

*Research That Matters: Finding A Path with Heart*¹

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“I would like to ask you to remember only this one thing,” said Badger. “The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive; that is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves.” (Lopez, 1990, p. 48)²

Recordar: (Spanish). To remember; from the Latin *re-cordis*, to pass back through the heart—Eduardo Galeano³

As a Canadian curriculum scholar I often use my own life as a site for inquiry, and as a university instructor I encourage both pre-service and veteran teachers to do the same. Such autobiographical inquiry is neither the dominant form of research in Canadian curriculum studies, nor should it be. Yet I believe this research matters for curriculum theory, for the field, and for the researcher, and as such deserves a place in the academy. While it is true that what defines a text as autobiographical is (a) the presence and significance of the narrative *I* (Kadar, 1993), and (b) the disclosure of this self through and in the text (Lopate, 1994), this does not mean that the *I* is necessarily the subject of the text. I find it difficult to defend, as research, some autobiographical narratives, particularly those where the researcher makes himself, most often his psychological or

moral self, the topic of the inquiry. In such work, the spotlight of the writer is aimed inward, most often in an uncritical fashion. If the writer fails to have a topic for the writing other than the *I*, or if the writer has a topic but fails to consider what others (researchers, scholars, practitioners, artists, thinkers) have written about the topic, fails to consider ideas other than her own, she shows discourtesy and does not instill confidence in the insights she may gain from her inquiry. Without a curious and thoughtful examination of a topic, autobiographical narratives are rarely instructive either for the writer or the reader. And without a careful examination of the autobiographer's own doings and actions, her character and spirit, as well as how those are historically shaped and socially situated, I believe it is unlikely the narrative is ethical either.

When considering approval of research involving humans, some university committees are interpreting the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Government of Canada, 2002) to mean that any person mentioned in an autobiographical narrative becomes a "human subject" entitled to all rights and protections of subjects in empirical research: informed consent, right to withdraw, anonymity, and confidentiality. The effect of this specific interpretation of the *Tri-Council Policy* means that even if autobiographical researchers wanted to shift the focus of their inquiry from their own moral or psychological selves, to a topic that lies outside the autobiographical *I*, but with which the *I* is inevitably in relation, they could not do so without acquiring informed consent for each person mentioned or implicated in the narrative. The other alternative is for autobiographical researchers to disguise those people, places and events so they cannot be identified. Which brings us to the question of truth...

Traditionally, autobiography posed as a "true" story, a work of narrative built directly from the memory of its writer. However, postmodern readings of autobiography caution that memories are faulty and such readings call into question the assumption that the autobiographical necessarily equates with either objective or subjective truth. The autobiographical *I* is itself a construction that is capable of seeing only parts of itself, or the topic of its gaze, and of revealing even less on the page (Kadar, 1993). That truth—about the self or the topic—is elusive, suspect, and mostly likely impossible does not release the researcher from her contract with the reader to be a truth teller, to tell the truth as best as she's able, sometimes at risk to herself (Flynn, 1988).

When done well, autobiographical inquiry can be profoundly ethical. When the researcher/writer's life is the site of the inquiry, not the topic of the inquiry (Chambers & Oberg, 1998), the research makes visible and audible the complicated interconnections between the topic of the writer's gaze, and her ideas, values and beliefs, as well as the feelings she attaches to each of these (Bly, 2002). What provides autobiographical research with its veracity, at least in part, is that the complicated map of

the inquirer's ideas, beliefs and feelings is drawn from particular places, events and experiences. Inevitably, those events and places bring the autobiographical *I* into contact with others, and invite the writer to attend to her relations with the others. It is this attention to the particulars of place, event and other where autobiography's kinship to fiction is perhaps most evident. Another similarity between autobiographical inquiry and fiction is that a full exploration of the topic of the writer's gaze, in both instances, requires a balance among pathos, logos, and ethos.⁴ Perhaps what distinguishes autobiographical inquiry most clearly from fiction is the autobiographer's contract with the reader to keep the details of those events, places, and others as truthful as possible. And yet, without explicit informed consent from each character in the narrative, the most recent interpretations of institutional guidelines for ethical research may condemn autobiographical inquiry as unethical, unless it is fiction.

While I remain committed to using my own life as a site of my inquiry, and encouraging students to do the same—to conduct such research within the academy can be difficult, and sometimes dangerous, work. Supervising one particular graduate student's thesis has led me to be as preoccupied with the difficulties of conducting autobiographical inquiry inside the university, as I was once enamoured with the results. In the spring of 2003, Michelle Bertie-Holthe successfully defended her Masters thesis, which *was* an autobiographical inquiry and a feminist critique of a fatal shooting of a student at a school in Taber, Alberta. While school shootings are unfortunately not that uncommon in the United States, when a student at W. R. Myers School murdered fellow student, Jason Lang, in April 1999, that had been the only fatal school shooting in Canada for twenty-five years. And five years later, there still has not been another. Michelle Bertie-Holthe, a life-long resident of Taber, was an English language arts teacher at W.R. Myers School at the time of the shooting. The victim and the shooter, as well as many other key players in the event, were all well known to Michelle Bertie-Holthe. She was a witness to most of the events that she reported and those few things she didn't witness directly, Michelle Bertie-Holthe reported verbatim from the public record. Because Michelle's thesis used her own first-hand observations and reflections on events she either witnessed or were part of the public record, I advised Michelle that she need not apply for approval from the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee to conduct her study. Once complete, Michelle Bertie-Holthe's analysis, and critique of institutional responses to violence and bullying, was astute; the text was finely crafted and the (layers of) stories were finely told. The external examiner, eminent Canadian curriculum scholar and Professor Emeritus, Ted Aoki, reported to the supervisory committee that Michelle Bertie-Holthe's thesis ought to be mandatory reading in every teacher education program in Canada. Aoki has since used excerpts

