. I lay in bed holding this pain; it was a big ball of pain sitting on my upper chest. As I held it and cried, it dissipated slightly but I can still feel the residue today. I don't know what to do with it.

I remember talking a lot about resistance in the first semester of the program. Now being the client, I didn't like that label. It seemed pretty judgy. Did my counsellor think I was resistant? Probably.

Resistance. Being in group was painful. I enjoyed the class itself but actually being in group – ugh! It was painful in that it brought up a lot for me: frustration, annoyance, boredom, anger, many, many unpleasant and what I deemed uncounsellor-like emotions. But also painful in that I really wanted to dig in and see what would happen if we took it seriously and yet there were those who clearly did not want to commit themselves to it.

Group Reflection Journal, Fall 2016

My goal of working on sharing my perspective especially when it might conflict with someone else's is in direct violation of our group norms. As a group we have decided, implicitly, that we will not work and we cannot accommodate differing perspectives. As long as the difference of viewpoint can be squelched, the group can carry on talking about the lighter things and pass the time until group is done.

This is mainly what brought up the warring emotions. I found myself irritated by those who would just talk on and on without saying anything, without exposing anything; surface fluff filling the air with drivel. Please.could.you.just.stop.talking! Say something real. I'm sure this is not how a counsellor should feel, or how one should think, and yet here I am thinking it and feeling it and berating myself for it. Proving yet again how not 'nice' I truly am.

So, since its group, I decide to speak up and say something, to share my perspective. This is far outside my comfort zone but if I want others to be real and genuinely enter the process, I reasoned, then shouldn't I as well? My face burns red and hot as I express what I am thinking and especially how I am feeling. It is so uncomfortable I'd like the floor to swallow me whole. It doesn't. Instead I sit there and deal with the aftermath.

Basics

Learning something new starts with the basics and builds from there.



Figure 4. Counsellor's Colour Wheel

Holding Space. My first practice with counselling was in our Interpersonal Counselling class, counselling each other. I learned so much about myself through that experience. I saw my judgment, how I hold myself apart from others, but also:

Interpersonal Self-Reflection, November 2016:

I knew that I was comfortable with silence but I learned that I love holding space for others. There is a difference between silence and intentionally holding space. It feels sacred to me to be with a person as they are processing something really hard, to be fully present and giving them a space to do that. It feels like physically, emotionally and spiritually creating a womb-like place of discovery.



Figure 5. Holding Space

Empathy. It was in practice class that we first had the opportunity to find outside clients, instead of classmates, to counsel. I found myself trying hard to just remember and live the basics which I considered: presence, empathy, immediacy, and silence. It was deeply impactful for me to practice counselling with a client and then to receive feedback about our taped sessions, but I was also very challenged by the inner work that was a necessary part of the process.

Personal Journal, Feb 3, 2017

This becoming is hard work. It is challenging and frightening and exhilarating all at once. I am exhausted much of the time from the constant state of churning going on in my inner being. I had supervision on Wednesday with (my professor). She indicated that I am perceptive... but that I need to soften my questions and use empathic highlights more. She says I need to come forward a bit in session and take some risks. I think I am ok with taking risks although I always feel a tension in that I know I can't really bring everything I think into the session and plunk it down because it isn't firstly about me, it is about the client and what serves the client. I do need to try some things in order to learn though. I have been careful with my voice, my voice has been silenced over the years and I have begun to reclaim it.

Our final assignment was an integration project to express what we had learned.

Personal Journal, April 5, 2017

I often think in terms of weaving, creating artwork by weaving threads together; I follow threads – threads of thought, emotion, unction. In thinking through the symbolism of weaving I thought of the warp and the weft, the yarns chosen, the texture, the weight, the colours, so many options. I was in the shower this morning and a line came to me: I am both the warp and the weaver. I got out of the shower and started to write and what came was a poem. I don't write poetry. I also did my first weaving project today. Who am I? What else is inside wanting to get out?

The Warp

I am both the warp and the weaver
 the structure, backbone
 clients come
 sit, talk, cry
 then
 they go
 feedback, wonder, discovery
 the weft begins to take its form
 texture, colour, technique
 weaving in and weaving out
 day to day
 embracing what comes
 a sliver of time
 changes me

Change. On March 31, 2017 I left a job that I had worked at for close to 10 years, an institution I had been part of for many more than that. It was the longest job I have ever had and I really enjoyed it, especially the last few years when some of the dysfunction had begun to be worked through. It takes courage and hard work to face dysfunction and to do something about it, and we had; the admin team, of which I was a part and the board, of which I was also a part. It takes a lot of courage. I was to find out that counselling and taking the inner journey also takes courage.

Practice

Starting my practicum was fun and exciting as well as extremely nerve wracking. I felt like my head was full of practical techniques that I had no idea how to use and my heart just wanted to connect with people. The anxiety and jumble of emotions over the first few weeks was intense.

Practicum Journal, April 2017:

"To move from the known role of the lay helper to the unknown role of the professional is a taxing task often acutely felt when the student is assigned the first client" (Ronnestad & Stovholt, 2003, p. 12)

As I continue to work on my thesis proposal, I look ahead to this afternoon and my practicum orientation. I am nervous. As I read this article the above quote jumps out at me and I know this is where I will be shortly. Anxiety will threaten to take over as I question whether I am really cut out for this. I am also excited and anticipate the great deal of growth and learning that I will acquire over the next several months.

Practicum Journal, April 2017:

I had my first day yesterday! It went so fast. I looked through my client files, then I started making phone calls. I was excited at first looking through the files and then I had an 'Oh Shit' moment thinking about actually meeting with people and thought, 'can I really do this', 'What if I suck?'

The next day I had my first client.

Practicum Journal, April 2017:

I saw my first client!!!! What a sweet person... I found there were times in session when I had no idea what to say but then reminded myself to stop working so hard and I would ask the client to expand a bit more on something (they had) said. I tried immediacy a few times which was ok.

I found myself thinking about my clients periodically throughout the day.... and night.

Practicum Journal, April 2017:

I was up in the night thinking about my clients. Tossing and turning thinking about where to go with them, what we should focus on next time in our sessions. Wondering what next week will bring in terms of clients. Should I book myself up sooner than later, will I be overwhelmed?

Within a few days, I was feeling passionately about my connection to counselling.

Practicum Journal, April 2017:

I didn't expect to feel this so early in the process but I feel like I was born for this, like I could do it all day every day and not get bored with it. I wonder how my feelings will change and grow over the next year. I feel like a counsellor. How will this identity change and morph and flourish over the rest of my practicum and training? I have found my passion, it kindles something in me that I have rarely felt in my life.

And then a client called to cancel....

Practicum Journal, May 2017:

Phew, feeling pretty vulnerable right now. I just had a client call to cancel (their) appointment, or so I thought but then (they) said (something that) tipped me off to the fact that (they weren't) just cancelling (the) session but that (they) didn't want to come back at all. Something about (the phrasing they used) really hit me and something in me panicked and I sort of froze, I couldn't think or process what to say next. So we just ended our call cordially but I would have really liked to process it with (them). (The) phrase kept swirling in my head and the first thing I thought was that somehow I had created an environment that was not friendly, or welcoming, or

what (they) needed. It was my fault. I was to blame. A wave of shame and doubt swept over me and I started to think back to our session. Did I do something, did I miss something, was I cold or uncaring? How had I failed (them)?

Then the more rational part comes forward and a conversation ensues:

Head: "it's ok if it wasn't a fit, maybe (they weren't) ready, maybe (they) need a different kind of counsellor."

Heart: "But what kind of counsellor do (they) need? Maybe I should be that kind of counsellor, maybe that is what I need to learn."

Critic: "You were probably cold and came across as uncaring. (They) need someone who actually gives a shit and shows it. That isn't you. What's wrong with you?"

Heart: "I do care and I thought we connected. I was looking forward to working with (them). It's a separation that hurts even though we only met one time. There is still an investment that I have made and it is disappointing not to see it through."

Head: "Yes, but you can't control people or make decisions for them. They get to decide what is good for them and why and when and how. It may have had little to do with you."

Critic: "Right, how could it have had little to do with you? There are only two of you in the room and the other person doesn't want to get into a room with you again. It clearly has something to do with you."

Heart: "Maybe I suck at being empathic. Am I just bad at this? How can I do better?"

Head: "(They) could have meant any number of things when (they) said that. It could have been too intense for (them). It could have been too vulnerable."

Critic: "Yah but (they) didn't try and let you off the hook on the call. (They) didn't say it wasn't you which (they) might of if it truly was just (them), if (they weren't) ready. (They) specifically referenced the environment."

Heart: "Did I come across as judgy or cold?"

Head: "I think we better watch the tape again and see what we missed"

All: "Ok"

Resilience. Practicum held many ups and downs but throughout:

Practicum Journal, June 2017:

I love my clients. They are amazing, brilliant, resilient people.

Silence & stillness

I sit here this morning looking out at the horizon, watching the sun rise, light exploding, revealing colour and shape, the clouds moving wistfully across the sky. I am in awe at creation. I have all these things in my heart to talk about but I don't know how. I don't know what to include and what not to include. I don't know how to convey the things that are in me. This is a common obstacle for me. I feel a great deal, there is always a lot going on inside, but an inability to express it. I turn my face, my heart, my mind, to God and ask what the day holds. There is this pull to abort the process; to turn my attention to something that will distract me from the discomfort of not knowing. There is always this option in a session with a client as well. The discomfort, the ambiguity, can distract and I can try to grab hold of something lesser in order to alleviate the building pressure to do something, rather than just be. I see this now as I sit here, lose yourself in your phone, watch a movie, read a book; distract yourself, do something, anything else, but just sit in Presence and wait. But I am in a rare moment where I recognize the call to distraction for what it is. This happens sometimes in session as well, a knowing that sitting in the awkwardness, sometimes in complete silence, is all that is needed. I am reminded of the meditation with which my spiritual director begins our sessions together, from Psalm 46:10:

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

Taking as much time as needed to pause and reflect, to center myself, to come back to myself and to God, she says each line slowly asking me to repeat it when I am ready. I spend some time here today, alone, yet never alone.

Elephants & apps

In August of 2017, I travelled with a group of friends to California for a women's conference. I faced some sobering truths about myself there. I went to the conference on the heels of a very full year. I had started a complete career transition with the M.Ed in Counselling program, taken 10 courses, worked part time, had a health scare, and made my way through half of my full time practicum. As if that wasn't quite enough, I had also left my job of close to 10 years, sold our home of 19 years, and moved into a multi-generational living arrangement with my mom, step-dad, and adult children – oh, and my dog died, all in the previous six months. It was a lot and I was tired. I had a few weeks off and I needed a rest. This was meant to be the start of it.

We drove from Prince George to Northern California across 3 days. I drove most of the way because I prefer to drive. The first full day of the conference I was feeling tired and sort of cynical; disconnected from everyone and everything, just kind of floating through the morning. The conference was being held in a large convention centre where there was both floor seating and stadium seating. We found some seats way at the top of the stadium seating where there was room to spread out and even lie down.

Wonder Journal, August 3, 2017

(One of our friends) was having a hard time in the late morning so (two of the women) left to minister to her taking my car. I felt trapped and stuck at lunch having so much time and nowhere to be. (One of the women) had started in making

personal comments towards me in the morning which also added to my funk and I was really wrestling with my feelings of frustration and anger and victimness and wondering why I am the one that doesn't get to have space to be. Why can't she just let me be who I am without commenting constantly or portraying me in some weird, distorted way to others. I find it really frustrating, cloistering! Then at lunch we were walking around and she said she was going to the fountain because she didn't want to listen to my complaining or something like that. I have no idea what she was talking about. I did not feel that I was complaining. By that point, I just needed some time alone. I really needed to be apart from her and HER negativity and painting me in a negative light constantly. I went and read and wrote for a while. I had this pain in my chest and it was like all the stuff from the past year came crashing down on me. I started to cry and cry and cry and kept on crying for the next three hours. I lied on the floor feeling sorry for myself. Feeling alone among a crowd of 2,000 women; feeling unseen and uncared for. Feeling that, of course, friends would go and minister to (our other friend) but no one would be there for me.

I knew this place of pain well. I have been here before many times. I know the terrain. Here was yet another layer. I remember feeling so exhausted and depleted, but also so very tired of feeling this way for so long in my life. I wanted it to be gone. I needed healing.

Wonder Journal, August 3, 2017

The hope and expectation I had in going to the conference was to get a revelation of Jesus. I looked for this and wrestled with it each day but this day specifically, I was seeking for healing in those deep parts of me that feel rejected and uncared for. I thought at one point that I wanted Jesus to heal the wounds and then thought 'no, it isn't even a wound, a wound would imply that there is something there in the first place. This was a missing piece. Something I've never had and yet desperately needed.' As I was on the floor, God told me I was an elephant and he gave me the impression of carrying a large load and having the capacity to carry a heavy load.

This didn't seem to be the inspirational pick-me-up that I had hoped for. An elephant God, really!?! What on earth does that even mean?

