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How Learning and Living Resilience amidst Experiences of Difference, Stigma, Marginalization, and Loss Contributed to my Identity as a Social Justice Educator: A Scholar Personal Narrative

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How Learning and Living Resilience amidst Experiences of Difference, Stigma, Marginalization,
and Loss Contributed to my Identity as a Social Justice Educator:

A Scholarly Personal Narrative

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Amy B. Schuler

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2015

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

How Learning and Living Resilience amidst Experiences of Difference, Stigma, Marginalization,
and Loss Contributed to my Identity as a Social Justice Educator:
A Scholarly Personal Narrative

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.
We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions
required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

This qualitative study, written as a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), explores how experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss resulted in an evolving social justice identity further shaped by resilience and hegemony. Living in a family defined by mental illness and poverty, the narrative arc of the SPN explores how this scholar learned and lived resilience, ultimately resulting in a passion for social justice. The discovery of hegemonic norms at play ultimately opened new understandings, which evoked healing, joy, and a desire to build classrooms where students can claim the power of their own stories. This study recommends the need to extend social justice beyond the walls of academia as a way to cultivate environments that honor the lived experiences of all people while also challenging hegemonic norms that oppress and marginalize. It further recommends using other theoretical lenses beyond the risk-resilience binary as a way to disrupt the overcoming narrative while challenging deficit thinking so prevalent in how we frame our lives and make meaning of our experiences.

Keywords: resilience, stigma, hegemony, social justice

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to both my mother, Marsha and to my father, Casper. Mom, you continue to show me unconditional love and for that I will be forever grateful. Your strength throughout the years saved me from falling deeper into depression and hopelessness. I continue to carry you and the lessons you taught me into my relationships with colleagues, students, friends, and my own family. I carry your heart with me and look forward to many more years of making memories and sharing stories. I love you.

Dad, you loved me unconditionally and I know you tried to find health and peace in your own mind and body while on earth. I have carried you with me in my relationships with students, colleagues, friends, and my own family. I continue to carry you with me in my writing and in my memories. I miss you every day and ache knowing that George and Henry will never know you the way I have known you. Yet, I am thankful that you are at peace. Thank you for loving me, playing with me when I was young, and supporting me in all of my endeavors. I love you.

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To my boys, George and Henry, I can only say that I am sorry to have missed bits and pieces of your lives. I thought about you every time I was in class, every night away, and every afternoon I was busy typing. Thank you for loving me in the way that only children can. I love you both with all of my heart!

To my mom, Marsha and step-father, Aaron and to my parents-in-law, Mary and Don, I owe deep gratitude. Without your love, encouragement, and help taking care of George and Henry, I could not have finished my program. You walked with me during my low points of self-doubt and shared my joy at passing my CLR and other milestones. Thank you. To my brothers, Ryan and Denver, and my sisters-in-law Clarissa, Angie, and Yvette, I will forever appreciate your support and love during this time. I am very lucky for the family in which I was born and the one that so graciously adopted me later in life. I love you all!

To all of my friends and colleagues who supported me throughout these years as I struggled to find balance between being a mother, student, friend, teacher, and wife, I love you and am forever grateful. Thank you for your unconditional love, your generosity, and time spent together.

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Chapter One

Pre-Search

Recently my husband said to me, “Amy, you have such a keen sense of justice, yet you can be so self-righteous and unforgiving of others.” He meant no harm and I cannot say I disagreed with his words. Thinking about his assertion, I asked myself, “How is it that my soul seeks social justice?” and “Why am I so self-righteous and unforgiving of others?” As I grappled for answers, I thought back to my 5-year-old self, sitting on a couch listening to my dad. He said, “Amy, we have to move to grandma’s house to take care of her. You and your brothers will attend Mt. Calvary School. We will visit the Kindergarten and meet your teacher soon. Is this okay?” I don’t remember my answer. I was still sad over the death of my grandpa, my dad’s father who called me pumpkin and played Missing Matchups with me in the hospital before my open-heart surgery the year before. The move resulted in the uprooting of my family. Thus began a long journey where realities of financial insecurity, mental illness, and death came to dwell. Forty some years later, my husband’s assertion forced me to step into the past to better understand myself as someone who seeks social justice yet also embraces self-righteousness and judgment.

My husband’s comment came during my final doctoral class where I was expected to synthesize and reflection on the learning of the past three years. This class symbolized the end of my coursework and the beginning of dissertation work. The class also solidified my dream of becoming a college professor in a department of education. At this point, my critical literature review had been approved and I was all set to carry out my grounded theory on social justice education. Considering was a culminating class, I was not expecting anything new to seep in. As life would have it, something new did: Robert Nash’s Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), a methodology grounded in narrative research.

Narrative Research

According to Creswell (2013), narrative writing takes many forms including biography, autoethnography, life history, and oral history. Moreover, memoirs, personal narrative essays and autobiographies also fit into the traditional narrative (Nash & Bradley, 2011). A Scholarly Personal Narrative has similarities with these more traditional methodologies but it also differs in unique ways.

Biography is a form of narrative writing where a person chronicles the life of another person (Creswell, 2013). An autobiography is another form of narrative writing focusing, as the biography does, on a “more chronological and linear” story (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 19). Yet, unlike an SPN, “many autobiographies tend to be impersonal in their authors’ self-depictions, more about events and people than insightful, risk-taking self-disclosure” (p. 19). Memoirs are another form of narrative writing where a writer tries “to make sense of the ‘raw material of life’ by looking inward, not outward, at least initially” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 17). Writers of memoirs and SPN’s both honor and chronicle the life of an individual. However, a stark difference is apparent in that the SPN writer works toward “connecting [her] universalizable themes and beliefs to both the non-academic and academic writings of others in order to provide important background ideas for [her] readers” (p. 17)

While evident that SPN writing shares some characteristics with more traditional narrative methodologies, Nash and Bradley (2011) feel that SPN writing is most closely aligned with the personal narrative essay as it “tells the story of the author in such a way as to analyze, interpret, and reflect upon some larger idea, event, or important figure in the writer’s life” (p. 18).

SPN Guidelines

The SPN methodology is grounded in the belief that all of our stories matter and that healing can occur through the telling. This type of methodology will also enable the researcher to incorporate human experience into scholarship (Nash & Viray, 2013; Unger, 2014). The four components of SPN writing include pre-search, me-search, re-search and we-search.

Pre-search includes what playwrights refer to as a through-storyline, or theme. Key themes are identified through the writer's analysis of her story establishing "a narrative arc" that "binds all the various stories, places, themes, and characters together in some pivotal way" (Nash & Viray, 2013, p. 127). This beginning stage includes a journey within oneself to discover "the formative/driving/motivating idea or conviction that you hold with such energy and passion that you are willing to take the time, and make the effort, to research and write about it in a sustained way" (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 36).

I want to understand how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as someone who seeks social justice, particularly as it connects with my teaching. As Unger (2014) states, "Approaching my research using the SPN methodology allows me to combine elements of my autobiography with scholarly research in ways that most clearly enlighten the issues surrounding this important topic" (p. 35).

The second component, me-search, is the understanding that an author is never entirely objective in her research because she carries her own stories, beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices into her research, analysis, and interpretation. Supporters of qualitative research believe this to be liberating, particularly for groups traditionally marginalized. In the case of SPN writing, the me-search component comes "prior to research [...] Our personal lives and experiences are

central to our research and scholarship” and cannot be separated from them (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 58).

Re-search is the third component of SPN writing and includes connecting the analysis of the writer to extant research and scholarship. Yet, as Nash states, “traditional understandings of what constitutes legitimate truth criteria in research starting from the outside in (object to subject) will have to give way to new truth criteria starting from the inside out (subject to object)” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 80). Because narrative research methodologies interpret the world differently (i.e., constructivist, subjective) than quantitative research (i.e., measurable, objective), re-search within SPN writing will look different because “data collection, literature reviews, and the analysis and interpretation of data [...] always emanate from the central themes and self-narration of the writer” (p. 87).

The final component of SPN writing is we-search, which speaks to the need of connecting the stories, themes, and research in my SPN to a greater audience. Natalie Goldberg states that “We are important and our lives are important, magnificent really, and their details are worthy to be recorded” (2010, p. 55). I hope others who have similar journeys will be able to relate to the details of my life, particularly how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. This move from personal to professional emphasizes the deep relationships we have with one another; the move also illustrates how our stories can impact and extend existing scholarship on identities of social justice educators.

Beyond the components of pre-search, me-search, re-search and we-search, Nash and Bradley (2011) offer 10 guidelines for SPN writing. First, researchers must ensure that their voice is “distinct, candid, and uniquely [their] own” (p. 27). As a child growing up in a

financially insecure household with a mentally ill father, my voice was relegated to staying within. My voice has been ready to surface for quite some time. SPN writing offers a venue. Second, the authors refer to a “through-line” where the researcher must clearly stay close to themes within the writing. The themes of difference, stigma, marginalization, loss, resilience, as well as the creation of a social justice identity found in my own life are my “through-lines” within the dissertation. Third, in order to engage readers, the researcher should include “personal stories” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 27). I share my stories, experiences, and understandings freely with the readers. Fourth, Nash and Bradley emphasize the *me*-search part of the SPN as it is the foundation for the re-search and we-search components. The *me* has been ready to come out for over 35 years and will provide a strong foundation for the re-search and we-search components. Fifth, “SPN writing starts with the *me*, reaches out to the *you*, and ends up with universalizable themes that connect with the larger *we*” (p. 27). I have always sought connection with others, both in my personal and professional life. Moreover, my desire to share my experiences to help others who have had similar journeys will help me focus on the *we*.

Sixth, the authors contend that citing the works of others is fine, as long as the citations are genuine and offer scholarly support that sticks closely to the themes of the SPN. I fully intend to connect my experiences and scholarly writing with extant literature on difference, stigma, marginalization, loss, resilience, and social justice. Seventh, Nash and Bradley encourage researchers to deviate at times from traditional ways of writing. I tell my stories through a creative lens, hoping to provide insight for my readers on the themes found in my story. Eighth, it is important for the researcher to firmly believe that her story is one of importance and worth sharing. My story may prove helpful to those fueled by the same passion for social justice. As Viray states, “When I am asked to share these stories, someone on the

other side of the universe may find connection, and therefore, community. And perhaps, just perhaps, my stories may help others heal (2014, p. 144). The ninth and tenth guidelines remind the researcher that writing can be fun and should be written with vigor. I thoroughly enjoy writing, particularly if I feel it can help others. Passion and vigor are in my nature and hopefully reflected in my writing.

This scholarly personal narrative offers my journey as a foundation in uncovering how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. In keeping with the SPN methodology, I strive to tell my story with honesty and integrity.

Validity, Reliability and Generalizability/Universalizability

Looking to qualitative research as a guide is helpful when thinking about issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability/universalizability. Typically, qualitative researchers do not view the topic of generalizability as a crucial part of their study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) as the word itself is grounded in the quantitative and positivistic world (Creswell, 2013).

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), generalizability refers “to whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the specific research subjects and setting involved” (p. 36). As opposed to generalizability, SPN writing offers the we-search component in an attempt to find connection between people and their experiences.

Creswell (2013) shares his understanding of the notion of validation as a process and “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 249-250). With regard to validity and SPN writing, Nash and Bradley (2011) express how more traditional ways of validating research “will have to give way to new truth criteria starting from the inside out [including] trustworthiness, honesty, plausibility, interpretive

self-consciousness, introspectiveness/self-reflection, and universalizability” (p. 80). Again, the authors offer questions regarding the issues of validity and generalizability/universalizability to guide SPN writers:

- How do we determine our writing is trustworthy and honest?
- What does plausibility mean in the context of our personal narrative writing? What is plausible scholarly personal narrative writing, and how does it overlap and depart from more traditional notions of validity?
- How self-conscious is the SPN writer in terms of introspection and self-reflection?
- What is “good” introspective analysis, and what constitutes “adequate” self-reflection?
- How do we know whether and to what extent the self-narrative carries universal implications for the personal and professional lives of others?
- How exactly is the “self” of the writer connected to the “multiple selves” of readers?
- What might be some valid tests to determine the universalizability of an SPN writer’s central themes? (Nashe & Bradley, 2011, pp. 80-81)

I kept these questions in the forefront of my mind and heart as I wrote my SPN, thus sharing my truth as I experienced it. Although those aligned more with a quantitative background may still question the validity and credibility of SPN writing, the connection to relevant scholarship and theories will differentiate the SPN from other forms of narrative writing, such as memoirs or biographies.

Objectives and Research Question

Within my SPN, I look both inward and outward believing as Goffman did that “identities are forged in interaction with others” (Kivisto, 2011, p, 128). My identity was certainly impacted by those with whom I shared my life. My dissertation attempts to answer the following question: How learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. Perhaps the writing will offer clarity into this question and I will be able to more fully respond to my husband’s assertion that I possess such a keen sense of justice but also tend to be self-righteous and unforgiving of others.

Conclusion

There is still tension within the academy regarding the validity of such personal writing. At the same time, it is imperative that people take “their responsibility to look critically at their socio-historical contexts. More important, writers are free today to position themselves at the center of their inquiries. This adds creative vitality and personal relevance to social knowledge” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 18).