of Michelle's thesis in presentations he has given to teachers. Aoki praised Michelle Bertie-Holthe for her intellectual and professional courage in providing a first-hand account of the events of the Taber school shooting and he commended the scholarship at the heart of her autobiographical inquiry, which did not simply report but also analyzed and deconstructed. I say Michelle's thesis *was* an autobiographical inquiry because events following the successful thesis defense, initiated by senior administration in the university, forced Michelle to choose between not graduating and revising her thesis so that the central event, the location and the people involved bore no resemblance to the Taber shooting.⁵

The Path With Heart

In the early 1960s, Carlos Castaneda completed the fieldwork for his Ph.D. in anthropology. His research took him to the Sonora desert in Mexico to study with a Yaqui sorcerer named Don Juan. Early on, Don Juan insisted that Castaneda choose one of three medicinal plants to be his guide during this apprenticeship. To choose, Don Juan told Carlos Castaneda,

... you must keep in mind that a path is only a path; ...and there is no affront to oneself or to others, in dropping it, if that is what your heart tells you to do. But your decision to keep on the path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question: does this path have a heart? All the paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush or into the bush... Does this path have heart? If it does, the path is good: if it doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you. (Castaneda, 1968, p. 76)

This quote is from Castaneda's first book *Don Juan: A Yaqui Way to Knowledge* published in 1968 by UCLA Berkeley Press. This book, as well as several of the sequels—one of which earned him his doctorate from UCLA—tapped into a generation's yearnings for another way of knowing the world, and perhaps legitimacy for hallucinogens as a part of a spiritual path. By his death in 1998, Castaneda had gone from celebrity anthropologist of new-age shamanism, and sixties pop icon, to an infamous recluse and suspected trickster who fabricated everything from his date and place of birth to the existence of Don Juan. Some critics claim

that while Castaneda's books may be elegant allegory and compelling fiction, credible anthropology they are not. Other critics are concerned less about the origins of Don Juan than the content of his message, which upon analysis carries traces of a mixture of wisdom traditions such as Buddhism and various Indigenous epistemologies (cf. Noel, 1976). Leroy Little Bear, Professor Emeritus of Native American Studies at The University of Lethbridge, has used Carlos Castaneda's books in his senior Indigenous philosophy courses for at least a decade. For Leroy Little Bear, the voice of Don Juan resonates with Indigenous worldviews about knowledge and reality, and with the idea that there are several paths but in the end we must choose and while the result is the same the journey is different.

This leaves me to wonder about the uneasy relationship between truth and research. What place do fiction or fictionalized accounts have in educational research? Literature—derived from the Latin *littera* meaning letter of the alphabet and *litteratura* meaning writing, grammar and learning—is not compelled to be real. Prose, verse, creative non-fiction and fiction are all interested in truths, be they localized and partial, or universal. But literature is less concerned with literal truth, literal also from the Latin *littera* meaning adhering to the letter, adhering to fact free from exaggeration, reproduced word for word, verbatim. While literature is rarely literal, people who read and write literature are literate, from *litteratus*, to be marked by letters, to be educated and cultured, knowledgeable and competent. Literature is both a cause and an effect of literacy and education; thus it has always had a place in the academy especially in the humanities. What is the place of literature—as a practice, as a body of knowledge, as a critical discourse—in faculties of education and educational research? And what and where are the boundaries between adhering to the letter and being marked by letters, between fact and truth? These are not rhetorical questions meant to be provocative.

This blurring of boundaries faces other disciplines, such as journalism where plagiarism (for example, the Jayson Blair case at the New York Times), mockumentaries (for example, *Fubar*), and fictionalized documentaries (for example, the CBC Radio One documentary on the dog hair farms in Australia) raise certain ethical dilemmas.⁶ What constitutes research and inquiry—and makes it distinguishable from literature? Or is research another genre of literature—one with its own rhetorical conventions that are often disguised by the apparent primacy of the literal? How do we decide these matters? How do we decide what matters?

Does the Path Have Heart?

Like many teachings in the esoteric traditions, Don Juan's advice is ambiguous. The path with heart is good and the journey along it will be

joyful. Like all paths, it leads nowhere, but it will make you strong. If you find yourself on a path, then you must stay on it only if it has heart, and it is only your heart that can tell if it so. How do you know if the path has heart, particularly, if you are choosing a topic for inquiry and means of pursuing it, as opposed to choosing among three hallucinogenic drugs such as Castaneda had to do?

Several years ago, I studied testimony of Dene witnesses to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry—a public commission to ascertain the conditions under which a natural gas pipeline should be built down the Mackenzie River Valley (Chambers, 1989). Although the Berger Inquiry, as it is commonly known, travelled to 27 places, I chose the testimony of witnesses from Fort Good Hope, NWT. That was a choice, a path; I could have selected testimony from any of the other 26 settlements, towns and cities. I think I chose Fort Good Hope because I'd lived there, first as a child, and then, as an adult, and while short, these experiences were intense and formative. In many ways, Fort Good Hope shaped the researcher, teacher and writer I am today.