Wonder Journal, August 3, 2017 (continued)

I kept crying periodically throughout the evening but also trying not to be a total downer to others. I realized that my stomach was hard as a rock and hurting. (One of my friends) asked me why my stomach was hurting. It kind of confirmed what I thought, that no one had noticed that I was down for the count. She then asked how my afternoon was. I didn't know how to answer that. Then (another friend) asked me if I was enjoying the conference. Again, feeling that those around me were totally out of touch with what I was feeling, feeling unseen and unknown, I turned to Jesus.

I was asking him to fill those places in me that so desperately needed connection. I find that I dialogue with him a lot about people and how hurtful relationship is. It seems especially for me, I don't know why, but it feels that others judge me, criticize me or don't see me. This is old, old, old and I was tired of it. I was tired of the need, the unfulfilled need for connection, intimacy and relationship.

Wonder Journal, August 4, 2017

In the morning I talked with (a friend) a bit about how I'd been feeling and working through and I shared that I feel that people don't care about me. I shared the picture of the elephant and she said, 'didn't someone share something about elephants yesterday'?

It turned out another of our friends back home had shared an article on Facebook the day before and I hadn't seen it. It was one woman's account of elephant behaviour and how it related to her friends when she was going through depression (Hatmaker, 2018).

She tells this story:

A few months ago, I went down hard. I found myself at the absolute bottom, down in the sludge and muck where not even a ray of light could crack through the darkness. On a particularly awful day, my ride-or-die friend sent me a picture and a story. It was about female elephants, you know, as all good stories begin. See, in the wild, when a mama elephant is giving birth, all the other female elephants in the

herd back around her in formation. They close ranks so the delivering mama cannot even be seen in the middle. They stomp and kick up dirt and soil to throw attackers off the scent and basically act like a pack of fierce bodyguards.

They surround the mama and incoming baby in protection, sending a clear signal to predators that if they want to attack their friend while she is vulnerable, they'll have to get through forty tons of female aggression first. When the baby elephant is delivered, the sister elephants do two things: they kick sand or dirt over the newborn to protect its fragile skin from the sun, and then they all start trumpeting, a female celebration of new life, of sisterhood, of something beautiful being born in a harsh, wild world despite enemies and attackers and predators and odds.

She sent all this to me and said: *We have you. You are never alone.*

This story made me start crying all over again. THIS, I thought, this is what I want!

Why am I never the one in the middle being protected and cared for? Also, it felt terrifying to recognize how needy I was; I hated it. But also, God sees me as an elephant! How cool is that?!

Wonder Journal, August 4, 2017

Later in the day, I was dialoguing with God about my hurt with people. I got this picture of God pouring liquid gold into all the crevices and hurt places....he was filling up those places with his gold... those places are a goldmine. Those places of hurt and pain are treasuretroves.

Later, as I talked with friends a bit about my experience, they shared that this is a Japanese technique called Kintsugi, to repair broken pottery by filling up those places with lacquer mixed with gold powder. It is thought to honour each piece's unique history by emphasizing the fractures rather than hiding them. From this I took that God is healing me but also that he views those places of hurt and pain, vulnerability and brokenness, with tenderness and beauty, they aren't meant to be hidden away. When I got home weeks later, I continued to reflect:

Wonder Journal, August 28, 2017

Right now, I am in a space of feeling unseen and uncared for by others still. I know on one hand this is a terrible trap that can take me down and yet on the other, I am dialoguing with the Lord on it and trying to get some closure on it because I don't want it anymore. What starts going through my head when I am in this space are all the times that I am not cared for, specifically those times where I see others being seen and cared for so I know it happens, it just doesn't happen to me. I feel like I need to be strong. If I am vulnerable, I am judged or criticized or ignored or people just freeze (which is a kind of ignoring) and don't acknowledge what I've said or what I feel.... There are things I need to ask for. There are those who reach out and ask for help and receive it. I don't generally ask for help and so don't generally receive it..... I also don't like to feel that I am so self-absorbed and needy and insecure and feeling sorry for myself that I need everyone to stop what they are doing and focus on me. That seems hugely unfair for me to ask, though I don't at all feel that way when others ask for help. I feel honoured that they have asked me, so why do I feel like there is something wrong with me if I ask for help? Because I am still a commodity, I am an app - I can help but I can't ask for help.

Feelings & Emotions

Jung told me that his work as a healer did not take wing, the metaphor is mine, until he realized that the key to the human personality was its story. Every human being at core, he held, had a unique story and no man could discover his greatest meaning unless he lived and, as it were, grew his own story. Should he lose his story or fail to live it, he lost his meaning, became disoriented, the collective fodder of tyrants and despots and ended up, as so many did, alienated and out of their minds... (Van der Post & Taylor, 1984, p. 138)

Fundamentally flawed. Over the course of the past two years, I have come face to face with my sense of being fatally and fundamentally flawed... over and over again.

Personal Journal, Feb 3, 2017

I have found myself wondering why I approach the world as if I will be rejected and disdained. I have always felt that I was just wrong, that my essence is wrong which leads to feelings of not belonging, of being rejected and abandoned.

Personal Journal, Dec 3, 2017

Thinking about myself and my relationships and this fatally flawed feeling I walk around with. I asked Jesus if this was something he could heal. It seemed like an odd question but I had to ask it all the same. I got an impression and then a picture of a foundation with a structural crack in it that rendered it unable to be built on. This is how I feel. Is my foundation, the core of who I am so unsound that others cannot see anything in me, don't want to pursue me or care for me or be friends with me because I am just that flawed. I am tired of feeling this way.

This is a sense that I have carried with me my whole life. I have worked on healing this rift in the fabric of my being and I have found that healing happens in layers over time, going ever deeper with each successive layer to heal different facets until it is (hopefully) resolved.

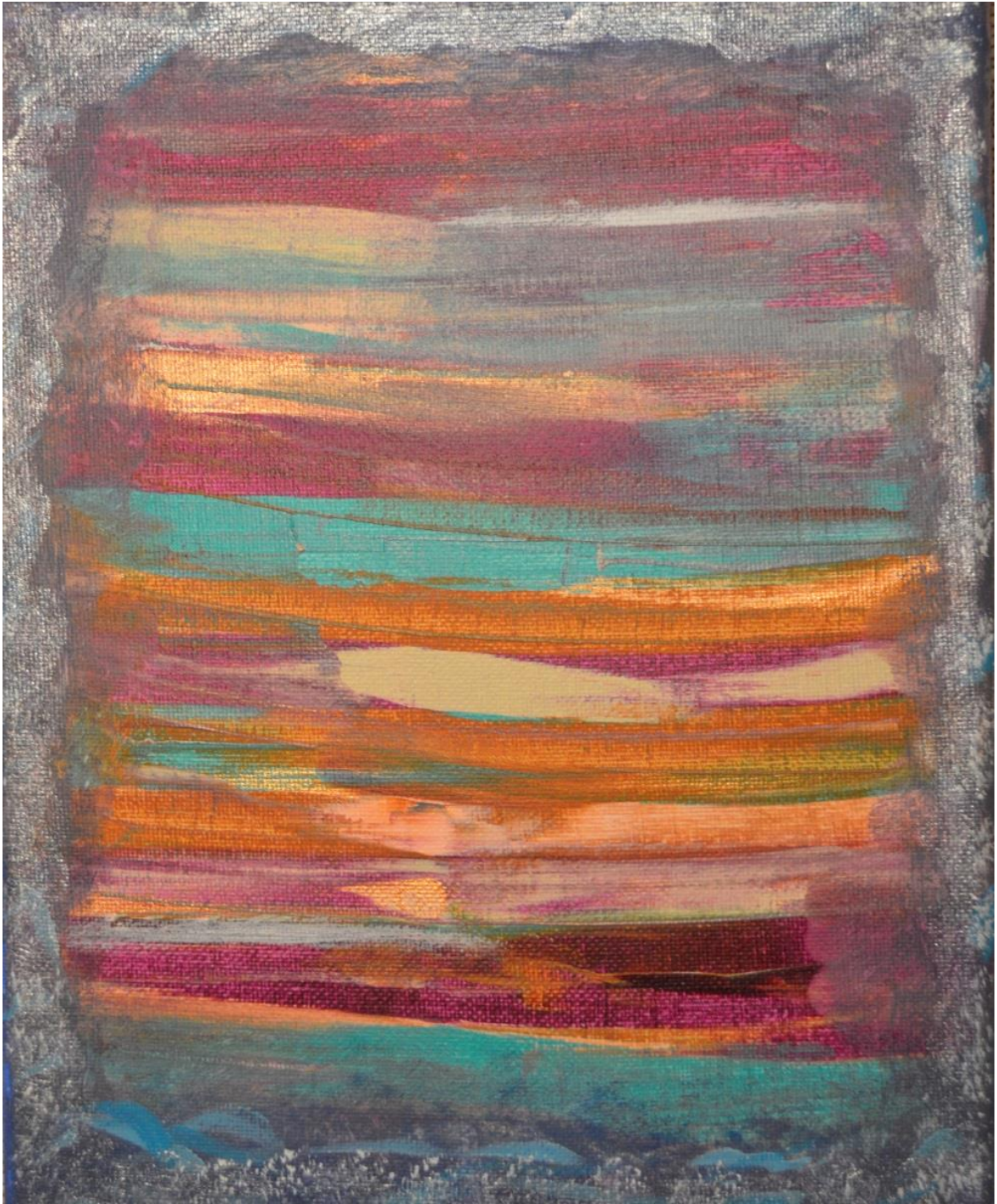


Figure 6. Layers

Humiliation. Humiliation was a strong theme during the spring of 2017 as I dove further to sort out this internal sense of being irrevocably flawed. I started to attend counselling again in May, with a different counsellor, because I was taking Trauma and I knew I would need some support; humiliation was a topic of discussion. As I look back I see clues in a dream that I had in March, signs of my unconscious and the Spirit at work.

Dream Journal, March 11, 2017

...this girl got arrested. I witnessed the arrest and I was invested in her in some way and I was mad at how the arrest went down. They arrested her in a sorority or fraternity house and people were making fun of her. There was an element of injustice as well in her being arrested at all but I was so mad at the whole situation. As I walked out of the fraternity house ahead of her, there were a bunch of police detectives (plain clothes) standing there clapping. I fingered them with both hands and said 'You guys are fucking idiots... all of you' and walked on through them and kept walking down the street.

I love this dream. As I read through my journals and connect this dream to what I was processing a few months later, I see that this is a part of who I am; a fighter. I love this part of myself, this part that hates injustice and will stick up for people. The part that warns others not to dare mess with those I love. What I didn't see until just now is that I could also be one of those people that I love and stick up for.

The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based up on the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections....The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. (Herman, 1992/2015, p. 133)

These excerpts from my journal helped to fit the pieces together for me:

Personal Journal, June 2, 2017

I have been circling this emotion for a while, trying to sort out what the fear is... the fear is actually a fear of humiliation. Humiliation is such an awful emotion, I will do anything to steer clear of it. I will not speak, I will not go to certain functions, not engage in conversation, not do a lot of things, to avoid the searing hot sting and pain of humiliation. Humiliation says "You are an idiot, you don't get it, you are wrong, you are not acceptable". Humiliation is dark and ugly and passes judgement on your worth as a human being. Humiliation, even the word itself; long and drawn out, 5 syllables to reinforce the power that it has. As van der Kolk (2014) says "we all know what happens when we feel humiliated: we put all our energy into protecting ourselves, developing whatever survival strategies we can". I developed survival strategies because I felt that sting of humiliation many times growing up and I hated it. It is awful! So, I learned to hide, and also to have a very tough exterior where it seemed that nothing rattled me. If I could learn to befriend humiliation, I would have much more freedom in life. How does one befriend humiliation?

Personal Counselling Sessions Journal, June 6, 2017

Had another session today; we talked about humiliation. She asked whether I had taken on other people's humiliation. I think I did. I think I have felt humiliated and have taken on other people's humiliation. I think I am afraid to speak sometimes because I am both afraid of being humiliated and afraid to humiliate. I hate injustice and I get angry at bullying and humiliating actions on the part of others attempting to humiliate. She pointed out that the humiliation piece seems much deeper than just mine. I seem to hold humiliation for others, even strangers. I feel the embarrassment and humiliation for other people. I want to advocate for them. I need to pay attention to what is mine and what is others. I can't be a container for other's emotions. I need to put it down. I need to notice my own emotions and own when they are mine and then figure out what to do with them and when they are others, put them down somehow.