Writing my dissertation as a scholarly personal narrative is the most effective way to uncover how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. Further, this methodology breathes life into the themes found within my story and through connection may help others who also identify as social justice educators. Finally, I hope that my writing adds an important voice to the conversation and extant scholarship on the importance of narrative research (Nash & Bradley, 2011).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Nash and Bradley (2011) encourage SPN writers to embed the literature within the narrative instead of the tradition of reserving a separate section for the “Literature Review.” They feel that relevant literature is not separate from the narrative but instead should be “embedded in the text whenever and wherever they are directly appropriate” and used to “further explain the themes”, narrative arc, and through-storyline of the SPN” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 132). Although I do embed literature into my narrative, I also provide a more “traditional” literature review that includes support for narrative writing, such feminist standpoint theory and oral history. In addition, I include relevant scholarship that connects to the themes found in my narrative—resilience, stigma, and pedagogies oriented toward social justice.

Narrative Writing

Historically, research has been carried out from a place of positivism, which is a “[p]hilosophical position holding that the only genuine knowledge is what can be obtained using the methods of science” (Rohmann, 1999, p. 308). In an attempt to challenge this claim and provide further support to SPN writing, I explore feminist standpoint theory and oral history. Both feminist standpoint theory and oral history offer an alternative for those whose lived experiences may not find support in a quantitative view of human behavior. By questioning what is placed before us as knowledge and reaching deep into people’s lived experiences, feminist standpoint theory and oral history honor different stories and ways of understanding one’s story.

Feminist standpoint theory. Just as the SPN methodology honors voice and questions the positivist definition of what constitutes truth, so too does feminist standpoint theory. Truth

and knowledge are deeply connected to epistemology. Rohmann (1999) helps extend our understanding:

Epistemology asks the questions What is knowledge? How do we obtain it? How can we verify it? What are its limits? What is the relationship between the knower and the known?[...] Perhaps the most common simple definition of knowledge is true, justified belief: I know something if I believe it to be true and that belief is justified. But the question of what knowledge is, at root, is so elusive that the answers tend to be by-products of a particular world-view rather than objective attempts at definition. (pp. 117-118)

As stated above, the worldview that has historically shaped what we view as knowledge is positivism. Those holding this worldview “rejected other possible ways of knowing” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5), particularly from historically marginalized people such as women and people of color. Feminist standpoint theory provides cohesion. The Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography defines feminist standpoint theory as:

An approach that argues that research has traditionally been limited in its analysis and conclusions because it has, in the main, been constructed from the standpoint of men, ignoring the standpoint of women and reproducing patriarchy. Moreover, it is usually the view of white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied men. In contrast, standpoint theory challenges the masculinist bias of rationalist epistemologies and offers an alternative perspective that seeks to understand the world from standpoints that are argued to be preferable, or at least of equal value. (Castree, N., Kitchin, R., & Rogers, A., 2013)

I offer my truth on how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator through writing a scholarly personal narrative. This truth is grounded in who I am, how I create meaning, and my intersecting identities. Karen Hering (2013) states:

As we put our own experience into words, noticing its unique texture and scent, its sound, color, and flavor, by lifting our eyes we begin to discover what transcends these particulars. And in that discovery, our words will point toward a larger experience of life where greater meaning-and connection to others-dwells. (p. 31)

Through SPN writing, I put my own experiences into words with the hope of reaching others in the sacred places where connection dwells. In this way, I hope to offer my story of how my identity was shaped for social justice.

Oral history. Oral history works towards understanding the diversity of people's experiences through story. Historians have relied upon oral history for thousands of years as a way to expand stories and people's understanding of their lives.

In his classic work *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Paul Thompson (1988) intimately shares how oral history:

[...] thrusts life into history itself and widens its scope. It brings history into, and out of, the community. It makes for contact—and thence understanding. [...] it can give a sense of belonging to a place or in time. In short, it makes for fuller human beings. (p. 21)

In widening my students' experiences by incorporating stories of those traditionally marginalized, I believe we see both those in the past and those around us as fuller human beings. Greene (1988) states:

There are always strangers, people with their own cultural memories, with voices aching to be heard. They have always been coming; they are still coming from the ravaged places, the police states, the camps, the war-torn streets. Some come for sanctuary; some, for opportunity; some, for freedom. (p. 87)

These stories from people with “voices aching to be heard” should not be found on the periphery. They are incredibly important to hear. Clearer and fuller pictures of the lives of all people will lead to a greater understanding of human behavior and relationships. Those who carry out oral history are committed to understanding “how history appears from the point of view of the ‘common person’ through interviews when possible and a critical analysis of personal documents” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 64).

Those committed to SPN writing are also interested in understanding how people see and make meaning of their own lives. The stories found in narrative writing unearth people’s experiences and reveal how meaning is created from these experiences, which cannot be quantified. Through my narrative, I offer my story, how I created meaning from my experiences, and how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. Through connection with the lived experiences of others, perhaps we will all become “fuller human beings” (Thompson, 1988, p. 21).

Narrative Arc

Beyond feminist standpoint theory and oral history, scholarship that is connected with the themes, or narrative arc found within my SPN is also present. These themes include resilience, difference, stigma, marginalization and loss, as well as pedagogies oriented toward social justice. Additionally, my SPN includes the notion of hegemony. Although I focus on scholarship that

connects to the narrative arc as a way to explicate my story, I remain open to other themes that may arise as my relationship with the literature and myself deepens.

Hegemony. Gramsci saw hegemony as a process of maintaining power through manipulation, imposed by dominant groups, so all would view the dominant ways of seeing the world as normal and how things should be (Kincheloe, 2004; Rohmann, 1999). Over time, this concretizing of normal “becomes deeply embedded, part of the cultural air we breathe” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 15). As we experience and internalize hegemony, it impacts how we view ourselves and create meaning out of our experiences.

Resilience. Unger (2012) explains resilience “as a set of behaviors over time that depend on the opportunities that are available and accessible to individuals, their families, and communities” (p. 3). Windle and Bennett (as cited in Unger, 2012) define resilience as a “process of negotiating, managing and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma.

Scholarship pertaining to resilience illustrates the widespread nature of mental illness, the commonality of experiences of children who are affected, and the explanation of why resiliency wins out in some and does not in others (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Participants in Blount’s study (2013) who due to intense fears of developing schizophrenia positively adjusted their lives to fend off the possibility of the illness. Those in McLoughlin’s study (2010) believed they possessed an internal drive to succeed as well as a reliance on a higher power.

Werner (2005) posits that “many behavioral scientists who study children who grow up in high-risk conditions have shifted their focus from negative developmental outcomes to the study of individuals who have made a successful adaptation to life” (p. 4). Many scholars now focus on “protective factors” that help children overcome less-than desirable environments such as poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, and divorce among other things (Garmezy, 1993;

Morningstar, 2013; Werner, 2005). Werner (2005) includes the following in her definition of protective factors, or buffers:

Good health; an easygoing temperament; intellectual and scholastic competence; an internal locus of control; a positive self-concept; the ability to plan ahead; and a strong religious faith or sense of coherence [...] role model of a competent mother who was sensitive to the needs of her child; affectionate bonds with alternate caregivers—such as grandparents, older siblings, teachers, and elder mentors—and an external support system. (p. 5)

Some of these same protective factors are also found in Garmezy (1993) and include:

[T]emperament and personality attributes such as activity level, reflectiveness when confronted with new situations, cognitive skills, and positive responsiveness to others. [T]he presence of some caring adult, [...] availability of social support [...] a strong mother substitute, a concerned teacher, a scaring agency, institution, or a church. (pp. 391-392)

Resilience includes the importance of social context and social influences on the individual (Rutter, 2012). Schools serve as one such context where social influences abound.

Rutter states,

Children fared better when treated well, given responsibility and multiple opportunities for success in varied fields, and the teachers provided models of conscientious behavior and an interest in and positive response to pupils' work and other activities. [...] school ethos will affect social functioning simply because it constitutes a social group as well as a pedagogical institution. (p. 38)

Rutter's comments undergird the dedication that teachers have toward their students—giving them opportunities for success both inside and outside of the classroom, engaging them in meaningful work while also modeling conscientious behavior, and providing connection.

Stigma and marginalization. When writing about stigma, Hinshaw (2005) references the “historical practices of literally branding members of castigated groups in order that they carry a visible sign of disgrace ... degraded status” (p. 23). He further asserts that the use of stigma in modern terms “connotes the underlying disgrace and shame” and that the person is seen, and may see herself as “intrinsically flawed” (p. 24).

In his seminal work, *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity* (1963), Goffman states, “[s]ociety establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complements of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories” (p. 2). Others then judge those with whom they come into contact against such categories. “While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (pp. 2-3).

The stigma that is then accorded this person is seen as justified because the rest of society has determined that his particular way of being is “incongruous with our stereotype of what ... he should be” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). The author names those who adhere to the socially-constructed ways of being and who make the judgment of those who do not fit into these ways of being as *normal*. He further states,

The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do ... the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that

he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess. (p. 7)

As one internalizes stigma, one also internalizes shame. Internalizing stigma, and thus shame “moves people into isolation” where one's reality is seen as “deviant” and “that their very being is flawed in some essential way” (Jordan, 2005, p. 85). Moreover, *stigmaphobia*, as articulated by McRuer (in Berube, 2006) occurs when “you find people scrambling desperately to be included under the umbrella of the ‘normal’” (p. viii).

Pedagogies oriented toward social justice. Pedagogies oriented toward social justice include critical pedagogy, multicultural education, culturally responsive/relevant education, democratic education, and social justice education (Apple, 2004, 2013; Apple & Beane, 2007; Au, 2012; Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; Banks, 1993, 2007; Chapman & Hobbel, 2010; Freire, 2000, 2005; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Nieto, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Shor, 1987; Shor & Freire, 1987; Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011; Sleeter & Grant, 2010).

Critical pedagogy. Wink (2005) defines critical as “seeing beyond” (p. 25) and pedagogy as the “interaction between teaching and learning” (p. 25). Critical pedagogy can also be defined as “the task of educating students to become critical agents who actively question and negotiate the relationships between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change” (Giroux, 2007, p. 1). Moreover, it is thought of as an educational movement with the aim of transforming oppressive structures such as schools through the process of liberatory education (Bettez & Hytten, 2011; Freire, 2000, 2005; McLaren, 2003).

Foundationally bound to Marxism, existentialism, radical Catholicism, and critical theory, critical pedagogy as it connects with Freire, is based on his experiences working with the Brazilian poor but it is also grounded in a larger movement against the wealthy and Brazilian military (Kincheloe, 2004). Freire (2000, 2005) saw education as having the ability to transform, humanize and empower people. As opposed to what he termed the “banking” method of education where “the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, 2000, p. 73), liberatory education involves praxis (i.e., action-reflection-action).

Critical pedagogy is necessary according to Freire, who stated, “We know that it’s not education which shapes society, but on the contrary, it is society which shapes education according to the interests of those who have power” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 35). Those who possess power control society and their narratives dictate curriculum. Therefore, the goal of critical pedagogy is to transform learners to subjects as opposed to objects through problem-posing education resulting with “the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (Freire, 2000, p. 81).

Multicultural education. Informed by both critical theory (CT) and critical race theory (CRT) which focuses on race, racism and power, multicultural education is an approach born out of a larger struggle within the larger Civil Rights movement with a focus on dismantling oppression (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). It is a term that traditionally focused on race and culture but increasingly expanded its’ reach to include gender, disability, class, and sexuality (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Moreover, advocates for multicultural education call for educational equality, a valuing of cultural diversity, a critical examination of the workings of schools, policies, and curriculum to counter hegemony and oppressive practices.

Multicultural scholars challenge oppressive practices that do not serve all students well. These practices include: tracking, teaching approaches, standardized tests, and classroom climate. The sociopolitical context of multicultural education, the significant role that teachers can have on impacting their students, the continuing impact that poverty can have on students, and the effects of NCLB on teachers and schools are further explored within the literature (Banks, 2007; Nieto, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter & Grant, 2007).

Culturally responsive/relevant pedagogies. Culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy is connected to critical pedagogy and multicultural education, as well as the social movements that framed them. Like Freire's attempt at liberating the poor in Brazil, and those working towards liberation and equality within the Civil Rights movement, culturally responsive teaching aims to liberate historically marginalized groups, particularly students of color. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching is defined as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31).

Ladson-Billings (1995) sees culturally relevant pedagogy as "not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (p. 160). She further states when given the opportunity of learning within a culturally relevant context, African American students do achieve (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Sleeter and Cornbleth (2011) explore the possibility of culturally responsive teaching as a way to understand how students' backgrounds affect their learning in a standards-based classroom. While Gay (2010) acknowledges the importance of culturally responsive teaching, including the goals of affirming cultural identities, becoming more critically aware and challenging inequities within schools, she is acutely aware that sociopolitical changes must occur as well.

Democratic education. Sharing the emancipatory quality found within critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and culturally responsive/relevant teaching is democratic education. Influenced by Dewey's (1938) belief that democracy rests on critical thought and social action by capable students, democratic education is marked by

a concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities, concern for the welfare of others and "the common good," faith in individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems, the open flow of ideas..., the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies, an understanding that democracy is not so much an "ideal" to be pursued as an "idealized" set of values that we must live and that must guide our life as a people, and the organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life. (Apple & Beane, 2007, p. 7)

The work of creating schools and curriculum that embrace, promote, and uphold democracy is primary to attaining equality for all. If schools are democratic than their structures, policies, and practices should reflect these democratic principles (Giroux, 1988; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Further, democratic education offers the opportunity to help students realize their potentials to be compassionate people who care for the welfare of others (Fesmire, 2003) for as Dewey (1959) states, "There cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for life in the school, and the other for life outside of the school" (p. 7).