Georgina Tobac was one of four witnesses whose testimony I interpreted. Georgina's nickname was *Súga*, the Dene word for sugar, which seemed a bit ironic. I remember her as an abrupt woman, almost difficult but perhaps my memory was edited and revised as I worked with her testimony to the Inquiry where her anger was audible, even palpable. As a witness, she faced Justice Berger and the cadre of government officials, southern lawyers and oil-executives present at the hearing, and addressed her testimony directly to them: "*Have you got hearts in you?*" she asked. "*All the native people sitting here more or less pleading with you to save their land. Some of them sound so pitiful. Have you got hearts in you?*" (Chambers, 1989, p. 103).

By way of contrast, Georgina hints at what it might mean to have a heart. Dene children are raised, she says, "*how to be true and how to love one another*" (Chambers, 1989, p. 103). In the English language, to be true is to be steadfast, loyal, honest, or truthful.⁷ In the Dene languages, to speak straight is to be truthful or correct, while to speak crookedly is to lie. To have a heart is to be straight and truthful in your speech and action; it is to be compassionate and generous in your words and deeds.

In the moment of her testimony, Georgina called into question the actions and motives of the very people she faced. An older Dene woman, she stood on the traditional land of her people, and gave the foreigners, the representatives of colonial and corporate power, a tongue-lashing in their own tongue. In that moment, she was what Michel Foucault (Flynn, 1988) called a truth teller; she risked speaking straight, telling the truth. The word courage comes from the French *coeur* and Latin *cor* for heart. To find and follow the path with heart requires courage and heart.

Finding the Path With Heart

Research matters and I am not interested in privileging one form of research over another. Neuroscience, molecular biology and astronomy matter. Feminist theory and Indigenous knowledges matter. Large-scale empirical research projects with massive amounts of data, such as multi-site school-based studies and provincial achievement tests, provide policy makers with valuable information. Having completed a short stint in educational administration, I am aware of the value of informative data for making the best possible decisions. But my research interests do not lie in such domains, and many novice researchers from schools neither have the interest nor the resources to pursue such topics or research designs. They do not have access to a laboratory, or funds for multi-site studies; nor do they have the luxury of full-time study to acquire or fully master a critical discourse such as feminist, critical or postcolonial theory. Some do but most cannot. For many of them, what matters—in the moment—arises from the complex almost unmanageable chaos that is their living practice—their classrooms, their relations, and their lives. When I speak of research that matters I am talking about researchers finding the research that matters *to* them but that also matters *for* others.⁸

Where Do We Find What Matters? Where Might We Find a Path With Heart?

For Don Juan, the path with heart is a conscious choice. He tells Castaneda to “*Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary.*” I wrote, “I think I chose Fort Good Hope,” because in spite of Don Juan’s dictum my choice was intuitive, as much as it was conscious or deliberate, as many research choices are. But deciding what matters, finding the path with heart, requires sustained attention. Although Don Juan suggests *looking*, “look at every path,” Georgina Tobac suggests *listening*, and connects listening to the heart.

“*I wonder if these people have got ears, and I wonder if they have hearts too?*” asks Georgina (Chambers, 1989, p. 103). These people to whom she is speaking—lawyers, politicians, bureaucrats, and oil executives—seem to Georgina unable and unwilling to listen to, and have compassion for those they seek to govern. I find this is true for myself and for many teachers with whom I work; we have to learn to listen to ourselves and to others.

While ears enable us to hear, to “be all ears” is more than just perceiving sound; it means to give your audience your full, sympathetic and thoughtful attention. To be all ears is the capacity to attend to others with full awareness, and to give due consideration to that which is being heard.⁹ In the Dene ideal, to have ears is to have the ability or inclination

to take heed of the words of others. To seek, to listen, to hear, is to be teachable. For the Dene, being willing to listen is a highly valued quality and is a characteristic of both good teachers and good students. The young are expected to listen when their elders are speaking. A common complaint about an errant child is that he or she “doesn’t listen.” Dene parents believe that their sole authority with their children rests in their words. “You must keep talking to your children, never give up talking to them—even if it seems they don’t listen,” elders, such as my mother-in-law, would say.¹⁰ Thus, in the Dene ideal, the teacher’s responsibility is to speak and to show while the learner’s responsibility is to watch and to listen.¹¹

The eye dominates the ear and all the other senses in Western academic discourse, perhaps in literature, as well; just as logos overshadows pathos and ethos (Aoki, 1991; Smith, 1994/1999).¹² When Georgina asks if I have ears and if I have a heart, I’m reminded that pathos and ethos matter, too; that listening with open ears and an open heart makes good relations between and among others possible. But how do we learn to listen, how can we hear hearts speaking—our own as well as others? Where do we find what matters, the path with heart?

I have found what matters shows up in obvious spots such as relationships with family and students and co-workers; in names of places and people and situations; in questions asked and questions left unasked; in declarations of love and independence and rebellion; in photo albums and mission statements; in moments of joy and those times when you are surprised or startled by tears and grief. What matters shows up in novels and poems and essays, as well as movies and documentaries, newspapers and current events. But I have also found that what matters hides in improbable places such as dreams, just beneath the surface of a story or a lie or memory; and what matters springs up in the middle of the contradiction between what I say and what I do.¹³ There are more, many more. I would like to mention three places, in particular, where we can find the path with heart and to tell you the story of a student and researcher who found herself on such a path: the middle of the night; writing notebooks; and mistakes, our own and others.