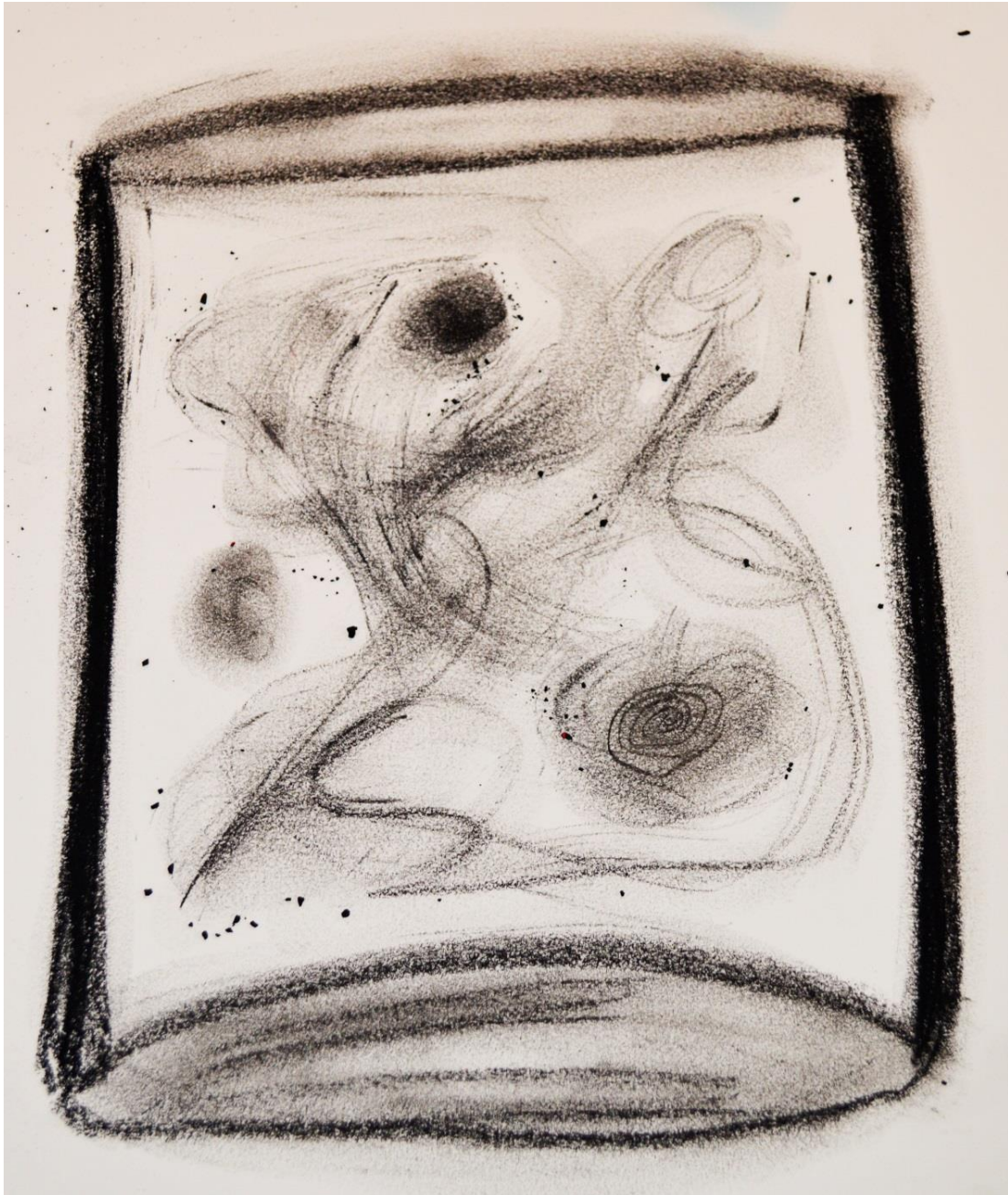


Figure 7. Holder of Humiliation

Shame. I have carried shame my entire life. I seem to have been born with it, this sense of being wrong, fundamentally flawed, like the essence of who I am is somehow not right. This is a tough thing to shake, it is so ingrained, like yeast mixed through dough, how does one go about extracting it again once it is mixed in?

“Shame is a response to helplessness, the violation of bodily integrity, and the indignity suffered in the eyes of another person.” (Herman, 1992/2015, p. 53). Shame is truly insidious. It creeps in there, into the deepest recesses of our being, imbeds itself, and is incredibly difficult to extricate. If I was left to my own devices, I would have lived with it until the day I die, I’m sure - but I am not alone. A dream helped me to look shame squarely in the face and feel the full force of its fury in my body.

Dream Journal, October 11, 2018

We were in this room with a bunch of people in a circle. This guy was facilitating and he was going around and when he stood by you, you had to do some sort of physical representation of how you felt, or how you were at that moment. He did a bunch of other people and then came to this little lady who had been really quiet up until then and she did this really exciting whooping and some physical dance to show it and everyone whooped and hollered and cheered her on. Just before she went I remember thinking about what I should do and I thought I would do an exciting, running on the spot, like an exaggerated arms, legs thing where I whooped and after this lady went I was like, ‘oh great, now it’s going to look like I copied her if I do it the way I want’, even though what I had in my mind was not the same as hers, it just had the same kind of excitement. So, I waited to see where the guy would go next because there were a few people left to go and of course he came and stood by me. Inside I was like, “ugh” but I went ahead and stood up and did what I was wanting to do but I was so self-conscious about it all that the whole time I was thinking about what people were thinking and what the lady was thinking and very cognizant that they weren’t whooping and hollering for me and wondering how I end this thing and it all felt so humiliating that mid-expression, I started to wake up and realize how my deep sense of shame at who I am, and the expression of who I am, completely shut down any outward expression of what was going on inside. I had wanted to express this excitement and sort of in a tie in to like a Superstar (the movie) thing, but couldn’t get it out the way I wanted and (I was) pretty sure nobody was going to care anyway. This sense that nobody was engaged with me, felt deeply humiliating. In fact I was sure they were dissing me in their minds. This whole thing happened over seconds and because I came awake during it, it seems my unconscious, Holy Spirit perhaps, wants me to see how deeply embedded this fear of humiliation is in me that

it completely shuts down expressiveness, the outward expression of who I am or how I am, or really anything about me before it can even be expressed fully. It is like I start to put it out there and then I self-implode and turn back in on myself and disappear.

This dream is one of the most visceral dreams I have had in my life. I felt the shame and humiliation so strongly and in that one dream, I could see how I operate in the world, the constant comparison, the exhausting hypervigilance, the falling short time and again. For me, it was an invitation to wake up, literally, but also in life, to come awake to my own ways that hold me back.



Figure 8. Shame

Sticky wounds. I have grown in sitting with my emotions, in seeing them and allowing them, recognizing them, and being curious about them rather than judging them, pushing them aside or stuffing them inside. But I have had to learn not to be completely absorbed in them as well.

Personal journal, May 7, 2018

Being ignored and invisible, not considered, is really a shitty feeling. I tried to notice this and yet not take it in to myself but let it be and then pass again. That is hard because it tries to attach to old wounds. That is interesting. Feelings are sticky. They are attractive, they try to stick and are pulled to those areas of woundedness that they relate to, making the wound fester rather than heal. It is food for the festering wound, it prolongs it. The wound starved of food and properly tended will eventually heal but the wound fed, only gets worse.

Retreat Journal, May 10, 2018

I never write in the midst of my pain, I probably should but I don't. Yesterday did not go as planned. I was feeling very insignificant and unseen. I felt ignored and unimportant, like I didn't matter. This felt very deep for me and familiar. I can often go through my days and not get overwhelmed by it but some days it sweeps me under and pulls me into its tide. It feels like a rip in the fabric of who I am and it is always there. I don't know what to do to affect any change. I do continue on, I do, every day, it's just that on those particular days, it knocks me to the ground and wipes my feet from under me and I am dazed and in pain, overwhelmed by it. Overwhelmed by the feeling of wrongness.

I recognized (my husband) as this big gift to me, my paradise. "I don't want to miss paradise", (Penny, 2010/2017), me either Louise Penny. I want to recognize the gifts in my life, my husband, my kids, my granddaughter, people who I love and sometimes I am reasonably sure love me....

Then my thoughts turned this morning to how self-absorbed my way of thinking was. It was so much based on responding to what I think other people are thinking or feeling about me, rather than being towards them in a way that is loving and caring, that shows they matter, belong and are important. What is that saying?... 'it's hard to give what you don't have'.... but perhaps not impossible. Maybe, just maybe, I should start to turn towards people in a way that I want them

to turn towards me and maybe in that I will see some change in me, some becoming that is becoming.

Wounds seem to be magnets that pull from the environment the data they need to self-exist, to continue to fester. So, for instance, this existential wound of I don't belong, I am on the outside, I don't matter (likely more than one wound there), something happens, I make a comment, share a story, a part of my experience, and there is no response, no connection, resonance or acknowledgement - I feel ignored; then someone else says something and there is this beautiful, heartfelt response and I long, deeply long to be seen, to be wanted and connected to, to be heard, to know that my experience matters, and I compare and am envious....and that then gets sucked into the void of this wound chasm and becomes more proof and further groundedness for the sense of being alone in the world, and on the outside, not fitting, not belonging, something is missing, I will never know what, but I will be on the outside forevermore.... and the wound, if not gets deeper, then perhaps is exposed and oozes and gains a bit more power.

Belonging. Others fit, others belong; I do not. This seems to be an overarching theme of my life. I see it everywhere and in most situations. I am ever on the lookout for indications of my belongingness or lack thereof. Observing, seeking interactions to feel, to know inside, not intellectually, that I am accepted and understood just as I am. The problem is that what I mostly see is the evidence of my outsider-ness. It doesn't matter if I am with friends, family, or strangers, the internal sense of my lack of belonging, of not being known, is palpable, it haunts me.

Personal Journal, November 14, 2018

I've noticed how I think through how someone is going to react before I say something. I think to some extent this is wisdom but it is also this sensing and neurocepting of the environment to see where the danger lurks. The danger is rejection, ostracization from the group, it's about survival. If I am made fun of, or wrong, then maybe I will be shunned, and put out of community and then what? This primitive need to be included and accepted was damaged way early on. I got the message really clearly that I was not a part of the tribe, and so I am always on alert, always in a type of hyper and yet hypo alertness, wanting to stay vigilant yet not

wanting to be obtrusive and noticed, to hide so that I don't draw attention to myself but on the lookout for danger, nonetheless.

I see that I pull away. I recognize it as my way of protecting myself but it might also be a test. A test to see if anyone will care, if anyone will seek me out, come find me, want to engage with me. When I put out what I think, what I feel, what I am experiencing and get corrections and admonishments, it creates a sense of disconnect. I feel unknown, unseen, like I am being pushed aside, as if what I think and feel, the way I experience the world doesn't matter. There seems to always be someone ready to tell me how I should do it differently, how I don't fit, how I am wrong, how I need to improve and be better in order to be acceptable.

Personal Journal, November 14, 2018

It seems that I am wrong no matter what I do. If I remain silent and listen, taking in others, I am too silent, too distant, too arrogant. When I share then I am sharing too much, being too self-revealing. If I learn, I am learning too much, trying to understand, trying too hard. If I don't, then I am unlearned, I should really do more. If I feel and show emotion, it is too much, if I don't, it is too little. If I have degrees, I have too many of them, if I don't, I am ignorant. If I show my feelings, frustration, I am bitter, if I don't, I am not human. Never do I feel just accepted as I am.

This lack of attunement affects me every day. Always looking outside myself for resonance, for acceptance, and only ever getting it in tiny little droplets, so that I feel like a parched desert traveller sucking the moisture from the leaf of any plant that is happened upon, never enough, certainly not enough to satiate, to satisfy the craving, the deep need for me. It seems dubious to look to people for this but how else does it become healed? I look to God and that has healed much but don't I also need to be connected to others in authentic ways? Never enough and always too much....

I see my cognitive distortions. I see my drawing back, my fear; my looking for any excuse to hide. At the same time I want so desperately to connect deeply with others.

Then it occurs to me that I am abandoning others. I pull away and abandon other people because of my sense of not belonging; this cycle of disconnection is one that I perpetuate. I want to turn my back and brood. I want to be self-indulgent and lick my wounds, by myself, all alone in the world. My way out may be to turn outward instead, the exact opposite of what I want to do, and recognize that not everything is about me, probably very little is about me. When I am in a healthy space I see this very clearly but as I sink into the quagmire of self-doubt and self-pity, it pulls me under as quicksand. I forget what I have learned. I forget that others probably don't do and say things with purposeful intent to put me down, to criticize me, and to condemn me, and even if they do, it isn't about me, it's about them. Stay curious.

Abandonment.

Personal Counselling sessions journal, May 11, 2017

Started counselling again today... I went in ready to talk about empathy and my own growth and need to express emotion to and with other people. I started crying pretty much right out of the gate. It felt good to sit with the emotion with her. There was a lot of fear coming up and I am not sure what it all is about but some of it is fear of abandonment - that if I allow others to see my vulnerability, I will be abandoned, it will be too much for them. This sense that I can't burden others with my stuff. At one point I was feeling really raw and crying and had this strong sensation that I needed to bolt and get alone to process it. It is very difficult to process with other people... it is very difficult to be with others when I am in an emotionally vulnerable state. Some of it is also that sense that 'emotion is manipulation' - this lie came from somewhere. I know (a family member) has expressed it to me. I remember being very emotional in our early married years and crying, I would try to get alone but we lived in a studio apartment so nowhere to go - I would go into the bathroom. I remember one time, she said something that left me with the impression that being sad or crying was manipulative.

I find myself tempted, often without knowing it, to enter into others' perspectives and orient myself to another's view, abandoning my own. In doing this, I have realized through these past few years, I abandon myself. Taking on others' perspectives, seeing the world through another's eyes (as much as I can imagine) can be a good thing; walking a mile in another's shoes, as it were. But, and it is a big but, if my own orientation shifts from what is truly me, to become what someone else imagines me to be, rather than who I truly am, I have ceased from my own path and lost my way.