The push for democratic schools is part of the history of our nation that views public schools as necessary within a democracy (Spring, 2001). Moreover, it is part of a larger historical movement against practices that are seen as undemocratic (i.e., tracking). Democratic schools are also a way to combat the realities of subjugated knowledges, hegemony,

standardization, and cultural and economic reproduction found within our schools (Apple, 2004; Apple & Beane, 2007; Au, 2012; Beyer & Apple, 1998; Giroux, 1988). According to Foucault (1980), “Subjugated knowledges are...those blocks of historical knowledge which were present but disguised” (p. 82). For Foucault, connecting differing forms of knowledge would result with a clearer picture of groups struggling to have their voices heard, so as to maintain their place within the story of history. Democratic practices and principles are evident in the pedagogies touched upon thus far and also connect with social justice education.

Social justice education. Advancing democratic education is social justice education. Influenced by the theoretical foundations and tenets found within other pedagogies oriented towards social justice as well as the struggles of historically oppressed people, social justice education calls for systemic change, challenging and confronting domination and oppression in all its forms, including racism, classism, and sexism. Moreover, social justice education calls for teachers to move their struggle for social justice beyond their classrooms to the streets (Adams, 2010; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; Kohl, 1998; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Picower, 2012; Wade, 2007).

Summary

Literature highlighted in this chapter both support narrative writing and explicate themes found within my SPN dissertation. Feminist standpoint theory and oral history honor the stories of people who are found in narrative writing. Moreover, scholarship on resilience, stigma and marginalization, and pedagogies oriented toward social justice connect to themes, or the narrative arc, found within my own story and undergirds how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator.

Chapter Three

Me-Search, Part One: Childhood and Adolescence

Within this chapter, I offer stories of how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. These experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss occurred during my childhood and adolescent years. Although the focus of the SPN is my own story, I cannot overlook the intersection of my story with that of family and friends.

My Family

The dynamics of my family have changed throughout the years. Some changes proved natural and slow, while other changes were more painful and sudden. As I search for my own identity, it is imperative that I explore the identities of those closest to me. My family of origin includes my father, Casper, my mother, Marsha, and my two older brothers, Denver and Ryan.

My dad's origins. My dad was born in June, 19XX. His parents were Helen and Cap. Helen's love for my dad, an only child, was endless and she doted on him his entire life. Helen and Cap owned a coal business in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and did quite well, offering my father a childhood of love but also protecting him from want. Although they didn't struggle financially, other issues resided in their home. My grandpa was an alcoholic, violent at times, who did not choose recovery. This reality was a point of contention in my grandparent's marriage and led my grandma to focus solely on her son, my father. The alcoholism and arguing led to a lack of intimacy and estrangement between my grandparents.

My dad was a beautiful baby and grew into a handsome man. His dark brown hair, matching eyes, and olive complexion, proved irresistible for many women. Not only was he physically attractive but he also had the ability to engage in animated conversations with anyone with whom he came across. He had a wicked sense of humor and an incredible brilliance,

particularly in math. He loved playing with my brothers and me when we were young, quite a kid himself. He also loved sports—I particularly remember his love for baseball and football. His loyalty to sports was so great that even when my mom went into labor with me, he asked her sister to take her to the doctor, as the Packers were playing. His dad, Cap, my grandpa, died of stomach cancer when I was only five. My dad's mom, Helen, my grandma, died of natural causes when I was 24.

My mom's origins. My mom was born in April, 19XX. Unlike my dad, my mom had nine siblings and she was squarely in the middle. She had two brothers, Stanley and Michael (Mickey) and seven sisters, Mary Ellen, Gloria, Sharron, Jane, Marian, Lori, and Gretchen. Her mom, Bernice, stayed at home with the children while her dad, Stanley worked as a police officer.

Also unlike my dad, my mom grew up with very little as the salary of her dad did not stretch to cover the needs of 10 children. My mom has many memories of being cold because of a lack of warm clothing, shoes that didn't fit, very little food, and sleeping in bunk beds, two to a bed. Like my dad's father, Stanley was also an alcoholic creating an uneasy tension in the home. Further, the gap between the siblings spanned 24 years, offering little opportunity for closeness between the oldest and youngest siblings.

My mom was in her late-20's when she lost both of her parents. Stanley died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1969 and Bernice died of cancer in 1972. Although I have no memory of meeting my grandma, my mom did take me to see her when I was a baby. I never met my grandfather as I was born three years after his death. My mom has shared that losing both of her parents within a few years was incredibly painful but that having three children helped in healing

her grief. Whereas my dad's childhood was carefree, my mom's childhood was more serious due to financial constraints and a divvying up of attention among the children.

My mom is a beautiful woman with chestnut brown hair, brown eyes and freckles. Her outward beauty is matched only by her inner strength, fortitude, and love for her children. She loved my father and grieved when his illness robbed her of the man she once knew.

My mother and father met while attending Central High School. Upon graduation, my father attended the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse while my mother wanted to attend nursing school in Rochester. However, that would have meant my parents involving themselves in a long-distance relationship. When sharing her desire to attend nursing school with my dad, he said, "If you go, we can't get married." And, so my mom decided not to go to nursing school.

When she first told me this story, I was angry and felt a grave injustice had taken place. How could she give up her dream so easily? Looking back, though, I realized that she was operating from her own experiences of witnessing a "working" father and a "stay-at-home" mother. For her, unlike me, the desire to get married and stay home with children was more important than a career—times were different in the 1960s.

Whereas I saw her decision to work in the home as opposed to outside of the home as oppressive, she did not, echoing hooks (1984) sentiments that many women could not identify with viewing the "family" and "home" as oppressive. In fact, "many [...] women find the family the least oppressive institution" (p. 37). Moreover, hooks points to "affirm[ing] the primacy of family life because we know that family ties are the only sustained support system for exploited and oppressed peoples," of which my mom was, due to her impoverished reality growing up (p. 37). Her own family life and support included not only my dad, but three children as well.

My family's story. My brother Denver was born in March of 19XX; Ryan in August, 19XX. They remember my parents bringing me home; they loved having a baby sister. Denver was a healthy boy and enjoyed the status of only child for his first few years. Ryan developed serious asthma and almost died a few times from it. Ryan and I look a lot like my dad, although my brother has grey eyes, whereas mine are deep brown. Denver looks like my mom's side of the family and has grey eyes as well. Although I will share memories of them both throughout my narrative, it is important to state here that I can't imagine my life without them. My childhood is mixed with theirs. Many of my memories include them and much of the support I received during the turbulent times came from them. They are a part of me and my story, as are my parents.

I was born on October 3rd, 1971. The whole in my heart, which is common in babies, did not close and my parents knew that once I reached the age of five, I would have to undergo open heart surgery. I looked just like my dad when I was born—dark brown hair, dark brown eyes and olive skin. I don't have a lot of memories before the age of five, except those that took place in the hospital during my surgery.

My memory of my grandfather Cap playing Missing Matchups with me in the hospital right before my open-heart surgery resides in my heart still. The way he called me *pumpkin* with such love and affection is also in that space. He has been gone for 38 years but I still remember him and feel his presence. This story, this memory of mine, connects me with him, and his past. It also connects him with my children and their future. "When we live in a family [...] where we know each other's true stories, we remember our capacity to lean in and love each other into wholeness" (Baldwin, 2005, p. 18). I have been carried by and invited into the stories and lives of some of my family members who have come before me and who are here now. These stories

have impacted my identity in ways unknown. I will continue to share their stories with my own children, who will continue to carry these same stories to future generations.

While in the hospital, I took rides in a red wagon with a young boy who was undergoing surgery as the result of his grandma accidentally running him over with the lawn mower. I don't know what happened to this boy but my mom still refers to him as my "boyfriend" while there. When I awoke from surgery, my mom was staring down at me. I tried to bend up to hug her but was so sore that I couldn't and began to cry. She bent down toward me to give me a kiss and I felt much better. I went home after a few weeks and prepared to begin kindergarten.

At a young age, my father was the bread-winner. He was very loving and supportive of my brothers and me. My mother was equally loving but more strict with us, reflecting perhaps her own upbringing. I have many memories of my mom coming home from her third-shift work as a 911 dispatcher, sitting with my dad in the living room both drinking a Blatz beer while smoking and talking. As the years progressed and our financial situation grew worse, along with my father's mental illness, those times of sitting together talking would diminish altogether. Moreover, my mother would become the bread-winner, instilling in me at a young age the notion that husband and wives both work.

I was close with both of my brothers and always felt loved by them and my parents. I used to read them poems I had written and they would all listen with excitement and support. I even had a poem published in one of those anthologies that you pay to have a poem added. I didn't care about having to pay because to see my work in print elevated me above the impending darkness of mental illness that would become my family's reality.

During the summer of 2014, I spent time with my aunt Gloria, my mom's oldest living sister. She talked about her own personal struggles with mental illness years before and how she

internalized the accompanying stigma. She was fearful of asking for help fearing that no one would understand her deep sadness. Even if she were to ask for help, it was difficult finding professionals who could help her. After she could no longer take the darkness in her mind and spirit, she checked herself into a psychiatric ward with her two young children in tow. She could not recall their reactions to this situation, or even who picked them up from the hospital. She just remembers feeling alone and different; feelings that I, too, have experienced for much of my life.

As she spoke, I thought about the sadness of people who have a mental illness...the isolation and loneliness they feel...palpable...solid...heavy. She and my dad held these feelings in common. My dad shared with me that when he was about 18-years-old, it felt as though a black cloud was hovering over him and he could not get out from under it. Had Gloria and my dad ever talked with each other about their similar sadness? Talking with one another may have broken down the isolation and other heavy feelings they both carried.

As I reflect upon my nuclear and extended family, the importance of story weighs heavy on my heart. I am troubled by the stories that were never told believing as Baldwin (2005) does that “[w]e require story in order to link our lives with each other. Story couples our experiences, mind to mind and heart to heart” (p. 20). If there is a lack of story, then connection can be lost and this disconnection will be carried forward. Although I know a lot about my mom and dad’s lives growing up, I don’t know a lot about any of my four grandparents’ early lives. I wonder what stories they carried in their hearts. I wonder if they felt isolated. What family members have I not “met” because their stories were never told? What aspect of myself, my identity derives from an unknown family member from past generations? How can I recover my grandparents’ stories? Thinking about my life as a direct link back in time and a direct link to

the future, I “learn to [also] take [my] place in the story going on around [me]” in the present (Baldwin, 2005, p. 35).

Baldwin (2005) asserts that story has the potential to heal family heritage. She shares the Iroquois nation’s belief “that the decisions made by the living tribe must take into consideration the impact on the next seven generations of the tribe” (p. 143). She further shares that “The decisions we make in our personal lives also have generational consequences. We have inherited these consequences and we will pass them along” (p. 143). As I think about my own life and that of my mother and father’s, I wonder what decisions made by people in our past generations were passed along to us. What habits and ways of being were a part of my great grandparents and their grandparents? As my heart aches to know more, I must find peace in the reality that there are stories that may forever reside in the shadow of which Carl Jung spoke (Baldwin, 2005).

When I look at my nuclear family, I see mental illness, depression, and alcoholism. I also see an incredible amount of love and commitment to family. Yet, hegemony, anger, isolation, and patriarchal norms are also present. Perhaps my experiences with difference, stigma, and marginalization are part of a greater collective story, part of collective identity. Resilience resides in our story too. All of these stories, the spoken and unspoken, “live in [my] spiritual bones” and are part of my authentic self (Baldwin, 2005, p. 149).

As I reflect upon the collective generational story as well as my own individual story, I contemplate the shadow and grapple with ways in which I can integrate stories that continue to be hidden into the collective generational story. Baldwin (2005) states,

If we step up to the challenge of healing the family story, we need to be grounded in the healing of our personal story. We start there, standing firm in our own life experience

and the person we have become through linking, editing, disorienting, and revisioning our personal story. This is the psychological and spiritual foundation required to head into family history. (p. 150)

Writing my dissertation as an SPN is one way to “shift ... these generational decisions out of shadow” (p. 153) and integrate them into my personal story and thus the collective generational story. Moreover, I am committed to healing my personal story through SPN writing. As I heal while delving deeper into the family story, I hope to not only bring healing to the collective generational story, but also work towards reframing the story that I pass along to my own children and their children for generations to come. In essence, I hope to “not change the realities, but ... change how those realities are understood, and therefore, what quality of story is passed along” (Baldwin, 2005, p. 155).

I pass along my experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss but can now integrate resilience into the story as well. Resilience is not only part of my story, but it is also part of my mom’s and her mom’s story. I can also pass along the strength and resilience of my father as he fought his illness for so long, and how my brothers and I are all okay because of the love of our parents and their commitment to family—these aspects are part of the family story too. These aspects are just as important as experiences of difference and stigma, marginalization, and loss.

My story and that of my family and the collective generational story will be passed down to my children as a “gift to them: a story about forgiveness, about compassion, about questioning. *I am contributing to my lineage backwards and forwards, through the personal work I’ve done to heal myself*” (Baldwin, 2005, p. 157) through my SPN. I offer my story to my nuclear family, to my own family, and to future generations because “when a story is sent

authentically into the world it is received” (p. 161) linking with those who read and hear it, integrating into their own stories. After all, “noticing where we stand in the middle of generations gives us a sense of continuum and a way to recognize how time proceeded before we were born and will proceed after we die” (p. 164). The ability of story to connect and offer healing exists throughout my own narrative. So, too, does the art of questioning.

The Art of Questioning

Toddlers and young children constantly ask ‘why?’ I imagine that most people can remember a time when one of their parents, or another adult answered the ‘why’ question with, ‘that’s just the way things are.’ This response never set well with me, even as a young child. When in school, particularly when I attended Mt. Calvary, I knew not to ask questions because I came to believe that my teachers were spokespeople for God. I do remember asking ‘why?’ over and over again as I grew older though. Some questions I remember asking or even just wondering out loud include the following:

Besides Mary, why are only men revered in the Bible?