In the Middle of the Night

Course outlines for my graduate classes typically state: *You shall write regularly and continuously about what matters to you.* Many are stumped by such a course requirement. If they are seasoned graduate students, they are more familiar with assignments that include “two class presentations and a paper or a project” and with choosing topics for these assignments from a list, or at least a domain, prescribed by the course outline. But I’m interested in the research they will do when they have to find their own

topic and ideas, research that matters enough they will commit a year or two of their life studying and writing and making sense of it (Chambers & Oberg, 1998; Oberg & Chambers, 1992).

When I first began university teaching, I assumed that students arrived at graduate studies with a research topic in hand, or at least, at hand. Next, I assumed that it was my task, as an instructor, to give them the opportunity to explore and become more deeply informed about their interest. But I quickly discovered many teachers don't have a topic or a question, at least one that is easily accessible or fully conscious. Students may arrive at graduate studies with compelling ideas, significant experiences and questions that plague them, but often they do not recognize any of these as worthy for graduate inquiry (Oberg & Chambers, 1992). This is a source of some anxiety especially as the time to write a thesis or dissertation draws near. Even when students declare a topic sometimes they don't have a lot of heart for it, and what really matters is swimming just below the surface of their alleged topic. What matters may lurk in that time in between sleep and wakefulness. So I ask graduate students: what keeps you awake at night? What do you think about when you cannot fall asleep? What wakes you up in the middle of the night?¹⁴

I know something matters when it keeps me awake, or when I'm compelled to rise from my bed in the middle of the night or the early dawn to write. Sometimes it's in these wee hours when the rest of world lies still enough so I can hear my heart speaking.

In the fall of 2000, I taught the required introductory course in curriculum studies, and Michelle Bertie-Holthe, a newly admitted graduate student, took the course. Upon my invitation to write about what matters, Michelle wrote short cryptic messages about gophers and lightness and dark, but mostly the dark. Something was keeping Michelle awake at night, in her gopher hole, but I didn't know what it was.

Another Place: In Our Writing Notebooks

When I tell students to write about what matters I avoid telling them how or when, and sometimes (like Carlos Castaneda) they are stumped. So I suggest they keep a writing notebook (Chambers, 1991; 1998; Chambers & Oberg, 1998).¹⁵ I invite them to write not as a way to display what they know, or have learned, but as a form of inquiry. Following a common edict of writers, and teachers of writing, to novices (cf. Bradbury, 1990; Brande, 1934/1981; Cameron, 1992; Dillard, 1990; Goldberg, 1986, 1990; Ueland, 1938/1987), I recommend that students write regularly. Following Rebecca Luce-Kapler's advice, I suggest that ten minutes a day is better than not writing at all.¹⁶ I invite students to write their way into a topic; and if they already have one, I invite them to explore and go deeper with it, through writing. I don't require students to submit all of their writing; my purpose is not accountability. I read their writing so I invite them both to deepen their ideas and to invite them to (re)-connect with

the memories and emotions attached to those ideas. I respond with enthusiasm for their ideas, to instill confidence in their ideas and to instill an awareness of the craft of writing so that they may extend their ideas in and through writing. I want them to know that their experiences, their ideas, and their writing matters; that as an audience I am “all ears.” I ask: *Have you said or written everything you want to say about this topic?*¹⁷

I think we write and research to figure something out; it might be something small, and it might be something big.¹⁸ Novelists do it, documentary filmmakers do it, and poets and playwrights do it. So do journal and diary writers, who never intend to go public with their work.

Georgina asks, “*Do you have ears? Do you have a heart?*” (Chambers, 1989, p. 103). Writing in a notebook invites me to listen to myself, to listen to hear my heart speak. If I listen it will tell me what matters; it will show me the path with heart.

*“Big compelling ideas, important matters nestle inside these notebooks” I tell graduate students, “but sometimes the writer cannot hear them. Sometimes you skip right over them and move onto to the next thing. Read your writing out loud to your self or the wall or your cat or your lover or your 8-year-old daughter. And see if you can hear your own ideas. See if you can hear where you are staying safe, avoiding a subject, or outright lying. See if you can hear where your voice rings true and you say something that you need to be listening to. Listen to yourself and what you are saying (or not) in your writing.”*¹⁹

When I began to notice Michelle Bertie-Holthe in class, I saw a farmer’s wife with four sons, who’d gone back to university to become a teacher. But I heard very little. Michelle was remarkably quiet. In her notebook were small cracks in a tightly sealed door. Out each crack seeped small cryptic fragments of what would become a story and eventually a thesis. What could be heard through the cracks was the radiant shame of a teacher whose temporary contract wasn’t renewed and the howling grief of someone losing a job she loved. The small quiet voice of a witness seeped through the cracks, a woman whose student walked into school one day with a gun and murdered one student and wounded another. Her school, W. R. Myers, and her hometown, Taber, Alberta were on the map. And she was out of a job, out of a profession. And in the fragments of her story you could hear that she believed these two incidents, and the writing in the course, were interconnected, and that they were turning points.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger was interested in turning points. In these moments of turning, *Kehre* in German, we rise above our every-day world and come to see, hear and understand life and being differently (Schrag, 1986). Eventually, we return to the taken-for-granted, but the memories of those turning points remain, turning and turning. At what point, do turning points, and our researching of them, become mistakes?