Personal Counselling sessions journal, May 23, 2017

In my counselling session today, we got a little more clarity around the fear and where the fear comes from. It comes somewhat from the fear of not being seen or understood, of not being able to repair things or process things or resolve issues. I like to resolve things, I have a need to feel understood. I just want my needs met. Our needs sometimes involve other people and it is vulnerable to put our needs out there for someone else because the risk is that they won't meet the need but further the risk is that the need itself will be ridiculed and my vulnerability will be turned around as a weapon on me. I am afraid of ridicule. I realized this as I was heading out to my car after our session. I am afraid of ridicule. I was ridiculed a lot growing up. I think I learned to only put the safe things out there for others to judge. I don't talk about my faith much. It is so integral to who I am that putting that out there for others to judge and ridicule is like putting myself out there to be mocked and whipped and beaten. It's like putting out an offering of myself - what if it is rejected? What would it mean if it was rejected?

Personal journal, April 11, 2017:

I am realizing that I put my own thoughts and needs on the back burner in order to take into consideration other people's perspectives. I don't step forward; I stay quiet, hidden, in the background. I assume that putting my own thoughts and viewpoints out there will not be met with acceptance and kindness. I expect judgment and derision....

Derision

being mocked
laughed at
ridiculed
the bulls eye of fear
sweet and bitter
vulnerable opportunities await
terror sets in
pulling back
she hides
never to be
seen
again

Personal journal continued, April 11, 2017:

... and so I put myself aside for others and while this can be noble, it is also self-erasing. I cannot continue to obliterate myself. What I want matters, what I feel matters, what I think matters and what I sense matters. My preferences matter, my instinct matters, my passions matter.

I also realize that by doing this I present to other people a false front..... I feel badly about presenting a false front. I feel disingenuous and I feel that I am not being true to me. Ick. I don't like this feeling. I feel kind of sick to my stomach. Honesty is important to me and yet here I am being dishonest. I hate hypocrisy and yet here I am being hypocritical. The three fingers pointed back at me accuse me, and they are right, of course.

This issue of abandoning myself has been a strong theme throughout the past few years. It showed up for me in class as we had discussions that I did not engage with wholly because I had already sorted out what the reaction would be to my thoughts and so most often remained silent. The challenge for me as I progressed on this autoethnographic journey was not to lose myself and get sidetracked by what others might want to know, or what others want me to answer but to give an honest and wholehearted account of parts of my journey. This is a deeply emotional, fearful, and difficult thing; but it is a homecoming. I am coming home to myself.

Self-acceptance. I had a dream on Valentine's Day (2017) in which I had an autistic son. I sing him a song of such sweetness, simplicity, intimacy, and love. As I look back on it, having learned a bit more about dream interpretation from a Jungian perspective (Johnson, 1986), I realize that I need to ask which part of me is this son, this autistic child? This part of me that feels incompetent and unlike those around me, not neurotypical, that wants only to be attuned to, accepted, and loved for exactly who he is. Perhaps it represents the lost masculine, the denied tenderness of the archetypal poet, the male romantic part (Hudson, 2016); a ballad of self-acceptance.

Dream Journal, February 14, 2017:

I gave him a hug and started to sing to him. I sang 'I love you, I love you, I love you...oh how I love you; I love you, I love you, I love you...oh how I love you'. And I kept singing it to him over and over and he started humming and sort of singing it back and we just sat there cuddling and singing. Then I woke up.

Ego

I am curious about a great many things, but mostly about us as human beings and what makes us tick. I am into human thriving and transformation. Recently I have gotten really into concepts attributed to Jung, learning about ego and shadow, persona, dream interpretation, the collective unconscious. I took to it; something in it hit some deep places in me.

As I walk through my day, I attempt to be self-aware. I observe myself and wonder why I do what I do. I have always been like this but my awareness of self was much more self-conscious and critical than curious in the past. An understanding of ego and shadow has helped me.

The ego wants to feel important so it bolsters itself with all manner of things to aid in this task. It will reach for things that society or culture tells us are important, things that make us feel important: money, fame, success, approval, position, power, knowledge, possessions, to name a few; anything that helps puff itself up in self-importance. The shadow contains all the stuff we can't or don't want to acknowledge about ourselves, the repressed negative aspects of self but also the positive aspects, the gold (Johnson, 1991). Sometimes it is those positive aspects of self that are the hardest to acknowledge and carry.

As I ponder the journey over the course of the past few years, I see a common thread of letting go of old patterns and owning my shadow, the negative for sure but also the positive, and the ways that keep me in ego, rather than Love.

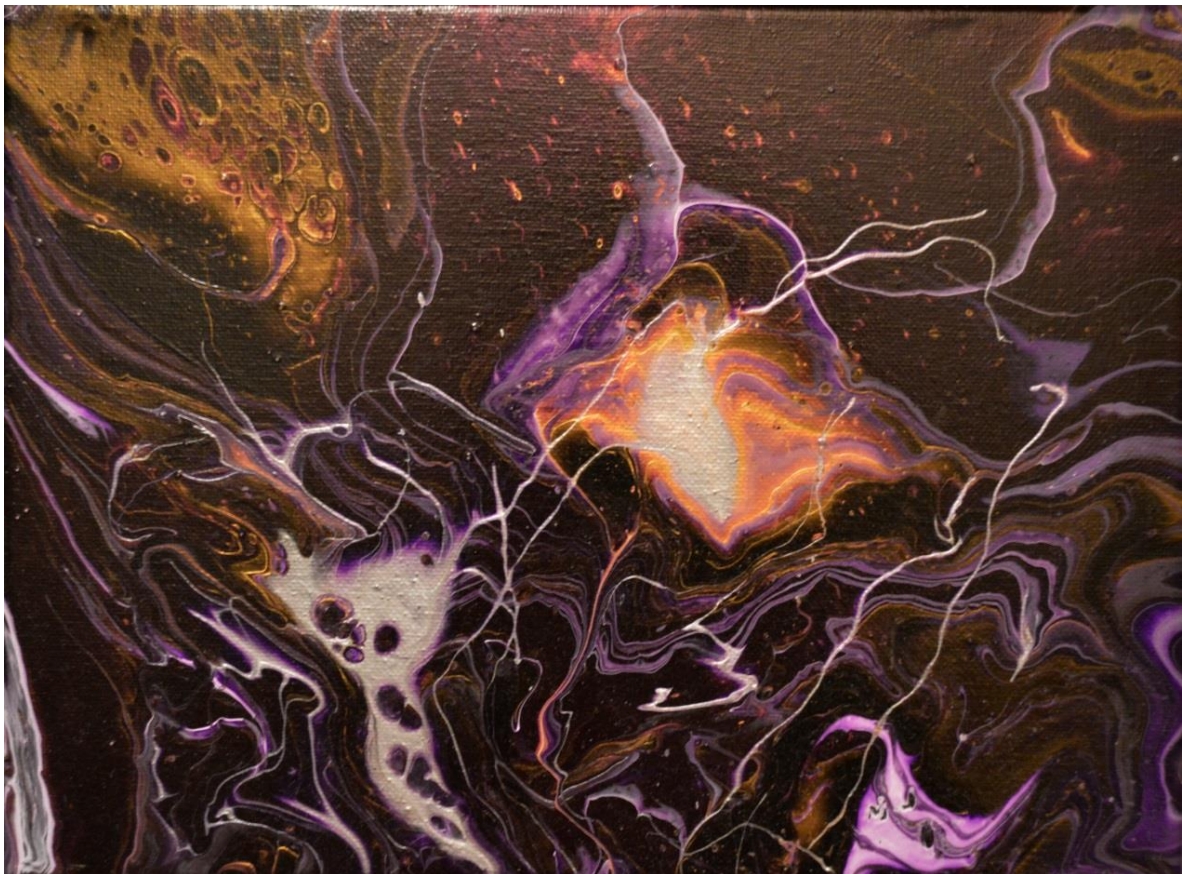


Figure 9. Shadow

Kenosis. One of the recurring ditches that I find myself falling into centres on two thoughts, 'what is wrong with me' and 'what is the point of me'. These thoughts can take me down a gyre of despair. They lead me to think that everything is wrong with me and there is no point or purpose for my existence. They have led me to think of suicide on many occasions throughout my life. My first counsellor asked if I ever had thoughts of suicide during the initial intake. I lied, said no. I thought it would be easier that way. Clients lie, it's true.

My thinking on this sense of despair, my feeling on it really, was revolutionized one day last year when I was reading *Healing the Soul Wound* (Duran, 2006) for my Counselling for Indigenous Peoples class. In it he talks of that sense in us as a need for transformation, for *something* to die. We confuse it, as we do with many things, by making it a totality when it is just a part of us. We replace the symbolic with the literal. There is something in us crying out for transformation, death and resurrection; new life. I have since seen similar language attributed to Jung. It strikes me that this is the way of Jesus. This is the mind of Christ. Many would say that thoughts of suicide are a very unChristian thing, but they might actually be very Christlike, if we only understood them as a call to kenosis, self-emptying; a deeply spiritual matter.



Figure 10. Kenosis

Defenses. I began to recognize my need to learn as a product of ego and a defense against living; a way to not be present to myself or others. I feel God calling me to a fast.

Personal Journal, November 11, 2018:

I am starting my fast today. A fast from reading and learning. I will need to find my way in this and feel what constitutes learning, this reaching for more understanding rather than to sit in the unknowing. This unknowing is uncomfortable. Do I reach for a book when I feel this sense of being uncomfortable or bored or unsure? Yes, I think I do. It is an impulse, it is an imbedded, automatic response. The impulse to reach for more understanding and knowledge, is so deeply entrenched. What will it take to

shake it loose, to look for other ways of being, to just be. This week is a start; I have already felt the inner quaking of how things have been.

*my interior quakes
mineral embedded in rock
the dark feminine
bids me come
to be crushed*

*with lotus bowl in hand
she mops the blood from my brow
life from death
Jesus knocks
releasing treasure*

So I write the above poem but it is unfinished, I can feel that. Inside I want it completed, done, tidy, and finished. Yet it isn't and that is ok. It feels like a bit of a failure to be in process. Where is a good book I can hide my head and heart in, so that I don't have to face this?

Supervision

As I progressed through practicum and experienced the individual supervision provided as well as the group clinical supervision, I discovered this place of starvation inside that craved feedback. I needed to see myself through another's eyes. I especially needed to see the strengths, the good things that were noticed in me. The areas for improvement are always helpful but the strengths are of great value. I found myself having to learn to take in the positive, to really hold it, and not to gloss over it in favour of recalling my many defects. This was a process that I see clearly began at my farewell party at work in March.

Personal Journal, March 31, 2017

I left my job today. The longest job I've ever had, 9 years; feels surreal. They had a farewell party for me yesterday. Nice things were said. Some words that stand out:

Wisdom, Strong, Respect. Many people spoke, many more did not and I found myself on the drive home being teased to focus on the voices that didn't speak up rather than to savour those that did. I turned away from the voice of dissent and derision and instead let the words of my colleagues sink in. The image that was created by the words was someone who had wisdom to share, someone who thinks deeply and who leads well yet mostly behind the scenes. Someone who only a few really get the opportunity to work with closely and if you don't, you may not realize her worth. It was of someone I have hoped to be and sometimes catch glimpses of.

As I started practicum, I wanted to be able to hold the tension of things that need improvement along with the positive aspects of my practice.

Practicum Supervision Journal, April 27, 2017

I had my first session of supervision. I enjoyed our conversation and he had some nice things to say about my first session. I am really looking forward to this weekly time so that I grow and learn about what I do well and what I can work on and to get some feedback and ideas about what to do next. It is invaluable. The stuff to work on of course is huge but I also think the affirmation of what I do well is going to be so cool. I don't usually take those things in easily and I certainly don't regularly have people telling me what my strengths are that they are actually witnessing and perceiving, and I think this part of supervision might be the most important component for me in the development of a counsellor identity. I think being able to own my strengths and feel like they are me, a part of me and not apart from me is going to be strengthening for my identity. I am learning to take in the positive. This feels really healthy and freeing.

Feeling protective.

Practicum Supervision Journal, June 2017

I had talked with (my supervisor) about (my client) during my last supervision and I remember feeling protective and a bit territorial about it, like I didn't want to be judged about this relationship, the therapy, what I was or was not doing. Maybe because I am trying to figure it out myself and feeling a good connection and I didn't want someone else coming in to interfere.

Practicum Supervision Journal, June 2017

I am thinking about supervision. I find it hard in ways. I like getting feedback but I like getting specific feedback about what I am actually doing or not doing. I guess what I want to hear is what I already recognize, maybe I am not open to seeing things that other see. I'm not sure. I struggle with feeling misunderstood so when someone tells me something about a session, first, they are walking into a relationship and making judgments on a snippet and don't know all the stuff leading up to that so I have a hard time taking the criticism in. Second, it feels like no matter what you do, the supervisor is needing to give some critique so sometimes it feels generic or doesn't feel like it fits. I'm not sure how to be open to the feedback but still weigh it. I guess that is actually what I am doing - wrestling with it rather than just accepting it or rejecting it. There are things that I am trying in session that I wouldn't do as a norm, such as being a bit more directive. I am trying things out. I guess the best thing to do with feedback is to really be present and listen to it and then take it away and weigh it out, see where it fits.