Why are women seen as prostitutes and second-class citizens in the Bible?

Why does my dad have the last say in things?

Why do women take their husband’s last name?

Why can’t I play sports after college?

Why don’t Ryan and Denver have to clean the house or do the laundry?

Usually the answer was, ‘that’s just the ways things are.’ My incessant questioning never really led anywhere when I was young. Yet, throughout the years I strengthened the art of questioning, particularly when talking with friends and most certainly when I began teaching. Sadly, many of the answers I received throughout the years were cloaked in patriarchal norms, even from my

female friends and family members—we had all breathed in hegemonic norms. Although this inner questioning gained momentum early in my life, it wasn't until my late twenties that I became equipped to make sense of the power dynamics, the hegemony at play. Yet, even though I felt empowered to question injustices, those in power used their gender and societal positions to defend 'the way things are.'

Starting School (K-4th grade)

I began kindergarten at Mt. Calvary, a Wisconsin Evangelical Synod church and school (WELS), in 1977. The school was near my grandma Helen's home, where we were living at the time. My experiences at Mt. Calvary had a profound impact on me, laying the religious foundation of who I am today. I loved kindergarten. Our room was brightly colored with a playhouse, a piano, a dress-up area, and a carpet, where we took our snack break and naps. My teacher was very strict but I knew she loved me. I quickly learned that the school's main focus was on forming our faith in God. I felt safe and warm in kindergarten.

I have no clear memories of 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade other than engaging in the formal curriculum. Although we must have studied social studies, science, English, and math, the main focus was religion. Hegemonic norms permeated my childhood at Mt. Calvary. I studied Bible verses, hymns, the Ten Commandments, and Luther's Catechism. Through Bible lessons and lectures, I learned that most things were a sin, including homosexuality, divorce, suicide, abortion, taking the name of God in vain and disrespecting elders. Although I do not remember my teachers outright stating that marriage was defined as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman only, this was definitely the message. I also never talked back to teachers because I felt like I'd be talking back to God, which was also a sin. When I did sin, I immediately felt guilty. This propensity to feel guilty for almost everything developed into a habit during my time at Mt.

Calvary. Still today, it is difficult at times to not see myself as a sinner and undeserving of God's forgiveness and grace.

At Mt. Calvary, classrooms were run with an iron fist and fooling around was not tolerated. I'm not sure if I was born a rule-follower or was forced into this role while there, but I have always had a strong fear of getting into trouble, which is probably tied into the guilt I continue to feel at times. I adhered beautifully to the rules and regulations of my teachers as my goal was to please them. Beyond following rules, my time in these early grades included singing praises to God during choir and playing four-square, kiss-or-kill, and swinging during recess. I also enjoyed reading, learning, and being a "good" Christian. I took my love of God very seriously.

Fourth grade stands out to me because of my love for my student teacher. A beautiful young woman with deep red hair, she was a teacher who cared deeply for me and her other students. I met with her once in private to talk. As my father's illness did not intensify until I entered sixth grade, I am uncertain if our conversation included my family, or just school-related issues. She lived close to my grandma's house and one afternoon I walked to her apartment for lunch. I felt so proud and special to have this individual time with her. I often wonder where she is in her life now. I also think about the impact she may have had in my desire to become a teacher.

Beyond this memory, the other one that I still clutch to is attending a classmate's birthday party. During the party, we decided to pretend that we were princesses, kings, etc. I wanted to be the princess and the birthday girl turned to me and said, "You aren't pretty enough to be a princess" and proceeded to give this title to a more "deserving" classmate—a young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. Deflated, I walked away and never asked to be the princess again. I

felt different, ugly and unworthy, internalizing the notion that I would never be pretty enough. I don't remember telling anyone about this incident at the time. Yet, it rises to the surface from time to time in certain situations, reminding me of "my place" only to be put back into "its place" deep inside of my heart. I felt heavy after these types of experiences, as if rocks were placed in my heart weighing me down. I didn't realize at the time how quickly I accepted what was considered normal, or beautiful, or right, or good.

As I look back at this situation from my fourth decade, I see that perhaps my classmate was just being mean or feeling insecure. As children, we believe in ourselves and that the world is truly ours with no limitations. Yet, slowly the people with whom we interact have the potential to strip us of our self-esteem, hope, and possibility. We are forced into hierarchies and identities until, if ever, we reclaim that which was stolen. I have brought her comment with me throughout my life and into personal and professional relationships. It has shaped my identity in how I *see* and treat others.. This is where my resilience is evident; it is this resilience that causes me to act differently. I also *see* others differently. In this *seeing* and acting is resilience.

It was also during fourth grade that I became involved in sports, from softball to track to basketball. I was really good in basketball and loved the game. Running, having teammates, and scoring baskets fed my self-esteem, helping to counter the insecurity I held in other areas. My love of the game would continue through my final years at Mt. Cavalry.

The Final Years (5th-8th grade)

With fondness, I think of my sixth grade teacher. For him, teaching was a calling and he cared deeply for his students. He was strict but supportive and encouraging. He not only wanted us to do well in school but he also wanted us to intimately know and believe that God loved us. I worked hard in his class because by that point, I had perfected the art of pleasing my teachers.

When he walked into the room, he immediately had our attention and respect. He expected us to complete our homework, be silent while he lectured, and participate when he asked us questions. He praised us when our answers were correct and encouraged us to keep searching when they were not.

When I entered sixth grade, I was incredibly insecure. My body was changing in ways that were foreign to me and I remember being acutely aware of and sensitive to how others viewed me. Once, I walked into class with a new perm in my hair and some of the boys laughed. I can still feel my shoulders sag that morning, wishing I were home in bed. I often wonder why I didn't stand up for myself in this situation or the one back in fourth grade at my classmate's party. I continue to,

consider the way in which the individual in ordinary [...] situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them. (Goffman, 1959, p. xi)

What impression of myself was I trying to convey in both of these situations as an adolescent? Why did I care what anyone thought of me, or my hair? I realize that this is what happens to children, adolescents and young adults, though—we allow others to not only scrutinize us but define what is good, what is normal, and what is pleasing. We hand over our power, our self-esteem, even our authentic selves to others. I wish I would not have done this. I hope my own sons do not do this in their lives.

I allowed others to define me but only in certain situations. I was incredibly confident in sports, particularly in basketball and track, and in my knowledge of the Bible. No one could rattle me in these areas. Yet, in matters of my physical appearance and math, for example, I

couldn't muster any confidence at all. At this time while at Mt. Calvary, I believe that the persona I was deep down inside found tension in what was being told to me and what I knew to be right and ethical and kind. In time, I would challenge hegemonic norms and take back my power, my self-esteem, and my authentic self.

My beloved sixth grade teacher ended up leaving Mt. Calvary for reasons that I can't recall. I imagine he was called (a practice in the WELS tradition) to a different position in another school. I was sad that he left because I would have had him again in seventh grade. Instead, I had a different teacher and have no memories of my time during that year in school. Eighth grade, however, proved very memorable for a variety of reasons.

My father shared a conversation with me when I was in my early twenties that he had with my eighth grade teacher, who was also the principal of the school. My dad asked how I was doing in class and my teacher responded, "She's not the smartest student but she knows her Bible verses well." My dad replied, "I think she's doing just fine" and walked away. My father shared that he was very angry at my teacher's comments and I am thankful he didn't share this with me at the time. Yet now, as I look back through the lens of being a teacher, I am so troubled by his comment.

Although to my teacher memorizing Bible verses was incredibly important and I am certain he felt he was complimenting me by his comment. Yet, his view of me as "not the smartest" had to have affected how he treated me. I always knew I was in the "dumb" group for math and never really excelled in this area, but to know that my own teacher and leader of the school felt this way, left me quite disappointed and angry. It is hard enough that we are judged and wounded by our peers. That professional educators would do the same creates even more

for students to grapple with. Moreover, as a parent, I can't imagine hearing such an insensitive comment said about one of my own sons.

A wonderful and positive event that eighth graders at Mt. Cavalry had the privilege of partaking in was performing in an operetta. Denver's class performed *The Wizard of OZ*; Ryan's, *Oliver Twist*. Ours was *Oklahoma* and I was Ado Annie. I loved acting. Confidence and connection to others grew as I practiced and received affirming comments. In order to prepare for our performances, we needed to practice on stage, which was located in the gym. At Mt. Cavalry, the gym also served as the cafeteria so before our afternoon practices, the floor of the gym needed to be swept. My eighth grade teacher used to ask me, and only me, to do this task. I felt embarrassed when he called my name and handed me his keys to open the janitor's closet—my dad's closet—for the broom. My dad had served as janitor for the past two years. I don't remember any of my classmates being asked to sweep the gym. Was he trying to shame me or did he have confidence in me because I helped my father clean after school most days? Were my classmates singled-out for other reasons?

The embarrassment I felt was quickly laid to rest once the practices began. I loved everything about the operetta—singing, dancing, making scenery, practicing my lines, getting into costume, working with others and of course, the final production. I was so proud of myself and my class as we performed for parents, grandparents, and staff. The applause warmed me. I was confident in myself as Ado Annie. As “Amy”, I was confined to play the role of the janitor's daughter trying desperately to conceal the hurt and pain that existed in my home and in myself. Yet, as Ado Annie, I was able to be free as well as guide and control how others perceived me. If I could hide my (and my family's) failings while taking on the persona of Ado Annie, then maybe I could give the “impression of infallibility” (Goffman, 1959, p.43) which

would spill out into my life as “Amy”, where I worked hard to “accentuat[e] certain facts [while] concealing others” (p. 65).

Beyond the joy that I found in our production of Oklahoma, I was still doing very well in basketball, and because we were a small school, I also participated in softball, cheerleading, and track-and-field. I am grateful I excelled in these activities. In these spaces, I gained confidence and believe that my participation in the operetta and sports really protected me after almost losing my mom during surgery that same year then experiencing the deterioration of my father’s mental health.

At home, I felt that my family was different, and as part of my family, I personally felt different and separate from others. We had been living with my grandma for many years now. No one else I knew lived with a grandparent. My father never seemed to have a job where he actually left the house until accepting the janitorial position at Mt. Cavalry when I was in sixth grade. Everyone I else I knew had a dad who worked outside of the home. To me this was normal, relegating me and my life to that of “abnormal.”

The janitorial position required two people but, for budgetary reasons, the school could only hire one. I know my dad’s illness took a turn for the worse when I was in sixth grade and really believe he couldn’t handle the work, particularly the work required of two people. Therefore, when he asked my brothers and me to help clean after school, we did because we were raised to help and honor our parents. Although I have always loved cleaning, some days I just wanted to go home and read, or play with friends. Although I was able to do these things sometimes, I still carried resentment and shame with me as I continued to place myself in a category of being different. No one else helped their dads with their jobs. My struggles with low self-esteem were affected by my role as the janitor’s daughter. I don’t know where I learned

that being a janitor was something to feel ashamed of or embarrassed by but I was ashamed and embarrassed nonetheless. I swept floors, cleaned the bathrooms, scraped gum off desks, and completed any other jobs that needed to be done. My mom would help my brothers and me too once she got home from her other job.

One of my classmate's fathers worked at the sewer department. The odor that she emanated reflected this. She was teased from time to time and although I felt bad for her, I also felt grateful that my dad was a janitor and not a sewer worker. I played right into hierarchical thinking and feel terrible for the role I played in "othering" her. I often think of her and wonder what memories she clings to from our time at Mt. Cavalry. I wonder if she felt different, marginalized, or stigmatized, accumulating rocks of her own in her heart. Did she carry resilience with her at the time? Does she now?

From sixth through eighth grade my dad's mood became more erratic and he and my mom argued a lot. At this point, peace eluded my family. It was hard to escape the chaos as my family held residence at the school. My oldest brother, Denver, had already moved out and Ryan was busy with high school. I felt trapped by the fighting and remember mentally wandering off and hiding in my closet. As I sat on my bean bag chair in this refuge, hiding from the sadness that clung to the walls of my home, clothes hung down and gently touched my head. During my time in this place, I shared my sadness and fear with my teddy bear, confident that my secrets would be safe with her. As I sat in my refuge, something deep inside of me yearned for a better, more serene life believing that in the future such a life would exist. Yet, a schism in my extended family weakened this hope. In their study, Angermeyer, Schulze, and Dietrich (2003) found that "the majority of respondents observed that friends, neighbors, and even relatives

gradually withdrew from the ill or the whole family” (p. 596). Sadly, half of my extended family withdrew from us, furthering my feeling of marginalization as well as loss.

During the Thanksgiving of my 8th grade year, I watched half of my extended family walk past our house to my aunt and uncle’s home two doors down but we did not join them—we weren’t invited. In the years prior, we had always been a close-knit family celebrating holidays as one large unit. Yet, there had been a falling out, the reasons of which are still unclear to me. My stomach still tightens when I think about this memory—the weight of the rocks in my heart was almost unbearable on that day. It wasn’t until the death of my aunt Mary Ellen in September of 2003 that my extended family would be reunited and a process of healing would begin.

My time at Mt. Calvary was over. I now looked toward high school. My oldest brother, Denver, attended Luther High School, of which Mt. Calvary was a feeder school. Years later, he shared that high school was not a good experience for him and did not hold fond memories of his time there. Ryan attended Luther for one year and did not like it at all, switching over to Central High School as a sophomore. I, too, attended Central. I was used to having around 12 students in my class but now had over 400. The size of the high school frightened me and I wanted to run back to Mt. Calvary.