A Third Place: In Mistakes

Hubert Dreyfus, an ardent critic of artificial intelligence, believes that in our society, wisdom is increasingly equated with problem solving. But wisdom, Dreyfus says, is a kind of “ethical expertise,” knowing the right thing to do in a situation, rather than a form of problem solving (Young, 2003). “This wisdom,” says Dreyfus, “requires us to dwell on our mistakes.”²⁰

Dwelling has a bad name in our ahistorical, pleasure seeking, and time-crunched society. Donny Brasco (Newell & Attanasio, 1997) was advised “to forget about it,” an anathema to dwelling. Dreyfus means *dwell* in the Aoki and Heidegger sense of the word—to be still with, to remain for a time with, to reside with. Dwelling means recognizing that mistakes, once made, reside in memory whether we want them to or not. Mistakes, whether they are my own or those of my ancestors or neighbours, will not be ignored or denied; rather they must be attended to. If I dwell with these mistakes, in a generative way, or “with a boundless heart” as Jardine (1990) says, I may find myself on the path with heart.

Michelle Bertie-Holthe believed that she made mistakes. She believed that her takes on the young boy who became a murderer were mistakes, as was her faith in the school administrators to treat her justly. And she believed her response to it all was a mistake. I think that her real mistake was that she believed that she could have prevented either—the loss of her job or the shooting.

My first mistake was that I did not advise my graduate student to apply to the Human Subjects Research committee for approval for her research, because it didn’t occur to me that autobiographical inquiry had “human subjects.”²¹ My second mistake was that I believed academic freedom is true, that my student could make these matters of public record, and first hand observation in the laboratory of life and work, the topic of her thesis. My third mistake was that I believed Michelle Bertie-Holthe could write literal truth and not be harmed, once again.

Finding a Path With Heart

Step 1: Attending to Logos: Right after the line, “You shall write regularly and continuously about what matters to you,” my course outlines typically say: “You will read widely and you will read a lot.” While much research in education denies or resists pathos, I think inquiry into what matters will simply not let you do this. You must explore and write the suffering and grief that comes from living in an imperfect world. But you must also make peace with the past and the present, and live into the future. And it is logos, in part, that makes that possible. Attention to the word, and to the words of others, rescue what matters from staying stuck

in pathos. Logos—as a word—is related to legend, through the Latin *legere* to gather, to collect, and to read; and *legenda*, the things to be read. And the things to be read are narratives, legends, lessons, teachings and scholarship—all relatives of the Latin *legere*. When you gather and read and truly study what others say about your topic, what matters is no longer just your selfish, self-centred concern. Logos balances pathos, keeps the traveller on the path.

Michelle read everything on feminism and silence, on bullying and violence, on healing and recovery. She read about power, its uses and abuses, and the many faces of oppression (Young, 1990). She read about marginalization and difference. The logos of critical discourses became the constellations in her galaxy, the stars that guided her, as she journeyed along her Homeric way, to other lands and always, always trying to find her way home, back to some kind of sanity, back to a world where what happened could make sense and she could go on living (Bertie-Holthe, 2003).

Step 2: Crafting Stories: One of the ways we can retain our sanity on the path with heart is to cast memories as stories. Narratives are crucibles²² that hold the events, as well as the pathos, logos and ethos at work in each story. Through stories teachers/researchers record significant events, and like the originative meaning of re-cord, through stories those significant events are passed back through the heart again. Logos invites the researcher to dwell with the stories, as she did with the mistakes, to tease out the significance of the story for herself, and then for others who might read it. To accomplish this, a writer must craft each narrative, seeing the story and its meaning again and anew, with each revision. You become a writing apprentice, learning how best to tell the stories that must be told (Chambers, 2003a). In so doing you create or find the potency of each story for you, the narrator, and for your reader; its power to transform the writer and the reader. As you remember and record, you pass the story, and the memory, back through the heart, once again.

Michelle crafted stories. Because of their potency, Michelle wrote in the third person (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). She called these third person narratives “she stories,” and through them Michelle Bertie-Holthe chronicled the events of the Taber shooting and her non-renewal of contract as if they happened to someone else, and in a way, I suppose they did.

Step 3: Finding the Balance: The poet José Coronel Urtecho told Eduardo Galeano (1989/1991, p. 120) not to worry that his historical book *The Memory of Fire* was not objective.

“Don’t worry,” he said to Galeano. “That’s how it should be. Those who make objectivity a religion are liars. They are scared of human pain. They don’t want to be objective, it’s a lie: they want to be objects, so as not to suffer” (p. 120).

The path with heart may be important, at least in part, because it does not veer away from suffering, whether it is our own or others. Georgina Tobac, the Dene elder from Fort Good Hope, asked: *Have you got hearts in you?* What might her question mean? To have a heart is to live, with generosity and compassion. The root of compassion is passion, from the Latin *passio*, which means suffering. Compassion is the “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.”²³

The kind of heart that Georgina speaks of has pathos, compassion for the distress of others; but it also has logos; a consciousness of the other and what they are experiencing, and conscious intention to act; and it has ethos—the awareness of the other, of community and ethics. Thus heart is not just an emotional organ bereft of reason, or language or wisdom; rather its very life requires a balance of all three. The heart of which Georgina speaks makes living with others, and living well, possible. This is a path with heart, where you need not lose your sanity nor should you abandon your intellect or your responsibility to others.