I tend to want to defend myself. Feeling perpetually misunderstood does that to you, always feeling like someone doesn't understand, needing to explain or defend. I guess pride comes in there too because I don't want to be misunderstood and mislabeled so I want to defend or correct. I probably just come across as really closed off and not accepting of feedback. I need to let go of my need to have everyone understand me as I want to be understood. What if I just let that go and allowed the impressions and perspectives to come. The issue is that I look too much to other people to give me a sense of who I am or at least who the world thinks I am. When I see or hear something that doesn't line up with who I know myself to be, then I feel misunderstood and it triggers all the shame stuff and loneliness and feeling alone in the world but also like I don't fit or belong because I am sure the things that are wrong with me are disqualifiers for me in being accepted and cared for. It's a twisty place to live.

Embracing paradox

I had a breakthrough while in counselling, not sure my counsellor agreed that it was a breakthrough but for me, it definitely was. It came about because of my fierce interior wrestling with what I felt were my (first) counsellor's negative views of me. I would leave counselling often feeling pretty crappy, with all this internal turmoil going on. I'm kind of

used to inner turmoil but this was the kind that made me wonder if I should go back, whether I was unconditionally accepted by this counsellor and whether this was really going to help me.

He was concerned if I stopped to think about my answer to one of his questions and felt that I was trying to give the 'correct' answer for him. In my mind I was simply trying to work through the internal ambivalence to answer truthfully, authentically. He felt I was being inauthentic, I felt that I was trying to be authentic. Perhaps both were true.

Process Journal, May 8, 2017

I was thinking about my own experience with counselling. It was the first time I had been to counselling and I went because we are told in the program that getting your own counselling is important. I am thinking about the lasting effects of counselling - what stays with a person afterwards, right after of course is interesting but what about months after or years after? It has been a few months for me and what is staying with me is a few metaphors that really hit home but also a sense that I wasn't able to be myself - that somehow who I was in certain aspects wasn't accepted. Specifically, I am thinking about how the counsellor pointed out that I thought about my responses before giving them. He seemed to think there was something wrong with that - that somehow I was formulating all my responses to present them, and package them as he put it, a certain way. I can see his point and I think it was good to discuss that but I also am struck by how important it is to say things in a way to communicate well with others. To think about the words and the timing and the tone, etc so that communication is clear and not muddled. Now, he would say, just say it and then deal with it but that is putting the onus on someone else to clarify our communication because we are too lazy to do it ourselves beforehand. Regardless of how careful one is in their communication, there will be misunderstandings and accepting this is important but to take the stance that we should just let 'er rip, to me is irresponsible and I told him that...

One day as I was processing things outside of session, I realized that I used this word 'balance' a lot; just need balance, gotta have balance. Then it struck me that it isn't about

balance, it's about both-and, it is both at the very same time. It is not a bland blending of two polarities, not a levelling that makes them equal but embracing both in whatever measure they are at any given time. This was extraordinarily freeing!

This concept of both-and, embracing paradox, has stayed with me strongly over the past two years and only grown. As I have learned more about the shadow, light & dark, masculine & feminine, and many other seeming dichotomies, even liberal & conservative, it is the embrace of both that frees. I'm not opposed to the use of the word balance by any means but I needed to see that for me this word balance was neutering the honour and wisdom that each perspective holds. Similar to compromise, it is bland and lifeless, whereas both at the same time is energizing; it is exciting. It calls me higher to see something I haven't yet seen. A greater option lay ahead if only I can sit with the tension long enough without trying to neutralize it or shortchange the process. And yet, this too contains paradox, amid the energy is a deep peace.

I have been growing in this embracing of paradox over the past two years. It is a revelation turned conviction that has deepened, becoming ever more important for me. As I navigate my way in the world and see the polarities that exist within the various levels of culture that I live within, this concept of 'both at the same time' has become a central part of my worldview. It is a deep knowing; an ancient truth even.

So maybe my counsellor was right and I was too concerned with how he would respond if I just said what I thought. Maybe I do this too much in life and I should allow myself the space to speak, to voice my reactions, without so much filtering and editing.

Unleash the jerk

I feel the need
to allow my inner dick
to come out
unmuzzle the asshole; release the bitch

the one that says it 'like it is'
that doesn't think
first then speak
who doesn't edit and reject every thought and feeling

wakey, wakey,
come on out
you undesirables
you miscreants

wreak havoc on my life
roam the halls
and shake the rafters
stomp around unencumbered

be who you be
and let the chips fall
where
they may

And maybe it's also good to think before you speak.

Paradoxical faith. I'm in this liminal space in my faith where I have more questions than answers. It is uncomfortable but it seems right. This place of not knowing, of unknowing many things I thought I knew. It is challenging, frightening, and incredibly unsettling. I am not attending a church right now. Maybe for the first time in my adult life, I have no home church. I am holding my beliefs lightly. There is a part of me that is sad, that

is grieving. I don't sit with this part long. I rush past it, this needy part, afraid of what might come if I give it too much attention. Will I be swallowed in grief, will I lose my faith?

As I read Johnson (1991), on a flight from Kelowna to Vancouver shouting yes in my spirit, I hear the whisper of the Spirit of God, 'you don't need to compromise in your faith either'. It stops me. I sit with it and allow the thought plunked into my spirit to sink in to my mind. I don't know what it means practically but I know it's true. I can sit in the tension of Protestant and Catholic, Christian and any other belief system on earth, secular and religious, the one and the many, unity and diversity.

I can seek the unity that comes in the embrace of a wholly other perspective and know there is truth there for me. This I believe is what is sorely missing in our societal culture at this time. I see a growing inability to sit with a completely different view than one's own and not try to change it, fix it, or most popular, label, diagnose, or pathologize it. Far too many people are calling others names simply because that other thinks differently than them. Even our own Prime Minister models this for us. We can't sit with our discomfort, our anger, our triggers; we externalize and attack others verbally instead, often over social media. We say all kinds of things hiding behind our devices that we would never say to someone's face. What if that person we disagree with vehemently has legitimate concerns, a perspective we haven't considered; a way of seeing the world that might inform our own? We want everyone else to change to suit us, we point out others failings, accuse others of 'making us feel' a certain way, all to avoid our own inner selves. All this externalizing and world class gymnastics to distract ourselves from what only we can do. I am attempting to grow in holding the tension, as uncomfortable and unsettling as it is.

Ceremony

I am well into this thesis and I feel stuck again. This feeling of stuckness is recurring in my life. I think that's pretty normal especially when undertaking a large project like a thesis. This thesis being intimately connected with me and my experience makes me both more likely to feel stuck and less, it seems to me. Less in that it is about me, so in some ways, I expect it to flow out of me seamlessly. More in that it is about me and that is hard. I continue to work through my stuff as I write.

I try to pay attention to the liminal spaces in my life, those in-between times especially the hypnopompic and hypnagogic states, the times between sleeping and waking. This morning while in this hypnopompic state, not yet fully awake, yet not asleep, a thought culminated, perhaps just one word "sacred". Spurred on by my recent reading of *Big Magic* (Gilbert, 2015) where she talks about ideas, inspiration, and creativity as living entities, I wondered if I was being very hospitable to my story.

As I sit writing this, trying to form into words the sense that is in my body, my heart, my spirit, I am reminded of another hypnopompic state a few months ago while I was taking Counselling for Indigenous Peoples. I was trying to work something out inside, it was whirling and churning around in there, my mind, my emotions, trying to work something out that I couldn't put words too. This is a very normal state for me, I process, process, process. It can be quite the feat for me to actually get out of my face hole in words what I am sensing and feeling. I know by feeling, by intuition, and often words fail. There are times when I am in this state that I feel a call to dream so I will take a nap and see what comes. The language of dreaming, or the state of sleeping and shutting the mind off to

allow the spirit to explore and seek truth, can bring amazing clarity. So I went to sleep and as I was coming awake I heard a question, “What are your ceremonies?” It is a question that I continue to ask myself.

Back to this morning, the culminating sense was that I needed to be hospitable to my story, not just rush through, and not stay surface, but welcome it, bid it come, create a sacred space for it to be told. I decided to put some ceremony in place. Part of the answer to the question about my ceremonies, is spiritual practices that I engage in, one being centering prayer. Centering prayer is simply opening oneself to God (Bourgeault, 2016). You choose a quiet space either alone or with others. I quite enjoy solitude so generally I do centering prayer alone, but it can also be done with others. The purpose of centering prayer is simply being present; there is no trying, or doing. You close your eyes and just be, in Presence. As thoughts, ideas, to do lists come, you simply acknowledge them and allow them to go again. You are not ‘trying’ to empty your mind, you are simply allowing whatever comes to come; welcome it and release it, and return to Presence; simple, and yet so hard. This practice highlights all these impulses within me: the need to control, to do, to perform, to produce, even to be seen. It shows me all the ways that I buy in to being a commodity, rather than a human being. It is very grounding.

I have decided that my ceremony for writing will be to do centering prayer for 20 minutes, then light a candle, grab a coffee, invite (Holy) Spirit to be with me, and welcome my story to be told, then sit and see what comes.



Figure 11. Ceremony

Compassion

One of the most important lessons I've learned in my life, and really got finally, is that everyone has their stuff - everyone! I have had such an inferiority complex all my life that I was convinced that some other people simply did not have to deal with much in their lives. How fortunate for them, I would sneer. I was envious of all those people with seemingly perfect lives. I mean I knew they weren't *perfect*, but really, might as well have been, damn near close enough, I reasoned. I was sure that no one could really understand

my struggles, so I hid them. I would never talk about the stuff I was thinking or feeling. No one cared anyway, I would sulk inside myself.

One day not many years ago (yah, I can be a slow learner) I was driving to work and talking to God about this. I was probably whining, feeling sorry for myself. I'll never forget it, at the corner of Hwy 97 and 10th Ave when this knowing just fell into my heart, that everyone has their stuff. I started to think about the people that I had somehow made up grand tales of perfect lives about, and realized that they too have insecurities, hardships, addictions; some had troubled marriages, bratty kids, and crappy jobs. They had joy and pain, triumphs and struggles, just like me. It wasn't like a regular idea that comes and you entertain for a minute and then it fades. This was a deep knowing, it was a revelation to me, and it shifted some things internally. At once, with this realization, came a flood of compassion. It's tough to be compassionate while holding onto envy; compassion is a two handed posture.

Addiction. I have what is sometimes referred to as an addictive personality. This isn't surprising growing up in the home of an alcoholic, with both parents carrying their own generational trauma. Plus there was plenty of fresh trauma to contend with - not the least of which was the death of my brother.

Personal session journal, May 16, 2017

I remember the feel of the cool water on my legs and the firm tug of the current as we crossed over to the sand bar in the middle of the river that day, my 4 year old body straining to keep upright. We arrive on the sandbar and begin to play. I don't know how long we were there for but at some point I leaned over the water and said 'Look how far I can reach' then I turned around and you were gone. Mom says I went into a 'cone of silence'.

I've talked about this elsewhere but this tendency to want to escape, to hide, to be invisible, seemed inborn – perhaps it was, through epigenetic processes, through in womb messaging, certainly through childhood experience; I learned to check out, by any means necessary. When the world feels unsafe, people find ways to stay alive, even if it kills them.

Personal Counselling sessions journal, May 23, 2017

Today we talked about this dissociation I have been experiencing. It is a coping strategy from way back but (my counsellor) helped me to articulate it in a metaphor that I think will be helpful to giving me language around it when it happens. I made some hand gestures that looked like walls and a prison and talked about freedom. The metaphor that came to mind was a maze. I get trapped in other people's mazes and then I feel helpless, like I can't get out and I have no choice but to be trapped. I wondered if I get trapped by their expectations or my own. What are my expectations of myself in those moments, what are my assumptions? I seem to feel that I have no choice, like when I am trapped in class and feel like I want to leave but feel that I 'shouldn't'. These are my own expectations. Am I allowed to have a mind of my own, to be me and am I allowed to show up and be seen?

I will be paying attention to the dissociation and using it as a symptom, a marker to start asking myself questions about what is going on in my environment that is causing a feeling of helplessness or of being misunderstood. Why do I not feel safe? Are there expectations or assumptions that I am putting on myself in that moment? What does the dissociation do for me in those moments? I felt that this was a really productive session and helped me to articulate what is going on with me. I also tapped into emotion again which was great! There is something really important about being understood. I don't like to be misunderstood. I felt really misunderstood growing up, like I could never just be me. There was always someone picking at me to do this or that better, to be different, to look different, to act different. I never felt that I could do anything right, except in school - that is where I could shine, that is where I could excel. That was my safe haven, academics.

As Gabor Maté (2008/2015) talks about, when we come to terms with our addictive tendencies, our own escapist ways, we have greater compassion and understanding for others' ways of coping. It's when we remain in denial of our own addictions or decide to

rank addictions, making ours so much better, that we start to see other people's addictions as different from our own.

My addictions have changed over the years so that now I have quite an arsenal to draw upon. Learning is certainly an addiction, think about the amount of time, money, and focus it takes to go through a program of study. Academics became for me, an opioid, a way to appease the feelings of worthlessness, of inferiority, of lack of connection. Actual opioids would never do for me because I was too afraid of being out of control, of not having full use of my faculties, it freaked me out.