Although I would describe myself from kindergarten through eighth grade as religiously conservative, once I began high school my beliefs shifted. Although I missed the security of Mt. Calvary, the move to Central helped me recover a core part of my being as I began to question everything once again. Perhaps resilience had been growing deep down inside of me and it finally reached into my soul, shaking me awake, reminding me of who I was. This resilience in the face of experiences of difference, stigma, and marginalization continued to shape my identity as one who sought social justice.

High School

As my mom and I walked into the school for registration in August of 1986, I was overwhelmed. Seeing a few of my former classmates offered little comfort. The halls were long and dark. I was certain that I would get lost and that people would make fun of me—loneliness rested heavy on my heart. I wondered if my classmates would be able to tell that my family and I were different, that something was wrong. Would I make friends? I so desperately wanted to attend Martin Luther Prep School, as my dream was to become a parochial teacher. Yet, the financial insecurity of my family would not allow it. This financial insecurity came from my dad's gambling addiction. My mom shares:

I remember depositing my check and heading over to the grocery store. I had a full cart of food. Once everything was rung up, I wrote a check for the amount. A few minutes later, the manager came to the checkout lane and quietly said 'your check isn't going through.' I told him that I had just deposited my check from work. I had to leave all of the groceries in the cart and left humiliated. I found out that our bank account was in the negative because of your dad's gambling. He owed money to loan sharks.

We couldn't even afford groceries so the prospect of attending a tuition-charging school was out of the question.

Although I felt the effects of our worsening financial situation beginning in high school, my mom and brothers knew of our financial situation years prior. We all began working outside of the home at the age of 14. My mom had to sign a special permission form to our respective places of employment. Most of the jobs we had were in the fast-food area because for each shift worked, a free meal was given. Although I was protected from most of the financial problems until I was in high school, my brother Denver was not. As the oldest, he was the first to start

working. He secured a job as a bus boy at a local restaurant. Upon receiving his first paycheck, my father said, “I need to have your paycheck so I can feed the family.” Denver shared with me how angry he felt at my dad’s request. We didn’t know he was ill at the time, nor did we have any idea of the suffocating effects of his gambling addiction.

Denver also recently shared that around this same time, when I would have been eight years old, my mom came into his room one evening crying. She didn’t have the money to buy me a Halloween costume and wondered if she could borrow some money from him. He gladly gave her the money for my costume—he was protective of me. My family protected me from some of the realities of our family life. Yet, this same reality would eventually split wide open for all to see soon enough.

My mom kept working to make up for my dad’s financial losses. Once I was in high school, he began selling all of the valuables we had in our home, including fine China, Hummel figurines that my grandmother bought while in Germany, expensive silver, and anything else of value. He depleted our college savings and even sold my mom’s wedding ring. Our fast-food jobs were a necessity and at one point, we were all working more than one job. In fact, as a family, we cleaned a building on the weekends for extra money. I emptied ashtrays, vacuumed rugs, and took out the trash. Beyond the financial insecurity, my dad’s mental and physical condition rapidly declined during my high school years.

He spent many days pacing back and forth in the dining room, sometimes naked, or in only his underwear. I felt incredibly awkward and ashamed to see him this way. He would talk to himself in an agitated voice, which sometimes scared me. I rarely invited friends over as I could never predict how he would behave. Hiding my dad from the world was a survival skill that I learned and perfected. Unfortunately, this hiding strengthened my already deep feeling of

difference and shame. For many years, I hid my feelings of inadequacy from others. Yet, sometimes and with no warning, deep, strong emotions would seize me, holding me captive, ravishing my young soul—sadness, turmoil, ecstasy, hopefulness, hopelessness, loss. Unable to call for help, I would linger in these spaces ripped apart from others.

Goffman's (1963) understanding of stigma explicates my experience during this time. "Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complements of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories" (p. 2). Others then judge those with whom they come into contact against such categories. "While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different [...]. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (pp. 2-3). The stigma that is then accorded this person is seen as justified because the rest of society has determined that his particular way of being is "incongruous with our stereotype of what [...] he should be" (p. 3). I didn't want anyone to see me as not fitting into the accepted categories. The more I isolated myself from others, entrenched in the heaviness of my emotions, the more I felt different and so desperately wanted a lightness of spirit.

Although much scholarship exists on the effects a parent's mental illness has on children, a disproportionate amount deals specifically with a mother's mental illness (Caveney-Pote, 2007; Morningstar, 2013) as opposed to that of a father's, which was my experience. The stigma attached to mental illness is well-documented (Angermeyer, Schulze, and Dietrich, 2003; Corrigan and Miller, 2004; Goffman, 1963; Hinshaw, 2005) and mirrors my own experiences of feeling marginalized, stigmatized, invisible, guilty, and full of shame. We who have grown up with a mentally ill parent also experience the loss of our childhoods. This commonality would have lessened the heaviness found within my heart.

In addition to being agitated, my dad became increasingly moody. I made myself invisible as a way to protect myself from the uncertainty of my father's moods. It was just easier to hide in my closet or, as I grew older, stay out with my friends. I then experienced guilt for feeling ashamed.. It would seize me, leaving me feeling as if I were devoid of empathy or compassion. Denver and I have talked many times throughout the years about how we felt we had to grow up too quickly and take on responsibilities that we weren't yet qualified to handle.

Another personal experience reflects the term "courtesy stigma" (Corrigan & Miller, 2004; Goffman, 1963), which is used to explain the "prejudice and discrimination that is extended to people not because of some mark they manifest, but rather because they are somehow linked to a person with the stigmatized mark" (Goffman, p. 538). During a basketball game when I was in 9th grade, one of my teammates turned to me and said, "Look at the guy in the stands." As I glanced up I saw a man sitting by himself. His greasy hair, disheveled appearance, and horn-rimmed glasses held together by masking tape led me to catch my breath. I replied, "That's my dad." She sneered and said, "No it isn't." At that point, I looked up at my dad to prove to her that indeed I belonged to him and said, "Hi dad. Is Denver coming?" After he responded, my teammate turned red and said nothing else. Although we continued to be teammates, I held this comment against her and didn't foster our friendship off the court. Although outwardly, I claimed my dad on that night, inwardly I distanced myself from him. A heavy shame rested upon my chest. Hinshaw (2005) references these same feelings of shame held by family members of people who suffer from mental illness.

Fortunately, I was a starting point-guard on the basketball team and was preoccupied with practices and games. Although I felt close to my family, pain resided in my home. It was easier to foster the connections and friendships with my teammates—I felt comfortable with them just

as I had with my classmates during our operetta. Although I was putting distance between myself and the sadness at home, I also think part of the distancing was natural as teenagers tend to migrate towards their friends.

My ability to do well in basketball helped lessen my feelings of difference and also strengthened my self-esteem. Yet, in other ways, I learned through the hidden curriculum that I held second-class status as a young woman. All of the administrators in my high school were White men, as were all of my social studies teachers. I felt quite invisible to them both in my classes and in the school at large. These male leaders held the last word and their truth was the truth, reflecting the status held by men at Mt. Calvary. Most of my social studies teachers were coaches and would pay special attention to both male and female athletes over non-athletes. Although I was a basketball star in 9th grade, I ended up dropping out at the beginning of the season in 10th grade due to an ankle injury. Not only did I lose my sense of belonging to the team, I also lost my athlete position among my teachers.

As far as academics were concerned, I pretty much coasted in high school. The only subjects I really struggled in were Algebra II and Chemistry. I loved my English Literature class and did well in my other classes. I maintained a solid 3.0 throughout. My counselor never talked with me about AP classes, such as AP English. In the area of math, I was never able to shake off being placed in the dumb group at Mt. Calvary and wonder how much more I could have done had I had the needed support. I may have actually loved math had it been taught in a way that was conducive to how I learn.

As I reflected about my counselor throughout the years, his interactions with me probably rested on seeing me as “just a girl” or “just a poor girl.” Maybe he didn’t “see” me at all. I find little comfort in any of these scenarios. I internalized this hidden curriculum found in my school

as I could not find in any of the leaders or in the curriculum valuation of who I was. Any gains made in my self-esteem due to basketball were quickly eroded by these realities, including life with my father, his mental illness, and financial insecurity.

Although my day-to-day life at school was tolerable, the fabric of my family and my religious foundation continued to disintegrate. I missed many days of school during my sophomore year due to depression and “illness.” My dad would pick me up from school when I wasn’t feeling well as he wasn’t working at the time. In 1988, during my junior year, my mom sat my brothers and me down to inform us that our dad had been diagnosed with schizo-affective disorder and possibly schizophrenia—the doctors were unable to pin down which one it was. One precipitating event that caused my mom to take my dad to the doctor was when Ryan’s girlfriend accidentally came across a “To Do” list my dad had written in his basement office. One thing on the list was “kill myself.” When I was told about this, I was shocked and scared. The only thing I knew about suicide came from the religious teachings at Mt. Calvary—it was a sin. As my mom tried to explain what his diagnosis meant, I felt confused. Stigma entered my life on that day, although I would not have called it that at the time. More accurately, his diagnoses exacerbated my feelings of difference. Reflecting back, I wish I would have known about the commonality of experiences for those of us who live with a mentally-ill parent. From this commonality of experience, I may have felt connected to others and less isolated.

In his seminal work, *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*, Goffman (1963) explores the struggle of stigmatized individuals as they continually confront their own identities in relation to what he calls “normals.” Two types of stigma that Goffman mentions and that pertain to my father include “abominations of the body” and “blemishes of individual character [including] mental illness” (p. 4). My father’s physical abnormality occurred because

of his inability to successfully treat his diabetes resulting in the amputation of one of his legs from the knee down. As his mental illness became more and more intense, it left his physical appearance in ruins. His ability to take care of himself was lost. His hair was greasy, his face gaunt, his eyes wild and searching. His interaction with “normals” became increasingly difficult as many people appeared frightened by him. He may have carried his “blemishes” in his heart as I carried my rocks, both of us at times unable to take the weight of such heaviness.

Goffman (1963) further shares two types of wise persons: one who “caters either to the wants of those with a particular stigma or to actions that society takes in regard to these persons” (p. 29) or,

the individual who is related through the social structure to a stigmatized individual—a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respect as one. Thus the loyal spouse of the mental patient, the daughter of the ex-con, the parent of the cripple, the friend of the blind, the family of the hangman are all obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized person to whom they are related. (pp. 29-30)

I identify with the latter of the two types of wise persons mentioned here. I have always felt the stigma of my father’s mental illness mainly “because [it] operates at multiple levels—individuals, families, schools, communities, public media, and social policy” (Hinshaw, 2005, p. 714). I also believe that once difference and stigma took root in my body, heart, and soul, it became habitual to attach most other experiences to these feelings.

By the time I was in eleventh grade, my mom was working three jobs and my father was unemployed. Although I worked hard to clean the house and do the laundry in addition to my homework, the dining room table always seemed to be cluttered with newspapers, mail, etc. On one particular evening, my father made a comment to my mom about not keeping the house

clean, which was incredibly sexist and unfair considering that she was already working three jobs. She started yelling, which was quite out of character for her, taking the piles of mail and throwing them into their bedroom. I started crying and yelling at them to stop fighting. The sadness choked me. Denver happened to be home and rescued me by taking me back to his bedroom and helping me to calm down. His care that night is something I will never forget and I have shared my gratitude with him a few times over the years. My mom came into the room crying, saying how sorry she was. She said she wanted to protect me and needed to get out of the situation. She had to leave for work shortly but before she left she talked on the phone with my brother Ryan who was living with a friend. He reassured my mom that leaving my dad was okay and that he supported her decision. Shortly thereafter, my mom and I moved across town to an apartment, bringing along the negative effects of the past few years.

My mom was able to secure a lease for a small two-bedroom apartment on the north side of La Crosse. It was in this same building that a long-time friend and colleague of hers lived. Aaron would become more than a friend to my mom and a strong support for my brothers and me throughout the years. They married after my first year in college. At the time, I was surprised at how quickly she moved on, but throughout the years and with some maturing on my part, I realized that for my mom it wasn't a quick move. She desperately tried to make things work with my dad. She begged him to take medicine for his mind and eat healthier to help manage his diabetes. Yet, it wasn't until he resided at the halfway house that he started taking care of himself. She loved my dad, but after years of financial insecurity and an outright refusal to help himself, there was nothing else she could do. In fact, one of her doctors said she would die from exhaustion if her situation did not change. Outsiders may have seen her as moving on quickly but I think for her, it was a long time coming and a life-saving decision.

My dad and grandma remained in the house. I would visit them from time-to-time but it was incredibly sad. One difficult memory during my senior year was when my dad said, “Amy, if you and your mom don’t come back I am going to kill myself.” I felt helpless and upset by his words. Senior year was one of my darkest times as I continued to internalize the loss of my family. I was also diagnosed with mild depression during this time. My use of alcohol and the addition of marijuana became more frequent, helping to turn things off in my mind and heart. Although the use of alcohol and marijuana was not uncommon among my high school peers, I felt that the reasons I turned to them were different than theirs. I knew no one whose father was mentally ill, or who struggled financially as my family did. I also felt terrible about myself physically and bought into the belief that although a nice person, I wasn’t very attractive or intelligent. Moreover, I remember being afraid that I would “catch” schizophrenia and had myself “tested” at my therapist’s office. This fear, which only added to feeling different and marginalized, is reflected in the stories of other children who were “fearful of being contaminated by the mental illness of their father ...” (Corrigan & Miller, 2004, p. 537).