Michelle found this wonderful, delicate, and necessary balance in her thesis. She managed to weave two very complex narratives, written in the third person, with an astute reading of theoretical literature and critical discourses. Her research offered an insightful critique of difference and bullying as she both experienced and witnessed it—and an analysis of an institution’s response. Besides that her thesis was a testimony that research matters—and that the doing of research saves lives. In this case it was Michelle’s, and if others read the thesis, it could save more. Her thesis defense was a celebration; her research mattered—to her family, to other teachers, to her committee. I nominated Michelle for my university’s Governor-General’s Gold Medal. A committee reviewing the manuscript panicked; the story was too risky. Without consulting the supervisory committee or the university ethical review board (or the Faculty of Human Subjects Research Committee) key university administrators demanded an immediate meeting with the supervisory committee. “*This thesis will never see the light of day,*” was the administration’s opening salvo; the supervisory committee called unethical, and the thesis, immoral and illegal. If the school district found out they might sue the university. The story was unethical, they said, because both the identity of certain characters in the story and Michelle’s critique of institutional and individual responses were too thinly veiled, and permission to conduct research had not been sought. As supervisor of the thesis, I offered a compromise: that the University of Lethbridge grant the student her degree but not publish the thesis. My compromise was refused; their counter, and final, offer was that the student revise the thesis so that it would be impossible for any reader to connect what was said in the document to the real events, people or place. If this was not done there could be legal action, which could result in all computers

where original copies thesis could be found might be confiscated, and Michelle would not graduate.

What followed was a long weekend; Michelle and her committee were caught in an ethical dilemma. We were accused of being unethical, Michelle for telling the truth, and the committee for condoning it. The only options Michelle had was to walk away from her degree or to fictionalize the thesis; to lie in order to tell the truth. In the end Michelle relented; she disguised the events, the place and the people so fully that it is impossible to link the events in the thesis with the actual shooting at W. R. Myers School in Taber; and I admit to encouraging her to do so. Since there have been 37 school shootings in the USA, and only one in Canada, Michelle moved the setting of the story/research to the American Midwest. The title of Michelle's thesis had been: *Close to Home: An Autobiographical Inquiry into Being Marked Different in Schools*. She changed the title but not the last line of the thesis. "It was this writing," wrote Michelle, "that provided the map which has led me forward, which has led me home."

Where Does the Path Lead Us? Or Why Bother?

For most of my life, my encounters with death have been fleeting and with a few exceptions, relatively benign. Lately death has been a regular visitor, and people that I love dearly are passing on, becoming ancestors. I'm trying to pay attention to what the dying need from me, and what I am blessed to be receiving from them. Some of my best teachers have been or are close by. Yet, many are distant and death makes the distance greater between us all.

At the time of these events, one of my beloved but distant teachers, Carol Shields, was receiving palliative care for cancer that had spread from her breasts to her liver. Though she lived in pain, in the final months of her life, Carol Shields still wrote. As well as working on a novel, she wrote a short piece for the epilogue of a recently published tribute to her writing and her life.²⁴

"Let me say what I have discovered through the acts of reading and writing," wrote Carol Shields. "It is simply this: the language that carries weight in our culture is very often fueled by our search for home. Our rather piteous human groping toward that metaphorical place where we can most truly be ourselves, where we can evolve and create, where we can reach out and touch and heal each others' lonely heart."

Michelle Bertie-Holthe researched and wrote her way home, and like Georgina Tobac, Michelle was a truth-teller. She spoke her truth at great risk to herself. And like Don Juan advised, she looked carefully at each path and she chose the path with heart; it was not joyous but it was

necessary. In the end she was able to tell a story but she was not able to tell the story, the one that she'd witnessed and experienced, the story she must live with for the remainder of her life. Michelle was able to write a certain kind of truth, but not the literal truth. So if Michelle's thesis wasn't literal, was it literature? Like Castaneda, her fiction enabled certain truths to be told but someone reading the thesis will have to dig deep to find literal truth.

In the end, an educational institution bullied her once again. The last time her job was on the line, this time it was her degree. So Michelle wasn't allowed to be the truth-teller she wanted to be. She couldn't say that a student, her student, who was mercilessly bullied at school, walked into W. R. Myers High School one day and murdered Jason Lang, another of her students. She could say that a school administration she believed in did precious little to prevent it and a great deal to downplay the events, what led up to them and what followed. But she couldn't say which school administration and she couldn't say that it happened in Taber, Alberta—sweet corn capital of Canada—and not Florida, or Iowa or Littleton, Colorado, although the Taber school shooting happened only days after Columbine High School shooting. Michelle's research mattered; she followed a path with heart and in so doing she found a voice. And more. Through the acts of reading and writing, Michelle evolved, she healed her own lonely heart, and she told her truth, a certain kind of truth. And on 26 May 2003, The University of Lethbridge awarded Michelle Bertie-Holthe her degree, Master of Education.

Postscript

Once found, staying upon the path with heart (especially when it requires truth-telling) takes courage and I am often a coward. Eduardo Galeano (1989/1991), the journalist from Uruguay, writes:

Fear dries the mouth, moistens the hands and mutilates. Fear of knowing condemns us to ignorance; fear of doing reduces us to impotence. Military dictatorship, fear of listening, fear of speaking make us deaf and dumb. Now democracy, with its fear of remembering, infects us with amnesia, but you don't have to be Sigmund Freud to know that no carpet can hide the garbage of memory. (p. 112)

When I finally faced the fear that had dried my mouth, moistened my hands, mutilated my words, and paralyzed my pen (making the editor wait eight months for revisions), I also faced how I was implicated in what happened to Michelle and her thesis. Denying my culpability probably enabled me to begin this story, but facing my culpability almost prevented me from finishing it.