Practicum Supervision Journal, June 14, 2017

...fear of being judged, fear of being 'wrong', feeling 'wrong' all of my life. Maybe this is why school was so great for me, it was a place I could be right. Feeling wrong everywhere else, finding a place I could feel right - in terms of academics, not in terms of friends or personhood, but at least something, there was some place I could feel good about myself. And I have seen this, realized this over the past several years, that academics was my place of safety. I would keep running back to it over and over for another hit to feel ok. This program is different though. This is about transformation and really seeing who I am, not performing. Wow, if school is my drug, the cost of that is pretty high. I never got into taking drugs to numb or make myself feel better but I did go to school. That was my place, has always been my place to assuage the feeling of being wrong, of my essence being wrong.

Forgiveness. I learned along the way in my life that forgiveness was important. This is certainly a core tenet of the Christian faith; we are forgiven, we need to forgive. That is belief but what I have learned by experience is that forgiveness is essential. It changes us. I have been surprised to learn that when I am holding offense, anger, judgments towards others, it infects my heart. It starts to turn my love cold, and steals my compassion. When I choose to forgive, and it is a choice, not primarily a feeling, things shift, I breathe easier, feel

lighter, freer. This is incredibly important and what has really stunned me over the years is that it not only changes me and my internal reality, it changes the other person too. I have seen this time and again. When I deal with my own grudges, walls, and defenses, it allows me to be different towards that other person and it allows them to be different in return. It frees me but it also frees them.

Personal Journal, June 18, 2017

Everyone has a story, everyone has an internal world that others aren't privy to. We all have our perspective, our truth. Things happen, people hurt each other (hurt people hurt people) and people take on hurt and offense and pain; we all do. We vilify others because that is easier than facing their pain.... or our own. Some people are chronically rejected, some are protected, some are ignored and some are idolized. This is the world we live in. To me forgiveness is about taking our power back. To be able to forgive is strength, it is courage, it is powerful. Forgiveness isn't primarily about the other person, it is about us, it is about our own journey and being able to walk unencumbered. It makes us free. It allows us to go on and grow and flourish; to live and breath, to feel, to be human. It is secondarily about the other person, because in forgiveness, we release them, we allow them to change, we allow them to have their own truth, regardless of what they've done.

I want to live in freedom and I want freedom for others too, so I try to keep my heart free of offense.

Power & control

This program has put my already intense inclination to ponder and observe people and relationships on overdrive. Couple this with my own inner journey of working through my feelings of powerlessness and bid for control and it's no wonder this thread runs through the tapestry of my story. It seems to me that so much of relational dynamics comes down to power and control. I find myself noticing how we all try to get power or

take control, make ourselves superior or judge ourselves or others as inferior. Since my granddaughter was born, I am very attentive to the messages that she might receive from those around her, not least to save her from having to heal from the wounds I carry around.

Consent & coercion. I have a large extended family, when we get together with parents, siblings and families there are easily 20-25 people there. Since my granddaughter came into the world, just over a year ago, I notice things I didn't readily notice before. This is partly due to where I am in my healing and growth journey and partly due to societal emphasis. So, we were having a family party, I'm carrying my little granddaughter around and another family member comes up and wants to take her. She shakes her head. At 12 months, she communicates what she wants and what she doesn't. The question is: will we respect it or will we push right past what she has communicated and force our own will on her? This propensity by adults to force their viewpoints, needs, and wants onto children has become much more real to me over the past year. Granted we do this with other adults too but this interaction with the most vulnerable ones has my attention in this moment. I notice in myself the need to be needed, the wanting to be wanted. "I want you to want me, I need you to need me", as the Cheap Trick song goes. It happens in numerous ways, physical, emotional, spiritual. It occurs by holding a child for a moment too long when they have made it clear they want down; in continuing to tickle and poke at a little one when they are clearly not 'having fun'. Also, in pulling on a child to meet our emotional needs by giving us a hug, or a smile, or to say the right thing, act the right way to feed our ego, make us look good, or give us reassurance. It can be sneakily subtle or loudly overt, this exertion of control.

I am holding my granddaughter, she shakes her head at the offer of going to someone else and is accused of being mean. Wow, really?! And there it starts; the socialization of this baby girl to be what others deem appropriate for her to be; to condition her to be 'nice'. Something inside remembers, knows this all too well.

Women & men. I think a lot about the dynamics between male and female.

Process Journal, May 18, 2017:

I am currently reading Gottman's book (2015) and also re-reading 'The Body Keeps the Score' (van der Kolk, 2014). Gottman talks about how men physiologically get overwhelmed by stress and especially marital strife - criticism by the wife, etc and then shut down. He states that scientifically the man is flooded and incapable of dealing well with the situation at that point. The man will also be prone to escalating the conflict rather than finding ways to resolve it. Then in The Body Keeps the Score, reading about the trauma response of war veterans, I am fascinated by the male response. The story of retaliating and escalation of violence by men evoked a lot of emotion in me. I'm trying to put in words what I am feeling about that. On one hand it pisses me off. I think men should be able to choose better than they do and I wonder why it is up to women to take the brunt of the world's males' inability to regulate their emotions or response to stress. Why do women often bear the brunt of the violence and terror? A part of me wants to understand and is sad but the larger part is angry, especially with patriarchal societies that demean women, controlling them so that men never have to mature. It just seems so unfair.

Personal Journal, May 24, 2017:

Thinking this morning about the subjugation of women over the history of humanity. Reading The Body Keeps the Score again (van der Kolk, 2014) and the comments around incest being rare in the psychiatry textbook of 1974 (p. 20). How is it that men actually convince themselves that abusing women is alright? It makes me angry and sad and frustrated and infuriated all at the same time. I then turn to God and ask why? Why is this the lot of women, to be abused and humiliated and used, commoditized throughout history. The commoditization of females is a tragedy. What is your view of women Lord? He gives me Isaiah 54.

Isaiah 54 reads in part:

“Sing, O barren (woman),
 You *who* have not borne!
 Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,
 You *who* have not labored with child!
 For more *are* the children of the desolate
 Than the children of the married woman,” says the LORD.
 “Enlarge the place of your tent,
 And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings;
 Do not spare;
 Lengthen your cords,
 And strengthen your stakes.
 For you shall expand to the right and to the left,
 And your descendants will inherit the nations,
 And make the desolate cities inhabited.
 “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
 Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame” (New King James Version)

This for me is a promise that in places of barrenness, where there is pain and trauma,
 there will be healing and expansion, not only for those women fighting for it, but for the
 generations that come after. Women fight for new life, and even in barrenness, we sing.
 Tears stream down my face as I sit with this. A memory invades, hijacking my senses.

Imprint

fingerprints

mar her neck

imprints

of the violence

of yesterday

no one says a thing

life goes on

Strong women. I grew up in the midst of very strong women. They often don't recognize their strength but they are strong, they are powerful; I have experienced them as controlling. As I think about this issue of control, I see the pattern of feeling controlled in many ways by the women in my life. Freedom to be who we are and some agency in one's own life is important at any age. What I learned through the lens of trauma is that I was not allowed to be who I am. I needed to be what others needed me to be, to help others in what they wanted. This followed me well into adulthood and nowadays I am trying to take responsibility for my ways of being. I am not taking the blame, but I am also not blaming. I am not condoning anything that happened but I *am* taking responsibility for me.

So when I come into a situation with one of the lovely, beautiful, strong women in my life and I think 'you're ____', fill in the blank. Maybe it's 'you are controlling', now I turn that around on myself and ask why I feel controlled. What is it that I feel I can't do or that I am being forced to do? Why do I feel powerless? Living my life blaming others for how I feel is not actually going to change anything for the good but it might make me old and bitter and that is not the way I want to be. What I do want is to stay curious about what is going on for me, taking a long hard look at the three fingers pointing back at me. What I do want is to love others well, to understand, and care for them.

In relation to my strong women, I realize I learned not to tell the truth, not to really show up. I internalized that I didn't actually exist or at least shouldn't and I walked through life as a ghost; knowing (whether true or not) that I didn't matter and that no one would ever truly try to know me. If someone did try to get to know me, I was convinced that I couldn't show them who I really was because then they would know how deeply and

fundamentally flawed I was and they would no longer want to know me. This became my identity; the girl, teenager, woman that no one really knew, that no one would take the time to know. I still often cease to exist around my strong women. I go inside myself.

This is a feedback loop; a recurring pattern where there is no way out but to recognize the cycle and make a change. I only recently recognized this as hiding. I have felt abandoned, I didn't realize that in these very imbedded and ingrained habits I was abandoning myself and in so doing I was abandoning others. And I didn't recognize that I was in control, that I had the power to choose, to change; that I am a powerful, strong woman in my own right. I could actually view things differently. I could choose to show up and be seen. I was talking to God about this in the shower one day. I do a lot of dialogue with God in the shower. I was lamenting that I never feel seen.

Personal Journal, September 17, 2017

I often feel the need to be seen, I feel unseen but God spoke to me in the shower this morning and told me that I don't need to be seen, I need to allow others to see me and see others!

Wow, that blew my mind. I am the one who needs to allow others to see *me*. Huh?! It seemed true; felt true, but I had no idea what to do with it. How do I let others see me?

This is something I am working out daily and this thesis is part of that work. Others can't truly know me if I don't allow myself to be known. I am responsible; able to respond, to choose my response. So when I feel that one of my strong women is controlling, time to look at myself and see how I'm not showing up in the situation to tell them what I think, how I feel, how I see things, and what I need; to tell them about me and what I am and am

not willing to do. No one else can give me the freedom to be except me; time to stand up and be counted sweetheart.

Body Wisdom

The developing child's positive sense of self depends upon a caretaker's benign use of power. When a parent, who is so much more powerful than a child, nevertheless shows some regard for that child's individuality and dignity, the child feels valued and respected; she develops self-esteem. She also develops autonomy, that is, a sense of her own separateness within a relationship. She learns to control and regulate her own bodily functions and form and express her own point of view.

Traumatic events violate the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity. (Herman, 1992/2015, p. 52).

Trauma, especially developmental trauma, often disconnects us from our bodies (van der Kolk, 2014). Part of my journey has been to listen to the wisdom of my body once again.

Intimidation.

Personal Journal, March 23, 2018

I can feel my stomach in knots, anxiousness, nervousness. So, why? Why do I get worked up about what other people think? Why do I care about other people's judgement or approval? What is their approval or disapproval going to add or take away from my life? More importantly why do I allow those imaginary or real judgements to impact me so significantly?

Personal Journal, April 12, 2018

I am scared, I am afraid and intimidated. I don't value myself enough and I don't trust myself. It's intimidation that holds me back....this is a huge limiting factor. I asked the Lord for an analogy to help me understand this limitation and he gave me

a picture of a mighty rushing river. It was powerful and full but then it narrowed and was dammed up so that only a trickle of water was allowed through on the other side. This is me.

Intimidation

I close my eyes and ask the Maker of All to show me
When did this first start?
How did I get here?

I am taken back, not to a memory but to a sense
of being very little
and feeling startled scared

it's as though I have lived here my whole life
waiting for the fright, anticipating terror
the fear everpresent

It stalks me, hunts me, waiting, watching
ready to jump out and grab me
to swallow me whole

this is Intimidation, it is my shroud
my covering
my protector

Reconnection. I have never been that concerned with my body. It has been more of a frustration and cause of shame than anything for most of my life; or simply the way I get around, an obligatory vessel. I wore baggy clothes as a teenager to cover up my shape so as not to attract unwanted attention. I have had this love-hate relationship with it as long as I can remember. I used to have a list of things I hated about myself; I would recite it, sure that these were the things that made me unacceptable. Over the years that list faded but the disconnection to my body continued.

Personal Journal, May 12, 2017

I have been thinking the last two days about how much I ignore my body. I often will ignore my body telling me it needs to go to sleep or it needs to go to the bathroom, holding it for a long time or that it needs to eat, allowing hunger to go on for hours. I ignore my body and therefore I am disconnected from it. I need to pay more attention.

As I read this back I see the truth in it but I also see the reciprocal, that I am disconnected from my body so I ignore it, a self-perpetuating cycle.

Over the past three years my body has become more prominent in my consciousness. The Body Keeps the Score (van der Kolk, 2014) brought it to the fore, to consider what my body has been impacted with over the years, what it holds. I have chronic neck and shoulder stiffness and pain, as well as stomach issues. I have had three bouts of skin cancer, and a hysterectomy, each time a chunk of my body carved out. The thought started to break over me like a wave, 'what does my body know, what is it trying to tell me?' When I finally began to pay attention and listen, I found it held a lot of secrets.

Embodied empathy. I was with a client one day fairly early on in my practicum, the emotion was thick in the room, I was present, I was emotionally attuned to the client, we were connecting on a mental-emotional level but my body was stiff. I was curious so I watched back my tape (a wonderful benefit of having practicum sessions recorded).

Practicum Supervision Journal, June 2017

...in watching my session back I realized that I was very stiff in my body. Not super stiff, it just seemed to me that I was keeping a certain posture in my body that at times did not fit at all with what I was feeling. I felt very connected to her in the session and was tearing up with her but you wouldn't know it by my body language in parts. I realized in another way how I am disconnected from my body. I need to embody emotion.