While still in high school, my grandma moved into an assisted living establishment and sold the house in which she and my dad lived—my home for over 12 years. My father then moved in with Ryan, who was living in a two-bedroom apartment. My brother was working a lot and couldn’t provide the care that my dad needed so after a year, my dad was moved to a halfway house. One night while I was working at a local fast-food restaurant, my father walked in. The half-way house was only two blocks away from the establishment. I was embarrassed when he walked in but said hello and gave him some food. I wondered if anyone made fun of him as he walked to this place—his disheveled appearance, long gait and far-off look in his eyes.

I felt sorry for him but I also felt shame. It was an emotional tension with which I became used to wrestling.

Throughout my life, the feeling of being on the fringes has been a constant companion. Although in my adulthood this feeling has lessened, in certain situations, marginalization gains strength and momentum, rooting deeply once again. When I feel insecure, this uninvited enemy reigns and I am brought back to those painful days of financial insecurity and my dad's mental illness when my mind and body ached, my soul devoid of hope.

At the end of my high school years, I turned my back on the God of my childhood and would not find Him again for 10 years. How could a God whom I praised and served for all of those years give me this life of sorrow and loss? Why didn't He create me with intelligence and beauty? What was the point of life anyway? My ethics and the allegiance towards living a good life and glorifying God were deeply buried in a sea of anger, marginalization, shame, bitterness, and resentment, leaving me fragmented as I went out from the world of high school to college.

College and Graduate School

My mom forced me to go to college. In fact, when I stated that I did not want to go, she would not talk to me, so I went. She assured me that we would take it one semester at a time. The main reason I did not want to go was because Ryan was planning on attending the University of Wisconsin- Stout, which is where I was slated to go, but he changed his mind. He was my idol and I wanted to follow him. I think I was also a little scared and intimidated to go by myself. Mainly though, most of my friends were not planning on attending college. They would be living their lives without me and once again I felt different.

During my undergraduate years, I studied psychology but struggled with some of the classes, particularly those involving statistics. I wonder if my placement in the "dumb" math

group while in grade school impacted how I viewed math as well as how I viewed my abilities in this subject. Although math-related concepts embedded within my psychology classes caused me to struggle, I did maintain a B average.

Beyond going to classes and working at the school cafeteria to pay off my work-study grants, my two years spent at Stout were a continuation of my junior and senior years in high school where my main focus was partying. Studying was an afterthought. Some weekends, though, my mom and Aaron would visit so I would take a break from my usual escapades. One visit in particular has stuck with me. We went to the local mall and I really wanted to get a new outfit. I was trying one on in the fitting room and loved it. Yet, my mom and Aaron said they really couldn't afford it and I went back to the fitting room and cried, tired of financial constraints. My mom bought me the outfit and although I was so excited to have something new, I felt guilty.

This experience, among other similar ones, has affected my own response to the desires of my two young boys. Although I know it is not good for kids, or adults, to have everything they want, it has been difficult for me to deny them their hearts' desire. I never want them feeling deprived as I did so many times. Clearly, deprivation is relative as many children and families struggle for food and clean water. Yet, my experiences of deprivation and feeling different are a part of my story and powerful forces in shaping who I am.

My feelings of difference and marginalization increased during a few interactions with my roommate sophomore year. She and I came from completely different worlds. Although I knew her from high school, we were not friends during those years. We had other roommates our freshman year, but because we knew each other from high school and our first roommates didn't work out for either of us, we chose to live together the second year. Hers was a family of

wealth where everything was paid for and then some. She was blonde, tall, and light-hearted. Although I never had a desire to be a blonde, I certainly would have loved to be taller and most definitely light-hearted. I held resentment toward her at times because she didn't need to work, as I did. She didn't need to pay her tuition, her room-and-board, or pay for her books. Furthermore, her grandparents deposited a large sum of money into her account each year, setting her up for a life of luxury. Most of my friends didn't pay for their college expenses, both punctuating my feelings of difference and solidifying my place on the margins.

Two memories stand out with regard to my relationship with her in the context of difference and marginalization. One night as we got ready for a night out, I reached into a small jewelry box that had been my grandma Helen's and grabbed a necklace to wear. She happened to notice the necklace and took it from me. After gazing at it for a bit, she laughed and began to make fun of its cheapness. Although I could not expect her to understand the weight that her cruel words had on me, I was deeply wounded. I gently placed my necklace back trying to distance myself from the useless relic, just as I distanced myself from my father during my 9th grade basketball game. Shame pulsed through me again. I wonder where she learned to be so critical. I can't imagine her parents saying, "You should make fun of other people's things."

Society sends us these messages about what and who are valuable and what and who are not. Perhaps we both bought into these messages. I also think about who I am now as I write this and that if she said these things to me today, my response would be much different. At the time, though, I didn't have the capabilities to stand up for myself when it came to issues of socio-economics. As I continued to be pushed out onto the margins, or continued to place myself there, I became less inclined to fight for justice.

The second memory is of my roommate coming home after a night out. She was very upset and when I asked her why she responded, “I am so sick of guys liking me only for my body.” Initially, I was irritated at her shallow problems. After all, by this time, my father was residing in a halfway house and to me that was a real problem. Yet, I quickly felt sorry for her as I could tell this truly troubled her. As someone in her fourth decade looking back, now I more clearly understand that she wanted someone to notice her authentic self and not her physical body. I wanted someone to notice my authentic self too and not my outward appearance. Perhaps she felt different and marginalized, too, but for different reasons. We both allowed society’s definitions of what is good and what is bad to permeate our lives and our views of ourselves. Understanding that she, too, struggled, helped me see that hegemonic norms impacted everyone and perhaps the norms themselves should be challenged.

Sometimes I wonder why I become angry rather than sad at many of the things that happened in my life. Perhaps I expressed more sadness at an early age, and then after so many difficult experiences, it was easier to be angry. Or, maybe my sadness rages underneath the anger. I also entertain the notion that anger gives me the energy to address situations that trigger my sense of social justice.

A look at habits proves helpful. *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics* by S. Fesmire (2003) offers an in-depth look at some key components of Deweyan thought, including the complexity of habits. Fesmire claims that according to Dewey, “(1) Habits are functions of organic interaction with natural and social environments, and they form our characters. (2) They comprise a horizon of possibilities for moral deliberation. (3) They are plastic and need to be flexible. (4) Habit-change demands a change in environment” (p. 13). The development of my habits arose from the interactions I have had with others, my history,

and my environments. Others develop habits in a similar fashion. Habits ebb and flow as environments change spilling into each thought and action.

For me, anger is a habit. It is comfortable and helps me feel as if I have control. I feel justified in my anger as I look at the injustices that I have experienced but also what others have experienced. This anger arose from my experiences and environments, eventually turning into a habit that profoundly impacted my character. As a child, instead of talking about my sadness and disappointment, I became angry sequestering myself away in the closet, my refuge. Although my current environments have changed, I still find this defect of character when injustice rears its ugly face. Even though I realize that I no longer need to be angry because I know other more productive ways to handle situations, this habit is so deeply embedded inside of me that it becomes painful to think about its' extraction.

It was during my time at Stout that I began to love history and thought about earning a history degree. My spring break trip to Russia in 1992, paid for by financial aid, was instrumental in bringing history to life for me. I remember feeling alive while walking around Red Square as I gazed at the beauty of St. Basil's Church. I loved spending time at the Hermitage and Pushkin's home. Although I speak of this trip in detail under the joy section, it was while in Russia that wanderlust began to grow inside of me and continues to be a strong force today. It was also during this trip that I encountered difference to the norms to which I had always adhered. Being elsewhere brought me into connection with people whose social soil was different than my own but with whom I would come to find shared universal experiences.

My love of history and travel propelled me to transfer to a different university to pursue a history degree. Around this same time, my father transitioned from the halfway house to Lakeview Health Center, a mental hospital in West Salem, Wisconsin. He would remain there

until his death in February of 1998. When I was home on breaks from school, I visited my dad. Lakeview was such a depressing place; I remember the foul smells and haunting sounds coming from the residents. My dad always wanted my brothers and me to bring him soda and candy, two things he was not supposed to have because of his diabetes. At times, I felt as though he only wanted to see me because of his desire for these things. I resented this. Looking back, though, I know he loved seeing us. I can't imagine how much he must have missed his children—perhaps his plea for these things was one way he articulated his love for us.

My dad was not happy in this place, and when I visited, we really had little to say to one another. Sometimes I would sit with him while he ate dinner, or we would just sit in front of the television holding hands. Although he sat next to me during these times, my brilliant dad who used to tuck me in at night as a child, who listened to me read poetry, who encouraged me to become a writer, was no longer there.

As I sat in this place, this mental health center, throughout the years, I became angry at the health care system for not doing enough to care for and support my father and our family. This structural discrimination echoes the experiences of those found in Angermeyer, Schulze, and Dietrich's (2003) study. The researchers highlight the lack of funding allocated for mental health research, the lack of help centers, and the absence of information sharing from "professionals" regarding mentally ill family members. Where were the family support groups at Lakeview? How many people interacted with my father each day, bringing him into their conversations and offering him a slice of normalcy? Were people gentle with him when moving him from his bed to his wheelchair? Did they ask him how he felt each day? I imagine the loneliness he felt was unbearable at times. I wonder where he sought refuge.

I don't know if the medication or his illness were to blame for the emptiness within him. His talk of suicide, his deep pain over losing his family, the disease which invaded him haunted me for years—I will never shed the feeling that I should have done more. As I think back, though, I always felt his love for me even through his illness. This knowledge continues to bring me comfort.

While earning my history degree, I developed some great friendships. As was the case with my previous roommate, not one of my close friends had to pay for college. This reality added to my feelings of difference, fanning the waves of resentment, and deepening my understanding of the socio-economic divide. Although some of my friends did work, the reasons were different than my own. I needed to pay rent, pay tuition, and buy food while they could spend their money on other things.

The unfairness of life rested in my mind during these years and led to the development and cultivation of two other habits—self-righteousness and arrogance. These habits offered a way to protect myself whenever I felt threatened by someone whom I perceived to be entitled or possess financial security. In some ways, I looked down on people whom I believed had it “easy” showing minimal hospitality to these “strangers”. These habits of self-righteousness and arrogance continue to reside in me. As with anger, these habits provide me with comfort and a sense of control. They have also led to heartache—additional rocks in an already heavy heart. As I continue to root out the habit of anger so, too, I work at minimizing self-righteousness and arrogance, focusing on different and healthier ways in which I can think, feel, and act.

Some of my best friendships were forged during my undergraduate years and I continue to love these women dearly. One of our commonalities was struggle—I was struggling to understand myself and life in the context of mental illness and financial insecurity and they were

struggling to understand their own lives. Some came from broken homes and estranged relationships with parents, while others struggled with their identities. Throughout the years, I really began to understand that although money can pay rent, tuition, and other bills, it does not protect us from sadness or feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, or loss. My friends taught me this incredibly important lesson and for that I am forever grateful. We are part of the stories of those who walk with us in time and space. I share “the tangles of lived experience” with these women as we continue to dance in each other’s lives, deepening our connection and lessening the weight of our hearts (Fesmire, 2003, p. 28).

Leaving college was difficult. I had a history degree in hand and no job. I had student loans that would come due in six months and desperately needed to work. At this point, I took a job in Madison, Wisconsin as a page for the Senate. It was neither intellectually stimulating nor did it pay the bills. Some of my friends had already graduated and were off starting their careers; a few still had a semester or two before they graduated. I missed them. Being apart from them increased my feeling of loneliness. After six months of living in Madison, I was on my way to graduate school to obtain my Master’s degree and teaching license.

I was a teacher education candidate from 1996-1998. I had some incredible professors who encouraged me to critically think about matters of race, gender, and socio-economic status. During my time in graduate school, I wrote about the Rwandan genocide of 1994 for one of my political science classes. I learned about the construction of race and the effects that this had on the genocide—I still can’t shake the hopelessness I felt reading about the brutality used against the Tutsis. I saw reflected in this horrific event how societal constructs affect the personal lives of people. I learned the concept of “othering” from studying this event; however, I didn’t use

that word. I did connect, though this concept of “othering” during this horrible time with my own sense of feeling different.

As a student at the university, I could have chosen to carry out my student teaching in the area. Yet, my life up until that point propelled me to go elsewhere—urban, diverse, and different. I chose to carry out my student teaching at an inner city high school in a large urban area. I rented an efficiency apartment about four miles from the school. For the first two weeks, I just observed my mentor teacher, “John,” in his interactions with the students. He was a nice man, probably in his mid-forties, although at the time, he seemed much older. He would joke with the students a lot. He lectured quite a bit and then handed out worksheets that students were to fill out on the lectured material. I felt quite intimidated by these students, many of whom looked older than me.

My work with “at-risk” students in La Crosse offered little guidance for my interactions with students labeled “at-risk” in this large, urban, and diverse city. A few times, I doubted my decision to carry out my student teaching assignment here and not take an easier placement back home. The students were constantly talking and making inappropriate comments. They rarely appeared interested in what John was saying. They were nice to me and I would walk around helping them as they worked. As I look back through my teacher’s lens, I see things in this classroom quite differently. The students were completely disengaged and constantly talked because they saw no connection between the curriculum and their own lives. John taught, lectured really, in a way much like my own high school social studies teachers—dates, presidents and facts.