So I phoned Michelle, ostensibly to double-check that she wanted her name used in the published version of the story. But I secretly hoped that she would veto publication, at all, and then with a clear conscience I

could push the *delete* button instead of *send* and put this story behind me. We have agreed to include her response to that phone call.

March 20, 2004 11:45:36 AM MST (email)

Hi Cynthia,

I've done my thinking. Once again I appreciate your concerns for me. However, I am not going to be part of burying this story, hiding in the shadows and in silence. I would be opposed to you publishing this without my name in it. This is what I saw, this is what I heard, this is what I experienced, this is what I think about it, this is what I learned, this is my testimony. I believed what I wrote, I believed what I learned; I won't turn my back on it because of fear. Fuck Fear.

Remember in *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* when Castaneda asks Don Juan what one can do to overcome fear, and Don Juan replies,

"The answer is very simple. He must not run away. He must defy his fear, and in spite of it he must take the next step in learning, and the next, and the next. He must be fully afraid, and yet he must not stop. That is the rule!"

I spent a long time figuring out how to come out of my gopher hole, to stay in the light, and to recognize the mechanisms within and without that tempt me back into darkness.

I won't hide it under a blanket. If I had a chance to publish my thesis, I would take it, and I would want it to be published in the form that I first wrote it. If someone said to me, "You will be accepted into this doctoral program—or we'll hire you—if you agree to let this piece die," I would choose to publish. This goes to the very crux of what I believe is important about this story.

So, change Jason's last name to Lang, and leave the rest alone.

Take care of yourself. I think of you guys often. And when you think about all that happened last year, remember too that I wouldn't take any of it back, or wish it away. There is a reason things happened the way they did. You provided me a place where I could heal...that is priceless to me. At the very root of it was an ethic of care...

Love Michelle

And so with a dry mouth and mutilated memories, I do tell the story, the one that I live with, and a version of the one that Michelle lives with. And now, take this story and do with it what you will. But don't say, some long day into the future, that you hadn't heard this story, because you have heard it now.²⁵ And now you decide if Michelle and I found a path with heart, and if we followed it. You decide if this research matters.

Notes

¹ This paper was originally given as an invited lecture at the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, as part of the 2002-2003 Symposium Series in the Department of Language and Literacy Education.

² I first discovered this quote while researching a paper, "All My Relations," where I linked global culture and pedagogy to the significance of Dene testimony to the Berger Inquiry (Chambers, 1989; 1991). I was reminded of the quote again in reading Trevor Herriot's award winning creative non-fiction account of the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan, *River in a Dry Land: A Prairie Passage* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2000), and used this quote to introduce my paper "Buffalo Rock" (2002), an unearthing of familial connections to the sacred buffalo stone destroyed by the Canadian government.

³ Galeano, E. (1989/1991). *The book of embraces* (C. Belfrage with M. Schafer, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton & Co. (Original work published in Spanish in 1989). p. 10.

⁴ I would like to thank Canadian poet and novelist, and friend, Bruce Hunter, also a teacher at Seneca College in Toronto for the insight that good writing must always seek a balance among pathos, logos and ethos. For more information on Bruce Hunter and his publications please visit his web site. <http://www.quarterstaff.on.ca/hunter/>

⁵ Please note that Michelle Bertie-Holthe has read several drafts of this essay, including the final draft, and endorsed its content and intent.

⁶ See for example the 11 May 2003 firing of reporter, Jayson Blair, 27, from the NY Times for plagiarizing 36 of 73 stories from October 2002 until he was fired. See New York Times Sunday edition 11 May 2003 or various web sites such as CNN-<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/Northeast/05/10/ny.times.reporter/index.html> for details of the offences and the outcome. FUBAR, the movie, was produced by Busted Tranny Productions at 1625 Shelbourne St. S. W. Calgary, AB T3C 2L2. This mockumentary of two headbangers who go on one last blasting party was an official selection of the Sundance Film Festival. See the movie's official website http://www.fubar-themovie.com/title_page.html. The CBC Radio One aired the fictionalized documentary on a dog hair farm in Australia and later referred to this documentary as a Canadian example of the blurring between fact and fiction in journalism.

⁷ *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 1267

⁸ This interest in locating research in what matters to the inquirer has been a long abiding interest of A. A. Oberg as well as myself. Oberg and Chambers (1992) explored their practice of inviting students to "write about the things that really mattered in their lives." In that early paper, we already began to raise the ethical questions that lurked within such a practice, the potential for the teacher's misuses and abuses of power; the question of the pedagogic responsibility of the teacher when students open up topics of significance for them and others, and questions about the legitimacy of such inquiry for both our students and ourselves within the academy. In that paper we cite Vaclav Havel (1986) who writes, "it has always been my hope in my writing that, by bearing witness to certain specific experiences of the world, I will be able to disclose something universally human, something specific only being a way and a means of saying something about *being* in general, about people in today's world, about the crisis of modern-day humanity—in other words, those matters that concern us all."

⁹ *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 697

¹⁰ Bopp (1985) interviewed many Dene elders about their pedagogical practices, and they consistently referred to the need to talk to one's children.

¹¹This type of teaching does not refer to training in technical skills, but to matters of the heart and mind: topics, which academics might categorize as morality, politics, and history.