This brought me to specific times in my life when I have felt this stiffness and inability to express myself bodily. I continue:

Practicum Supervision Journal, June 2017

...back to my disconnect from my body, I realize that I need to work on this. How do I connect fully mind, emotion and body in a way that is integrous? How do I show in my body what I am feeling? At one point in the session, I felt that I should have opened up my posture and leaned into the emotion. I definitely push people away emotionally. I don't feel safe with most people to express how I feel. I feel safe with myself most of the time, I think, to feel what I am feeling but I don't feel safe with others... It's about safety. People need to feel safe. I need to provide that space where they feel safe and that means connecting empathically and allowing that to show up in my body as well. I think I am doing well with showing care on my face and in my tone of voice at times, but that is all neck up. From the neck down, pretty disconnected.

This session was pivotal for me to really see visually and feel viscerally how I was holding myself in session but also in life. In my next session I tried to embody emotion more:

Practicum Supervision Journal, June 2017

In my session yesterday I tried to move my body more. I leaned in at times, opened up my posture and just tried to change it up more. It felt better but I was also self-conscious a bit thinking about (my supervisor) maybe watching me. Kind of like a child trying something new out and wanting to do it in private, not to be criticized or picked apart. I feel quite vulnerable in those moments on one hand and yet really want to learn and do better. I really want to connect with my clients and with myself and others so this is important work.

During this time, we were finishing our Trauma class with a trauma fair, a student display of trauma interventions.

Practicum Supervision Journal, June 2017

I am working on my research for Trauma and (a classmate) and I are presenting Dance Movement Therapy as our trauma intervention. I had articulated what I noticed about myself and what I needed to do as embodied empathy, that I needed to embody empathy, showing my emotions with my body. I didn't realize that this was actually a thing. In my research it is referred to as Kinesthetic empathy or embodied empathy. I love how my connection with my self and God leads me to discover things that are already out there. I love this process, I love this relationship. I feel my way through life, sensing what I need to do, what I need to learn and what I need to focus on and when. This is what I experience in my relationship with God. As I draw closer to God, I know and love myself more and I open myself to others more. I am more connected.

Just two months later, while on retreat on Bowen Island, I came across a massage therapist who did somatic work and booked an appointment with him. During the session, as he assessed what was going on with my body, he said that he felt I was in a perpetual startle response. This made sense to me. In the fall I decided to take a therapeutic yoga class to help me get in touch with my body and begin to resolve some of these issues that were coming to my attention.

Creativity Journal, September 13, 2017

I decided to do this (therapeutic yoga) program because it is directed, and (the instructor) is a Kinesiologist who builds a program for us and our body issues. I am really trying to be more connected to my body. I sometimes notice how tensed up I am and then let the tension out of my shoulders. It can be quite pronounced. The first thing we did was get into a comfortable lying down position to quiet ourselves. (Our instructor) spoke to us about what we were doing and she talked about being aware of the support of our body, that we were being supported by the floor and the pillows, etc. As I brought myself to that awareness and really felt it and let myself relax, I started crying. It was deeply emotional for me to feel supported. I think there is a lifelong feeling of not being supported. This, along with the Somatic RMT

guy telling me that he felt I was in a perpetual startle response, the trauma held in my body is more immense than I think it is.

As I became more intent on listening to what my body was already speaking, I started to notice that when I felt criticized, ostracized, and put down, I froze. And when I felt happy and connected, it was easier to be myself and be with people. I started to notice what was going on in my body when I felt angry, or sad, or frustrated, or joyful. I learned about Polyvagal Theory (Dana, 2018; Porges, 2011) and began to observe my neuroception, what my body knows by instinct that my rational mind does not. I started to see my pattern of going into a dorsal vagal state, a freeze response, in social situations where I felt I was being ostracized, criticized, or picked on. I did some focused polyvagal work utilizing the exercises in Dana's (2018) book.

It has been transformative to connect my mind, emotions, and body. I am now much more aware of my body and the wisdom it holds. I have begun to accept all that my body has held over the years and to love it for all it does and has done for me and find myself caring for myself much better than I used to but the reconnection is still often painful.

Personal Journal, November 15, 2018

Connecting with my body is painful. It holds negativity and rejection, abandonment, abuse, depression, stress, grief, all the things, they are held in my body.

Grief & Loss

Personal Counselling Sessions Journal, June 29, 2017.

I have been processing a ton of stuff. Grief, for sure, being in the process, and also observing the process of grief. I described to (my counsellor) that I kind of enjoyed being in that place. There was joy in the acceptance of being in grief to give myself space to feel grief. There is also joy in remembrance, there is also sadness and an aching that those times

won't happen again but there is also a sweetness in remembering the happy times, the good things, the things that will be missed. There can also be regret for the things that will never be or that never were. Grief is a wonderfully complex process.

Letter to my grandpa. *I dreamt about you last night. You were vibrant, happy, smiling. I got to give you a hug, to hold onto you one more time. As I made my way through the morning, you lingered, the memory of an embodied you still fresh in my mind. I have never dreamt of you before, that I can remember. It was such a gift. Then I checked my Facebook page and a memory popped up of a video we took many years ago as we tried to take a photo of you and grandma. The whole family, laughing uproariously while trying to get one nice picture of the two of you, as you joked and teased. Oh, the memory of you.*

Today is 12 days shy of 7 years since you passed. Seven years ago today I sat by your bedside at Gateway Lodge with my mom and my aunt, sitting vigil, not wanting you to be alone. We sat with you for days, singing, talking, even laughing. I sit here now with the impression of you fresh in my mind, I can feel you, as tears stream down my face. I wish we had had more time with you; I wish you could have met your great, great granddaughter.

As I sit in remembrance, gratitude wells up in me. Thank you for all you were, all you are, to this family. Thank you for fighting your addiction all those years. You taught me what it was to be human: to be strong and weak, fierce and vulnerable, serious and silly, a sinner and a saint. I miss you. I love you. I want to hear another corny joke. Did you hear the one about the 3 eggs? Too bad.



Figure 12. A Great Day for the Race

Ripples. Loss is such a weird thing. To know someone that you love is gone. It's surreal. You know it and yet can't believe it.

Personal Journal, June 24, 2017

Our dog died today. Grief is such an interesting emotion, it comes in waves. At first I felt shocked but very quickly my mind turned to my daughter and how upset she will be by this. Fortunately we were just finishing up the trauma fair so I could pack up quickly and go meet her and (my husband). We sat outside crying, discussing what to do with his body. We decided to bury him up on our land. (My husband) went ahead to dig the hole and he found a lovely spot for him. (We) buried him, had a small ceremony. (My daughter) and I talked about our favourite times with him, what we would remember. As I drove home, I cried, realizing that I take the role of being strong for others, the emotional support and once I am alone, I can feel my emotion. Not that I try to hold it back anymore so much, I did cry with (my daughter) but waves of grief are easier to handle by myself. Then I posted the loss on facebook and each time someone expressed empathy, I cried. I realize how healing it is to have others recognize the pain and enter into it with you. This is so much easier for me from afar then in person. I have a really hard time fully feeling let alone

expressing my feelings with other people. But somehow grief is lightened when it is shared with others. There is something about empathy that releases the pain.

Personal Journal, July 9, 2017

I have thought a lot about grief as an ocean, it comes in waves. I picture myself standing on the edge of the water. Sometimes the wave comes in and just licks your toes and goes out again, sometimes the wave crashes over you and overwhelms you. You can see the waves (feel the grief) sometimes anticipating what is to come. Sometimes thinking a wave is going to come in hard and brace for it but it just comes up, encircles your ankles and goes again...just a gentle reminder of the loss. At other times, it takes you by surprise. You think it's going to be a gentle wave and instead it takes your feet out from under you or the waves compound, coming one after another so that you can't catch your breath. Grief is bitter sweet. There are remembrances that are warm and wonderful and then it follows with the realization that you will never have a moment like that again and the sadness crashes in. Guilt can be a part of grief. But guilt doesn't help the grief. I allowed the grief to come that Saturday night and I cried and cried and cried. The next day, I slept until noon (unheard of for me) and I felt thankful that I had the opportunity to grieve.

A year later, my practicum supervisor would be battling cancer and it would take her life just months after her diagnosis. I missed seeing her in a flurry of motion. I grieve. A few short months later, a dear friend of mine will pass away, also from cancer. I loved him. I grieve. Each one leaves a hole in the community, layers of community, ripped and torn by loss; yet, perhaps also brought together in new ways.

Creativity and play

One of my intentions as I looked to doing an autoethnography was to explore creativity and play.

Personal Journal, July 1, 2017

...today feels like a creative day, a day to play, to colour, to express and create! I realize there is some anxiety in me around this as I guess I must have some expectation of it being useful or 'good'. As I tell my clients when they are beginning

to pay attention to their own emotions, just notice them and be curious, don't evaluate. It is the same with creativity and play, I think, notice, embrace, be curious, don't analyze or evaluate.

Creativity Journal, July 13, 2017

I find it interesting that I am almost a full year into my program and I haven't written anything in this journal yet. I have been thinking a lot about constriction and how when developmental trauma happens, constriction occurs. The world gets small and life gets small and narrowed down. For me that meant a constricting of creativity, it got cut off or stumped at different points in my life. I wonder if others have found the same. Play was interrupted and creativity was stymied. One of my healing processes is to rediscover creativity and play. I think it is essential to me living the fullest life I can and I think it is important for my clients that I can connect to those parts of myself.

It was perfect timing to take the Child & Youth counselling course.

Play Journal, July 9, 2017

...we were given the assignment to create ourselves as a tree using whatever materials we wanted to. I used watercolour chalk and paint. I am always a bit intimidated by creating because I am not very artistic but I started to draw the tree trunk and root system and knew that I wanted to create deep roots. From there I started to create an apple tree with the sun shining and blue sky. I realized as I kept on adding things that I was adding things that were of use to others. I added a swing set and some footholds so someone could climb the tree, the apples so others could be fed. I also added some saplings that had sprouted up from the natural growth of the tree. As I stepped back from the painting and looked at the whole, I realized that it was an invitation; that I am at a summer season of my life, a time to learn to play and a time to invite others to play. I am also at a time when I have healed enough to be able to share what I have learned. Perhaps I feel that for the first time in my life, I am at a place that I have learned some things that might be useful and helpful to others and I actually feel capable of sharing them.



Figure 13. Come Play with Me

Creative exploration. The exploration of creativity has been deeply emotional for me, to reconnect to myself, my voice, play and creativity.

Personal Journal, September 23, 2018

I am very emotional the last two days. As I sit on the plane, I am weeping. It comes every so often.... It feels like a deep grieving, like a call to grieve. I can hardly see the screen to type this for the tears. I want to just cry and cry. Do something essential in me, I pray. It feels like something is breaking lose, something wants to be free, maybe it is my creativity. Maybe I'm mourning the lack of development in my creativity and the overdevelopment of my mind. Maybe my heart wants to be free, maybe my spirit is calling for expression that is not produced out of my mind, but only in full integration and connection between my spirit and soul, my mind and my heart. Maybe the disconnection must be grieved in order to be healed....Interestingly as soon as I acknowledged that this might be deeper, more generational than just me, the deep emotional pain subsided. This need to be acknowledged and seen, felt, welcomed, calmed the storm.

Flow

a scoby, thick and curdled
 blocks the flow
 what once brought life
 now inhibits
 newness pushes
 against its boundaries
 the fermentation process complete

the fullness of time has come

generational jams can be removed
 the schism is large
 threshold moments
 liminal space
 pain of disconnection looms
 and must be felt
 to be healed

Timing. I have friends who sense things that are to be. In one layer of my culture we call this prophetic. I have many beautiful, amazing, prophetic friends. They are a joy in my life. These women, this prophetic sisterhood, are a remarkable blessing to me. While we each have a bit of a different way of sensing, I tend to feel the timing of things. This I've noticed over many years, had confirmed by experience and circumstance as well as other people. I know when it's time; I feel it. It is an aspect of life that God speaks to me through.

An example is this thesis. I started my proposal for this thesis in Spring 2017 but waited and waited to finish it. There was a part of me that wanted to just get it done but I knew it wasn't time yet. This went on for well over a year. Finally in September, I could sense the call to write and set my goal to have it done by the end of October. I decided to start writing October 1 but something was hindering me. It was the time but there was a stopping up of the creativity and it wouldn't flow. Fortunately I had a Spiritual Direction session booked for that day. Providence!

Personal Journal, October 1, 2018

Had my spiritual direction session today. (my spiritual director) is wonderful! I talked about this sense of pain, fear, grief, anger that I am noticing the past few days in considering writing my thesis. We noticed what was going on there and I felt that this was such vulnerable work and I wasn't sure it would be accepted, putting the pain out there, the possibility of rejection, abandonment and being misunderstood, out in the external realm. As she encouraged me to sit with that and notice what was going on, I saw that there was this part of myself that is trying to be noticed, this part that is abandoned by self that wants to be seen, to have a voice, to be noticed. As a dialogue started with these parts of self, I saw this child holding out its hand to be taken by this other, more mature, bigger, more adult part of myself. Yet I sense that the younger part might be the more wise of the two. The smaller, younger part of myself is asking if I will see it, if it can contribute, if its voice can be heard, its creativity expressed. (My Spiritual director) asked me to sit there and notice what I

need in it and it was like there was this disconnect, the line got dropped and both sides could no longer speak to each other. I kept having these thoughts of creative ideas popping into my head that I simply won't start, I keep putting off, doubting it can go anywhere, rejecting myself without even trying. That is what the younger part is asking of me, to try, to explore, to see, not to abandon, not to reject, but to just try. What am I so afraid of? Why am I so insistent on pushing this part of me to the sidelines, marginalizing myself, dehumanizing and suppressing this part of me?