John turned over the teaching reins to me on February 5th. I honestly don’t remember how that first day went because of what came later. After what must have been an exhausting

day of teaching, I returned to my apartment that evening. As these were the days before cell phones, I was in the habit of checking my answering machine each night. Aaron had left a message that my dad was transferred from Lakeview to a local hospital and I should call home immediately. I called. He said, “Um, you need to call the hospital. Denver is there with your dad. He had a fall. He isn’t going to make it through the night.” After hanging up, I quickly dialed the hospital and was connected to my dad’s room. “Denver let me talk to dad,” I frantically sputtered. “Amy, he’s already gone,” he gently said. My body tensed and the past 26 years came painfully into focus—I couldn’t breathe, suffocating in my isolation. I was three hours from La Crosse and the hospital. Although I had been grieving for my dad for half of my life, his physical death hurt more than I can express—the shame I felt for not doing more burned deeply. At that moment, I was acutely aware at the heaviness in my heart as feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss pulled me to the ground, strangling me in their grip.

I called John to let him know what happened. He said, “Amy, I am so sorry for your loss. Take as much time as you need. You aren’t even getting paid for this.” I appreciated his support and took a few weeks to grieve. I received many letters from my students in the weeks after. Their identification with the loss of a parent overwhelmed me. I saw their behaviors differently, through a lens of loss and compassion. I now felt connected to them on a personal level—this connection lightened the heaviness in my heart. The support I received from them during this time strengthened my resolve to teach. It was no longer a career but a calling—a space where connection was possible and isolation diminished. Teaching provided me a sacred space to heal.

In the days, weeks and months following my dad’s death, I read over the letters he had sent to me while he lived at Lakeview Health Center. Although these letters are undated, he lived at Lakeview from 1992-1998. Reading them brought me to my knees as sorrow gripped

me—tears streaming down my cheeks. These letters can still fill me with sadness but I am able to push back sorrow’s grip most of the time. Now, I mainly find comfort in his words of love, encouragement and confidence that rise up from the pages. He states, “I love you. I always have loved you. I always will love you [...] Hug me a lot when you come home [...]” In other letters he guides me by sharing, “It’s good to follow your heart, but you must also use your head. As you go through school and life, remember there is magic in believing. Treat every moment of your life like a special jewel.” His words still guide me. “Keep believing in yourself and follow your dreams. I just want you to get into something where you can share your caring personality. Remember, however, that sometimes you are too caring; you must care about yourself too.” One letter in particular stands out:

Amos [his nickname for me],

Concerning Confidence

Even great people have doubts about themselves, they just do what you do and that’s overcome the doubts. You should know yourself and love yourself and that will help you understand others. It will also give you a clear head with which to examine and know people. Remember, also, that your heart and body are precious and don’t give away these things too easily. Now we come to why you have problems with confidence. A lot of it is because I was a rotten father. I didn’t talk with you enough or spend enough time with you because of my mental problems. I die every day because of how I let you and the boys down. Remember also that as you succeed, being happy is success and all people have doubts and maybe they won’t go completely away, but they will get better. I am so proud of my little girl. Love Dad XXXX

I love his confidence in me and his wisdom about the importance of knowing and loving myself in order to know others. This letter also contains his desire for me to take care of myself and not lose my heart or body to men. I wish that he would have shared these thoughts with me in person when I was in high school—maybe I could have avoided some heartache and self-destructive behaviors. He also blames himself for my problems with confidence. He wasn't a rotten father, just ill. When he states, that "I die every day because of how I let you and the boys down" I feel incredibly sad, especially now, as a mom. I can't imagine how it must have felt to have your family disintegrate and perhaps even feel abandoned by them. I can relate, though, to how bits and pieces of us die—I wonder if they can be recovered. Maybe these pieces don't die but go into hiding and it is resilience that finds them, giving them the strength to try again, to live again.

I genuinely appreciate his thoughts about success—no, success isn't measured with a dollar amount, even though our society gives us this message. Instead, success is measured, through happiness. I am comforted by the fact that he was proud of me, something I think most children hope for from their parents. I still want him here with me, though. I wish he could have found health and happiness. I wish he could have found wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. I am sure he has found these things in Heaven.

I think about how many children don't have this kind of love in their lives and how incredibly painful that must be, particularly when a parent suffers from a mental illness and can't articulate or show their feelings toward their children the way my dad could. Little bits of my heart continue to break as I think about my dad, especially when I think of my own sons who missed out on knowing him. As I do with my own children, he was trying to protect me from possible harm, both external and internal, based on his own experiences with difference, stigma,

marginalization, and loss. Throughout my years of teaching, I have shared some of my dad's thoughts and insights with my students. I carry parts of him with me—a deep sense of love and passion, an ability to see the world as it could be, and an acute sensitivity—profoundly impacting my relationships with family, friends, students, and colleagues.

Summary

My life through graduate school consisted of learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss. The more I learned and the more encounters I had with difference helped me understand that my experiences of feeling different, stigmatized, and marginalized because of my dad's mental illness and our financial insecurity were also the experiences of others.

These encounters with difference connected me with others. I was able to unpack hegemonic norms, understanding that these norms shaped the economic and health-care system present in my life. The inability to ascertain quality health care for my dad, his inability to talk about his illness, my feelings of difference and stigma were not because there was something innately wrong with us; society creates the stigma and society defines normal and abnormal. By knowing this, I was better able to understand the reasons for my own tension at not having access to a safety net that could have helped my family. Further, I began to realize that what is constructed can be deconstructed and rebuilt differently—including my own experiences. As I continued to be shaped by my experiences, my ability to challenge the *way things are* gained momentum and contributed to my identity as one who works for social justice. Eventually, I would take this identity into my classrooms as a social justice educator.

Chapter Four

Me-Search, Part Two: The Post-Graduate Years

I frame my postgraduate school years into four sections: the healing, the ugly, the joy, and the heart. The healing refers to my experiences teaching. The ugly depicts the politics, including my experiences with sexism that were present in a few of the schools in which I taught. Found in the joy section are my international travels. The heart contains stories of my family. Within these stories lies ways in which I learned and lived resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss, and how these experiences contributed to my identity as a social justice educator.

It is important to mention here that although I have separated out these areas into the healing, the ugly, the joy, and the heart, they do overlap. For example, I have experienced healing in teaching but also in my family relationships and while traveling with students and my husband. Moreover, the ugly exists beyond school politics, resting at times in my own heart. For now, though, I turn to stories of healing from my time as a teacher.

The Healing

Although I have experienced feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss in the years following college, and even up until the present day at times, when I think of my 15 years of teaching, my memory beckons me towards healing. I weave stories of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss into my narrative of how teaching helped heal my brokenness and strengthened my dedication to social justice. Teaching has always provided me a chance to look outside of myself and help others. My classroom served as a physical place where I taught history, a venue to connect this expansive discipline with the lives of my students. I tried to create a space where students could bring their own brokenness, their own inner stories of

resilience, difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss and see themselves reflected in the lives of those we studied and in the lives sitting next to them, including my own.

Story as connection. When I think of story as connection, I welcome into my thoughts strong and authentic relationships with students that I have been privileged to have throughout the years. I have always believed that story has the power to lead us back to our true selves. In this space we can search for “what will connect your life, and mine, and ours” (Baldwin, 2005, p. xiv). She states,

Story—the abundance of it, and the lack of it—shapes us. Story—the abundance of it, and the lack of it—gives us place, lineage, history, a sense of self. Story—the abundance of it, and the lack of it—breaks us into pieces, shatters our understanding, and gives it back over and over again, the story different every time. Story—the abundance of it, and the lack of it—connects us with the world and outlines our relationship with everything. When the power of story comes into the room, an alchemical reaction occurs that is unique to our kind: love or hate, identification or isolation, war or peace, good or evil can be stirred in us by words alone. The power of story is understood by the powerful, yet the power of story belongs to all of us, especially the least powerful. History is what scholars and conquerors say happened; story is what it was like to live on the ground. (pp. 3-4)

When I first read the above words, something moved inside of me as I realized that my story offers me a place in history, a lineage, and a sense of self. I am the daughter of Marsha and Casper. My ancestors came from Germany, Switzerland, and Norway. I am stubborn and tenacious. The telling of my story has broken me into pieces and rebuilt my sense of self in the

retelling. Stories of my dad being treated poorly, discriminated against, and sequestered in a mental hospital illicit feelings of rage, guilt, embarrassment, and shame.

Research on the lives of families who have endured mental illness and research on the lives of those afflicted with mental illness have historically been handed down from doctors and “scholars” from a sanitized and dehumanized perspective. My story is one from the front lines. My story includes real people enduring painful realities while grappling towards light and healing. My students have their own stories to share.

For me, teaching history has always been the sharing of stories, hundreds and thousands of stories. At the beginning of each semester, I would have students pick up their textbooks and dance with them while I passionately said “You are dancing with people from history, with their stories. Someday students may be dancing with yours.” Some students thought this strange, others laughed, and some understood the deeper message I was trying to convey. After this, I would share my own story, which I called My Personal Journey. I shared events in my life that evoked intense emotions, believing that the strongest connections are made in these spaces. I shaped my narrative in a way that allowed students to see me as someone with resilience who overcame hardship. I always included growing up financially insecure and how my brothers and I had jobs in the fast-food industry to ensure having enough to eat. I also shared stories of my mom’s sacrifices to take care of us. For example, when she wanted a Coke while working as a 911 dispatcher, she would instead take the quarter and save it using the accumulated money to buy food for us. I shared how she never bought anything for herself. Instead, she wore tattered clothes and shoes.

I also included the devastating effects my father’s mental illness had on me and my family. I shared how it felt to watch my dad slowly slip away mentally and physically as the

disease engulfed him. Finally, I shared how I put myself through college and graduate school by working at least one job. Once I got married and had children these events were added into my narrative. I would tell the students that it was only when I became a parent that I truly understood the love that my mom had for me and my brothers and that I would make the same sacrifices for my own boys that she had made for us. Not only did I share my journey but I passionately described how these events changed the trajectory of my life. I never feared the vulnerability that accompanies this type of disclosure as somehow I innately knew that it would lead to closeness with my students and relationships with them that were built on authenticity.

After I shared my personal journey, I asked students to share theirs through writing. I invited them to share at least three events that happened in their lives and how these events affected them. I told them that I would not share their stories with anyone else, reminding them to share only what they were comfortable sharing. I further explained my role as a mandatory reporter in case they shared stories of abuse. Although many stories included positive and joyous accounts (i.e., the birth of a baby sister or brother), others included heart-wrenching stories of loss, marginalization, and fear. I remember thinking how sad it was that these young lives had experienced so much pain.

I used the Personal Journey assignment as a way to ensure my students' voices were not marginalized but validated and valued. Eugene Peterson (2005) states, "Stories are verbal acts of hospitality" (p. 13). Through this assignment, and others, I extended hospitality to my students by welcoming their stories and providing a space for their stories to be heard, a space to see their own humanity in the faces of others. All of our stories are important and we crave a place of hospitality, a sacred space where we can reclaim the core of our authentic selves.

Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) explicates how I presented myself to students. My performance in the classroom as well as my role as teacher connects with the dramaturgical principles found in the text. Goffman asserts,

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. [...] It will be convenient to begin a consideration of performances by [...] looking at the individual's own belief in the impression of reality that he attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself. (p. 17)

I used assignments like the Personal Journey to ensure my students' voices were heard and valued. I honestly shared my story with them in an attempt to form connection. Yet, if I take into consideration the notions laid out by Goffman, I realize that in my sharing I also attempted to craft an impression of myself for my students. Although I believe myself to be a genuine person, I wonder sometimes about any hidden motives for sharing my stories. When referring to performers, Goffman (1959) offers "two extremes: an individual may be taken in by his own act or be cynical about it" (p. 19). As I reflect upon my teaching, I represent the former and feel that I was "fully taken in by [my] own act" (p. 17) but strongly believe that my *act* was genuine. Yet, I can related to Goffman's words,

We find that the individual may attempt to induce the audience to judge him and the situation in a particular way, and he may seek this judgment as an ultimate end in itself, and yet he may not completely believe that he deserves the valuation of self which he asks for or that the impression of reality which he fosters is valid. (p. 21)

As I strove to give the impression that my beliefs were grounded in social justice, equity, and inclusion, as well as arose from my experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and

loss, I grappled with my own humanness. I often felt that if my students could have seen inside of my head and heart at times, my cover would be blown as they would see that I was broken and at times held beliefs that countered social justice, equity, and inclusion. Throughout the years, I realized that these thoughts were a sign that I was human, and not disingenuous in my convictions.

I was at the end of my student teaching in May of 1998, still grieving my father's death, when I was offered and accepted my first teaching job at a rural high school in Wisconsin. This first year was difficult as I tried to stay one day ahead of my students while grieving. Two memories that helped in processing my grief hang on to me as I reflect back to my time there.

One of my students, "Jen" approached me one day after school. I sensed urgency in her need to talk. As the words stumbled out of her mouth tears streamed down her face. She had been raped by a fellow classmate, a boy one year older who attended the school. As I sat listening trying to comfort this young woman, the rage I felt toward this boy, who was not my student but I knew him from supervising the library, was intense. After she shared, I reminded her that this was not her fault and that she should open up to her parents and the guidance counselor, that she has the right to bring this boy to court, that what he did was wrong. I also told her that as a teacher, I had a legal obligation to report this to the school, which she understood. I wish I could say that this boy was held accountable for raping my student but sadly, as is the case for many girls and women victimized by boys and men, her family felt it best to move the entire family to a new city and I never saw her or heard from her again.