¹²David G. Smith (1994/1999) writes: "Most social theory in the West, especially since the turn of the century, has been generated in urban, highly industrialized environments where the only trees and plants available to human observation are products of hyper-cultivation, and the only visible animals are profoundly domesticated, dependent on pleasing human overlords as a means of manipulatively procuring the necessities of life. Such a site for the generation of theory and policy must inevitably ensure social outcomes that are driven by the ambiances, rhythms and tones of their situational origin, characterised most clearly by prediction, control and rationalization, to say nothing of an embeddedness within a sonic environment echoing primarily the noises of machines. Canadian musicologist and composer, R. Murray Schafer, says one of the first prerequisites for learning to hear the world in new ways is to undergo 'ear cleaning'" (p. 82).

¹³I would like to thank Antoinette Oberg for first making explicit, in personal conversation, this notion of the contradiction, as a significant site for inquiry with graduate students. These contradictions are like cracks that let the light shine in. "Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" says Leonard Cohen (cited by T. T. Aoki, 2003, p. 1). Following A. A. Oberg, I notice that the contradictions can appear within the topic, within the text, within what the research says about the topic or the text, or between what the researcher writes and says about the topic and the text.

¹⁴I began asking these questions in the early 1990s. See my reflective critique at the end of the 1991 essay co-written with A.A. Oberg where I list the questions that I pose as way of inviting graduate students to "write and speak about things which are of importance to them. I do this because this is what I do, this is the way I teach, this is the way I live my life." The questions I list are: What does really matter to you? What keeps you awake at night? What questions do you ask? What are you really interested in? What do you really care about? What do you want to or need to know or understand better right now?"

¹⁵For a fuller description of this practice see Chambers & Oberg, 1998. "Because of the unfamiliarity of everyday life as topic and site for inquiry inside and sometimes even outside the academic setting, we suggest specific strategies to help students direct attention to Topos. We invite students to enter into Topos through writing in notebooks and journals. From the first day of classes, we set up writing activities both in and out of class in which we invite students to describe their lived world. These descriptions come about through free-flow writing, narratives, vignettes, journalistic descriptions and poetry as well as various forms of life-writing such as autobiography, memoir, diary, and letters. In this writing, students use their everyday language to write their way into Topos. (We could say that through writing they 'represent' or 'describe' Topos and that would be partially true; but as the poststructuralists point out, through writing we are also creating that world as we write it, rather than 'representing' the world as it really exists external to us). We require students to hand in all, or portions of, that writing so that we can engage their writing. By asking questions and making comments, we invite students to see how their topic lives within their site" (p. 49). Also see C. Chambers "Student Journals: Private Lessons in Public" (*Analytic Teaching*, 42(1), 37-42, 1991) and "Composition and Composure" (*Alberta English*, 36(2), 21-27, 1998).

¹⁶Rebecca Luce-Kapler told me that ten minutes a day is better than not writing at all during the course of a telephone conversation as she was trying to balance

her life as a professor with her life as a poet. Luce-Kapler's most recent book is a book of poems, *The Garden Where She Dreams* (Nepean, ON: Borealis Press, 2003). Luce-Kapler is also co-author, with B. Davies and D. Sumara, of *Engaging Minds: Learning and Teaching in a Complex World* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000). Forthcoming is her text on writing and writing pedagogy, *Writing With, Through and Beyond Text: An Ecology of Language* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, forthcoming).

¹⁷ This question is adapted from a question Carol Bly asks in her book *Beyond the Writer's Workshop: New Ways to Write Creative Non-Fiction* (Toronto, Anchor Books, 2001).

¹⁸ In an acceptance speech for a literary award, aired on CBC Radio One, Alistair MacLeod told the audience that he believes that all writers begin with what they worry about.

¹⁹ This is quoted directly from a handout given to a graduate course in curriculum studies (EDUC5200) that I taught at the University of Lethbridge in the January to April semester in 2003.

²⁰ Dreyfus is a professor emeritus from UCLA who has written several books critiquing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and computers (*What Computers Can't Do?* and *What Computers Still Can't Do?*). Nora Young (Feb 18, 2003) interviewed Dreyfus as part of documentary on the seven heavenly virtues, of which wisdom is one.

²¹ Perhaps more devastating in light of what transpired was that Michelle Bertie-Holthe specifically asked me if she needed to apply for Human Subjects Research ethical approval and I specifically told her not to bother. Not because I was being evasive or duplicitous but because I simply thought that the mandate of the university committee or the new Tri-Council Policy did not apply to autobiographical inquiry.

²² In her essay "A Curriculum of Difficulty and 'The Anger in Our Miss Maple': The Story and the Commentary" (*Language and Literacy: A Canadian Educational E-Journal*, 3(2), Spring 2002), Leah Fowler writes, "All of [my narratives] may serve as force-field containers (*temenos*) which textually hold still the shards and images of difficulty long enough to examine the site of self, especially in teaching." In my essay, *Things I carried with me...* (*Educational Insights*, 8(2), December 2003b), I suggest narrative is a crucible for recording and interpreting significant memories, as well as transferring those insights to others. Particularly in relation to journeys, both physical and metaphoric, narratives of the journey undertaken are a kind of psychological, spiritual and intellectual mapping of the landscape covered. I say, "Pilgrims return home with objects of the pilgrimage, tokens that reconstruct the narrative of the journey, crucibles for the memory, textual accounts that interpret the experience for others" (p. 1).

²³ *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 268

²⁴ *Carol Shields: Arts of a Writing Life* (Victoria, BC, Canada: Crown Publications, 2003) edited by Neil K. Besner, Dean of Humanities, University of Winnipeg.

²⁵ I thank Thomas King (2003) for his eloquent way of reminding audiences of their responsibility to a story (and the knowledge it transfers) once that story has been heard.