At this point she suggested that I seek out a psychotherapist who could help me with this particular reconciliation of parts. She gave a few suggestions of people she would recommend with expertise in this and I was able to arrange to meet over Skype with a woman who did both Jungian analysis and Internal Family Systems only a few days later.

Personal Journal, October 6, 2018

I had a counselling session today to work through this creativity blockage. I had the sense of a little girl holding the creativity and play and this older presence protecting the community of self by keeping her at arm's length, keeping her exiled. The counsellor first helped me to notice what the older presence felt like in my body and my emotions. I felt this knotting in my stomach and then it would move up to my chest and lodge in my upper chest, it felt constricting like I was folding in on myself. And the predominant feeling was fear, fear and immobilization - ahhh, the freezing, the dorsal vagal state.

She then asked me to connect with the inner observer - my true self. My insight shifted from the older presence to the younger presence. (My counsellor) asked me to see what the little girl looked like, she had a dress on with ripped leggings, as if off playing and had tattered her clothing in the process. I asked what she wanted to give me and she said expressions of joy which kind of surprised me. I asked what she needed or wanted from self and she said to express herself, like to be free to express herself without needing to explain what she was up to, and to allow Self to allow her to lead sometimes, to trust her to lead. As we talked, the picture of her changed and she had motion around her and colours coming off of her and the feeling of excitement in the air. At some point I asked if she minded if I talked to the older presence and she took my hand and stood beside me.

(The counsellor) asked me to see what the older presence looked like and I couldn't really see any detail but I got the feeling of a tall presence, towering over us

and also heard this hurt sense of feeling that it was going to be blamed for shutting off the creative, this child part of me. I assured it that there was no blame, that it had done what it thought it needed to to protect self, it was ok. The presence shifted then and shrank down to a little boy who was scared and afraid of being blamed. I assured him that he had done what he knew to do given the circumstances to keep the community of Self safe. 'What you knew to do was to shut down play, shut down aspects of creativity that seemed unsafe because spontaneity could lead to disaster.' Early in the session, (the counsellor) had asked me if I had a memory that connected to this issue and the disconnect between these parts and of course, I was taken to my brother's death, and heard the phrase 'the day play died'.

So, I assured this little part of me that felt like it had to grow up too soon and make itself much bigger than it was, the part that induced fear when thoughts of play and creative expression were introduced, that put me in freeze mode (dorsal vagal state) when feeling threatened, that I didn't blame him, but he didn't need to play that role anymore. I asked him what would he want to do instead and with a twinkle in his eye and a big smile on his face, he said, 'I would like to play with her!'



Figure 14. Integration

Joy & incompetence. One of the practices I have embraced over the past few years is to notice joy. To notice what brings me joy; turns out there are quite a few things. In this attention-paying, I noticed that I love the cello. I love the sound of the cello. As I learned more and listened more, I found that I love how the cello has such range and emotionality to it. It stirs me. I decided I wanted to play the cello. I don't play an instrument but here I am, mid-forties, wanting to play the cello. Well, my kids started a cello fund for me and gave me a jar with money in it for Christmas last year, it brought me to tears. I felt seen and known. Friends and family contributed to the fund for my birthday and I finally bought one in November. I am LOVING it! With the magic of YouTube I am learning a ton!

Besides the cello, I have been doing pottery, painting, silversmithing, drawing, writing poetry, taking up photography, and pretty much trying my hand at anything creative that sparks my interest. In this process I have embraced incompetence. I don't like incompetence much, in others but especially in myself. I like to know what I'm doing. Creativity is meant to incorporate play and play is spontaneous; incompetence comes with the territory. It is a great way to let go of the false self and ego. I needed to allow myself to play, to try new things, to not know, not 'get it' and not have any expectations that it be good, whatever that might mean. In this I also had to embrace imitation, something else I tend to shun. As Gilbert (2015) states, "everybody imitates before they can innovate" (p. 142). I have found these are also important for counselling: embracing incompetence, not knowing, creativity, and play, as well as the progression from imitation to an authentic expression of self.

Chapter 5: Culmination

During this program I took 14 classes, had over 100 hours of supervision and close to 200 direct client hours, as well as countless hours of research, reading, and writing. In addition, this time period brought a number of personal challenges. What stands out to me as I look back at all the 'data' and think back on my experiences, is that so much of my reality is up to me. I get to choose. I see how I have wasted time worrying about what people think of me; on comparison. I have wasted energy on fretting, shame, and feeling inferior. I have wasted emotional, mental, and physical health on choosing to focus on things I can't control and anticipating what might be, instead of focusing on what - and more importantly, *who* is right in front of me. I have also learned that some things are not our choice. We don't choose to act and react in certain ways and to stay stuck or addicted. Some of these ways of being go hand in hand with trauma. We can however, start to become more self-aware, to be intentional about our own healing, and then it is possible to begin to see things in a different way, to have compassion for ourselves, take responsibility, and make better choices. I also recognize that everything belongs (Rohr, 2013). Everything that has occurred has led me to this place in my life and it is beautiful. Life is a paradox.

Going back to go forward

What happens over the course of our lives impacts us. I believe that we carry everything, resolved and unresolved, forward with us and that often we need to go back to go forward (Scazzero, 2006). It bugs me when counsellors discount the past or don't want to talk about it. For me it is an essential part of growth, to see how it all works together; to truncate life and ignore what has been doesn't serve us well. As Herman (1992/2015)

states, "Like traumatized people, we have been cut off from the knowledge of our past. Like traumatized people, we need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future." (p. 2).

I've had a big tin of my grandparents old slides for a few years now. There must be hundreds of slides in there. I've wanted to take them and digitize them. I finally bought a unit that could do it and as I looked through the slides one of the first ones I found was a picture of me at 2 years of age. As I gazed at that picture, thinking about life from her perspective with all I've learned to this point, a letter came.



Figure 15. 2 year old me

Letter to 2 year old me. *Hello little one. What are you thinking? Who are you looking up to with eyes filled with wonder, curiosity across your face? How do you see the world? What are you taking in at this tender age?*

Little do you know that in just 2 short years, you will have lost your best friend, your playmate, your first and only little brother (for a few years anyway). It will have a significant impact on you. It is a trauma that you won't ever quite get over. Still, there is much turmoil now, already, isn't there, do you feel the impact? You hold it all don't you? Those inquisitive eyes hold pain, and lots of questions.

I imagine you are wondering what's happening, what it is that you are feeling all around you, the heaviness weighing everyone down like a millstone. Wondering why it's hard to connect with your mom, to get and keep her attention. She's distracted and feeling the loss of one after another or keeping herself busy with activity to keep from feeling it. I wish I could go back and tell you that it isn't about you. It isn't because you aren't worthwhile or valuable. They don't mean to abandon you. They are doing the best they can. I wish I could help you see, to know in the centre of your being, that you are loved but they just don't know how to attune to you, to connect with you in the way you need. I wish I could buffer you from the pain, the grief, the sense of being left behind.

You will feel that the wrong kid died. You will. I know it sounds crazy but that is what you will internalize. You will think you are to blame, that his death was your fault. It isn't, wasn't. You were only 4 ½. It was no one's fault. You will feel like you don't belong (maybe you already do). You will lose your ability to play, to be carefree, childlike – loss,

grief, trauma, tragedy, and abuse can do that. You will experience betrayal and fear. You will know pain. Things will unfortunately get much worse before they get better.

They will get better though. I wish I could tell you that you are strong and brave and mighty, and have you believe me. Maybe I am, telling you. Trust me, darling, you are going to be ok. You are a fighter, a warrior even, and you will fight for your freedom, and win! Have no fear, dear one, you are going to be brilliant! All my love, ~ Me.

Transformations

Self-compassion. Something shifted for me after I wrote this letter and felt all that came with it. I was looking at other pictures the next day and found myself actually liking them. I never like pictures of me – ok, rarely! Very rarely! I usually cringe and say I am not photogenic, while I turn up my nose. As I looked at more, I realized that that cringy feeling wasn't there. I liked them; I even thought I was cute – how weird!

I noticed other changes too. I had a recent exchange with someone I look up to where I felt I was being judged; weighed, measured, and found wanting. Normally, this would send me into a shame spiral of epic proportions but this time, it didn't; I got angry. Like an indignant kind of angry, the kind of angry I get when someone I love is picked on. I was standing up for myself on the inside. This was new! I noticed it and something else alongside it. It was an invitation; an invitation to shame, to feel shame, to take it on again - but just an invitation. I realized that I didn't actually feel shame. I could have; I could have accepted the invitation and taken on shame again but I was like, nah! No thanks.

Personal Journal, November 2018

What I am seeing this time though as I continue to have experiences that are shedding light on this, thanks be to God, is that the actual feeling of shame seems to be lessening. What I sense is a an invitation to feel shamed but the actual feeling of humiliating shame is not there with such intensity as it has been. I think this goes back to my dream. I felt the shame with such intensity in that dream, and it brought it to the surface for me so I could be with it instead of hiding from it, or pushing it down.

Love. I have found that when I have the courage to be imperfect, somehow my sense of belonging in the world increases as does my love, for myself and others. I have learned to accept and embrace that I cannot be anywhere else but where I am right in this moment; that is surrender. In accepting and embracing who I am, right here, right now, with all my imperfections, despite the things that are missing, I have stopped abandoning myself. With this growing self-compassion, and acceptance of self comes an acceptance of others, and even a love of others imperfections. I am learning to keep my love on (Silk, 2013). It is quite a beautiful thing; I am in awe of how this works. How I relate to others is so much about how I relate to myself.

Jesus was asked one day by the Pharisees, the very rule oriented, dogmatic people of his time, what the greatest commandment was. He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, this is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40, NIV). In other words, life is all about love. The way of Christ is the way of love. Many things can interrupt love, such as: trauma, abuse, generational issues, and ego. I believe that the healing journey is a

journey into love. As my spiritual director so beautifully states, “Love is the midwife to becoming.” (Heuertz, 2018, p. 144). For me, this is a returning, to the One who is Love. As I return again and again, I find Love always there to greet me. Love becomes more imbedded, more ingrained, like God is carving out the ancient paths that have been there all along, clogged up by all the muck of the world and the trauma of generations. And as the debris clears, the fresh water begins to flow again, unencumbered and I recognize myself in Love.

Light & Dark. This journey has transformed me and my perspective on my relationships. I have beautiful friends. I have an incredible family, a wonderful husband, children that I absolutely adore, a precious granddaughter and another grandbaby on the way. I also have a big, lovely extended family. I cherish them. When I am with them now I see the light and the darkness, the beauty and the pain, and I love it all. I used to feel that I needed to somehow be better, do better, in order to be accepted. I thought I was accepting of others but really I was judgmental and saw all the things that needed to change as hindrances to relationship. I saw what was missing, much the same way I saw myself.

The culmination of this hit me as I went to visit family in another part of the province recently and went to church with them. As I sat there in the service I was overwhelmed with emotion at our human state. I was suddenly cognizant that we all have great gifts, talents to share with the world, strength and beauty.... and we all have foibles. This mixture of light and dark is beautiful. It is messy and wonderful. This is who we are - a glorious mosaic. Tears welled in my eyes and I was awestruck by the wonder of it all.

Becoming. I don't know someone else's fable, the stories they hold, but I do know we all have them. We all have our own stories, our own perspective, our own truths, which may differ wildly from someone else's. People can, and often do, see situations from entirely different perspectives. I have set out in this thesis to tell you my own stories, fables, myths, and perspective; mine, and no one else's. If they differ from someone else's, that is as it should be. What I have shared is true but it is not total. It is not total in the sense that it represents only a sliver of my experience and my truth, but it is also partial in that my perspective is only mine, to be total it helps to consider others' perspectives and especially God's perspective. My truth will always be incomplete, 'through a glass darkly', and that is humbling and wonderfully liberating!

After taking this intentional inner journey, embracing the process of counsellor identity development, I am much more open with people than I used to be a few years ago, or even six months ago. I have seen a continual progression of increased self-awareness and self-compassion. I reach out to others to allow them to see me in all my imperfections and I don't filter and edit myself quite as much as I used to. I also make a more concerted effort to turn towards others and really see them. It's been a wild, intense, and often painful ride, but I wouldn't trade it for anything; I am very grateful!

I have shared parts of my story in this thesis, embracing a level of uncomfortable vulnerability. Still, if you truly want to get to know me, grab a drink of your choice, maybe offer me one too, and pull up a chair or take a spot on the couch in my living room and let's spend some time together. Long, deep conversations are one of my favourite things in the world. Let's be present, connect with each other, and see who we'll become.



Figure 16. Becoming

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