As I think back to her and the experience of sexual violence she had to endure at the age of 16, I can only imagine the feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization and loss that may even remain with her today. With how women were re-victimized then, and continue to be

today, I imagine she felt so different from other girls whom she perceived as not having been raped. I wonder if she still carries the stigma that unequally remains on the rape victim as opposed to the boy or man who rapes. I wonder if this horrific event led to her feeling marginalized in a society that continues to re-victimize. I also can't help but think of the loss of innocence, self-worth, and perhaps even faith that she endured that night. I hope that my own experiences helped me to say the right words, to comfort her, to let her know that I truly cared about what happened to her and that I wanted to help her feel whole again. I hope that she has found healing and wholeness in the many years since I have talked with her.

Another memory that remains so clear in my mind is of another young woman, a student named "Abby", who also approached me with an equal sense of urgency. Her parents were going through a divorce resulting from her father drugging and raping her mother numerous times. He was also having an affair. She shared these horrific things with me through tears of disbelief that someone, her own father, could so brutally violate her mother. When she told me these things I remember being in shock. I had not witnessed or experienced this type of devastation growing up or as an adult. Again, I listened offering her my support. We would meet for lunch once in a while and I continued to listen to her as she struggled toward healing. Her mom eventually left her dad but that's all I know. As with Jen, I have not seen or heard from Abby since leaving the school. I imagine she struggled with feeling marginalized and most certainly experienced loss, not to mention internalizing the injustice toward her mom. I hope that I provided her a space to heal and I hope her life includes a sense of wholeness.

During these two interactions, I was able to connect with Jen and Abby's brokenness, even though our circumstances differed. I shared with them my stories of feeling different, my bouts with feeling stigmatized and marginalized. I hope my sharing helped them feel a bit less

alone and less isolated—perhaps the heaviness in our hearts were lightened through our connection.

I hope they knew at that time that someday they would feel whole again. Even though I forged strong relationships with many students at this high school, I felt my own grief of losing my father continue to anchor me in the past. Perhaps my relationship with Jen and Abby, their sharing of heartache and brokenness, helped me discern the fact that in order to further heal I needed to move forward.

Moving forward. I moved out to the Pacific Northwest to clear my head, continue teaching, and heal. I worked at a middle school in Washington teaching 6th grade Language Arts and Social Studies. These young students were excited about learning and life and as a result my passion started to resurface. My desire to help them understand life, to learn why history is important, and to feel connected and a part of something greater than themselves pushed me to teach in a more authentic way, to continue to be a more authentic person. I was fortunate enough to have many of the same students the following year as I moved to a 7th grade position, deepening our connection. As was the case with my first year of teaching back in Wisconsin, particularly my relationships with Jen and Abby, the two years I taught in Washington filled my soul.

I loved the students and thoroughly enjoyed living in Washington. Yet, in July of 2000 while back home, I not only welcomed my first nephew into the world but also met Bryan, who in time would become my husband. I decided to move back home to be closer to Bryan, my nephew, and the rest of my family—I intimately share about my relationships with them in The Heart section.

Before I left Washington and the school in June of 2001, the choir teacher and my students surprised me with a going away concert and a memento book. In the book, one student states:

[...] you showed me how to be strong and how to reach for your dreams when they seem so far away. I've looked up to you when things have gotten rough at home and I thought to myself the times you had shared with us about your family and how you stayed strong and pulled through. Thank you for that!

Another shares, "You always stayed strong threw [sic] times that were so difficult to overcome. I really admire your strength." Other comments include, "Thanks for being a great and compassionate teacher" and "You've touched everyone's heart." These words tell me that my experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss were not in vain. These students are now in their late-20's and I hope they have carried me with them as I have carried them. A colleague also shared:

You're at the beginning of a brilliant career...don't sell yourself short in anything [...] you'll never be just anything! [...] if you think of yourself as a glove on the hand of God your work will remain and have an impact on eternity.

His words tap into my belief that teaching is a calling and a way to heal by helping others. I want to have an impact on eternity, on students who are struggling. Teaching afforded me a place to heal wounds, both mine and the students. In struggling to make sense of our lives as we live with wounded families, our authentic selves seek out connection—a life line where our pain reaches out to the pain of others, and in relation with one another, we find healing and wholeness.

Back to the Midwest. After a year of subbing, I found a full time teaching job in a large rural high school in Northwestern Wisconsin. As with my experience in Washington, my time here included healing and movement towards wholeness. My confidence as a teacher and a person grew despite the fact that the community as well as the school exemplified a good-old-boys mentality, which I did not appreciate or fit into. Those of us who tried to combat this deeply entrenched climate were met with mixed support. Although I detested this reality of the school and community, my focus remained on making a real and genuine impact in the lives of my students. My art of questioning became even stronger as I planted myself firmly into the environment.

While teaching, passion pervaded my body, my classroom, and the students. My excitement for World history, my wander-lust for travel, my desire to help students feel the same way about learning and life fell out of me and into the room. I have been told many times by students, and some parents, that my passion is infectious. My deep commitment to education, which includes creating and teaching authentic, engaging, cultural and gender-sensitive curriculum, is rooted in my passion for human rights, equity, and justice. This quest for human rights, equity, and justice arose from my own struggles with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss.

Studying the events of history, such as the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust of World War II, as well as being mindful of current realities where human rights, equity, and justice were and continue to be absent, strengthened my resolve to work towards change. I often wondered why things happened, why more people didn't stand up against injustice, and what could be done to change these realities. The more I studied, the more I realized that hundreds of thousands of people have taken a stand throughout time and space working for a better world.

The more I learned, the easier it was to find connections with my own experiences, leading to an ever-deeper commitment to work for human rights, equity, and justice. Teaching was a way that I could share with students my understanding of life and the intricate nature of power. I helped them understand that they had the resilience to construct a better world, a more humane one, where people were invited to share their stories and were supported in their sharing; a world where hospitality existed, where relationships were more important than money, and a place where experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss joined together for connection and healing.

My relationship with students went well beyond the classroom as I have always believed that it is equally important to foster a strong non-academic relationship as the ideas and lives of students exceed the constraints of academia. As I did in Washington, I continued to allow my own passion guide me in organizing international educational tours for students to bring to life the countries that we were studying. These trips also gave my students a deeper and more personal understanding of why fighting for human rights, equity, and justice are so important. Bryan was able to serve as chaperone for some of these trips allowing us to create beautiful memories together.

Beyond teaching and organizing international trips, I started an Amnesty International (AI) student club. Most of the members were my own students but some of their friends joined too. Some of the boys who I had as students did not join as they saw Amnesty International as a girl's club. These were the realities I had to combat while there. The work that my students and I did for AI allowed all of us to work toward bettering the lives of others, victims of violence in particular. We wrote letters to free prisoners wrongly accused of crimes. We talked about the

realities of our world that allowed such abuses of rights to occur and dedicated ourselves to other human rights activities.

During this time, I also served as both a member of our local AI group and co-chair for Amnesty's Stop Violence against Women campaign. I bridged my students with the local group, deepening their involvement in community activities to bring about awareness of the ills existing in the world, specifically domestic and gender-based violence. We shared these realities with the community, forging genuine relationships with all involved. I encouraged my students to take on leadership positions, which they accepted and carried out beautifully. We organized many events throughout the years, including the Clothesline Project where families and friends honor victims of domestic violence victims by creating t-shirts which are then displayed on a clothesline in a community building or church. We also planned and staffed a film festival specifically addressing cultural norms that breed domestic and gender-based violence. We were able to raise money to support a woman from Rwanda to speak about her experiences during the genocide of 1994. She shared how she had been gang-raped and torn from her family, powerfully impacting the audience with her own story of stigma and loss. Yet, her story also contained resilience and the hope for a better future, a better world.

Working with students, the local group, and community members who truly desired to change the world in a positive way, who cared deeply about the issues that I cared deeply about, gently pushed me from the margins—a little. The students felt proud of their work in the Amnesty International group. They knew they were making a difference through taking action against oppression and injustice. Through immersing ourselves in the struggle for human rights, we saw more clearly the horrific realities faced by many people in the world. This enlightenment helped us recast our own experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization,

and loss, thus strengthening our resolve to use these experiences to help form connection and healing in ourselves, others, and the world. The experiences of working toward a better world, a more humane world, brought our souls and passions together—the weight of our own hearts lessening. In this space between and among us, our resilience led us to work towards healing the brokenness in others, and in communion with the prisoner, the Rwandan genocide survivor, and the families of domestic violence victims, we healed pieces of ourselves too.

In 2005, after three years of teaching in this rural school in Northwestern Wisconsin, I had the opportunity to teach in China for a year. My friend Ashley, whom I had met while living in Washington and traveled with to Europe back in 2001 and her husband John decided to extend their teaching appointment in China by one year. I hadn't seen Ashley since our travels and was excited for the potential to teach with her overseas. Bryan was busy in his third year of his Doctor of Pharmacy program at the University of Minnesota-Duluth and we talked about this opportunity that stood before me. He thought it was a good idea as it would offer me a chance to teach overseas, something he knew I had always wanted to do. Once the decision had had been made, I let my colleagues and students know that I would be leaving at the end of the year. It was especially difficult to leave my students and the AI group but my heart pulled me towards this new adventure.

Part of the requirement upon leaving the district was meeting with the superintendent. When sharing my decision to take a job teaching in China he said, “Amy, you are about to be awarded tenure, why would you leave and teach in China?” I replied, “Because I get to teach in China.” We were equally befuddled at our differing perspectives on this opportunity. As I look back at this interaction through a feminist perspective, I find it interesting, although not surprising, that he questioned my decision to leave as I did not take the expected course (e.g.,

gaining tenure). Tenure has never interested me and his questioning of my decision to leave was patronizing as it was evident that any path besides the one that leads to tenure was frivolous (e.g., female and emotionally-driven as opposed to male and ends-driven). I left that day with a heart full of gratitude knowing that I had positively impacted my students and perhaps changed the climate of the school and community if only a little. I also felt grateful for this upcoming opportunity that was sure to expand my heart and soul even further.

Teaching abroad. I cried at the airport as I knew it would be four months until Bryan and I saw each other again. It was equally difficult leaving our dog, Fred. I wouldn't see him for almost a year. At one point, I wanted to leave the airport and go back home but Bryan assured me that it would be a wonderful experience and that I had made a commitment to go. I left and spent the next 14 hours on a plane to Japan and then on to Shanghai. The long flight offered me time to reflect as I tried to contain my excitement for this new adventure my mind dwelling on the words of Robert Frost, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." I was taking the one less traveled and it filled me with unparalleled excitement.

When I arrived at the airport in China, I panicked as I didn't see my friend John. Ashley would arrive a few days later so he was picking me up that night. All I heard on the loudspeaker was Mandarin and having never set foot on Chinese soil, I was completely lost. Furthermore, I needed RMB, the local currency, to get a cart to haul my luggage to the arrival gate. Having no RMB, I grabbed my bags lugging them with me as I tried to keep up with the other passengers who eventually led me to the arrival area. After 20 minutes, I saw John and felt a huge sense of relief. He helped me with my luggage as we stepped into a van provided by the school and set off for my new home for the next 11 months.

I vividly remember the pungent and stale smells as I walked into the school complex. These smells would become invisible to me as my time there grew but will remain forever with me. John, Ashley, and their son lived in an apartment above the school, as was the case with most of the teachers. The day after I arrived, I remember crying to John saying how I thought I had made a mistake. He shared his misgivings, too, empathizing that it must have been difficult to be away from Bryan. Although I had left before, to college, to the Pacific Northwest, this leaving was different. This leaving hurt my heart because I was leaving the person who helped me love myself again. Although I felt intense loss when I left him, I did not feel disconnected from him.

Culture shock and intense feelings of homesickness were not uncommon for expats—I experienced both of these during my time in this beautiful and ancient land. Yet, I intensely focused on teaching, developing strong relationships with my students, particularly those in my College Writing class. Many of these same students joined Interact, a service club that I co-advised. As with students in my AI group back in Northwestern Wisconsin, these students demonstrated a strong desire to make the world a better, gentler place. Their compassion toward others and strong work ethic spilled into every project in which they participated. One such project that remains near to my heart is our collaborative endeavor with Habitat for Humanity in a leprosy village in southern China.

Leprosy village. One of the most transformative and healing experiences I had while in China was journeying with some of my students in the spring of 2006 to a leprosy village in southern China. Thoughts, feelings and experiences are taken from my journal:

Walking into the village on that first day was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. I saw people who were missing arms and legs and whose eyes the disease had stolen. There

were chickens and dogs and building materials and poverty staring me in the face-true poverty-the kind that sucks the breath out of those who dare to embrace it. I had to catch my breath a few times throughout the trip. The muted mosaic stands frozen-some of the scenes still lingering in my mind's eye. Yet, in the face of such hardships we were greeted with smiles and hope-both ushering us into this secluded refuge for those beaten and stoned due to a disease they contracted years ago.

Their "abominations of the body" led some to believe that they were not quite human (Goffman, 1963, p. 4). They were harmed as a result of something they had no control over, stigmatized and shunned from their families forever; their loss intense and pulsating. My ailments are easily hidden, theirs were not.

The students and I got to work quickly-perhaps to avoid the haunting feelings of guilt for not liking what I ate for dinner the night before [...] As we worked, two things hit me squarely in the heart: the joy that the villagers received from watching young people taking time to come and see them for no other reason than to help and the incredible way these students worked together, always asking if anyone needed water, or a break, or anything. They truly were ambassadors in the purest sense of the word.

Human connection was so powerful during our time at the village. The connection between students and among all of us was palpable. Sharing bits and pieces of ourselves offered such connection and strength reflecting Durkheim's belief that "the greatest good is in communion with others" (1953, p. 37). When I left on that first day, "I felt a distant pain but was unsure from where it came." Perhaps I never wanted my involvement in what I viewed as the "greatest good" to end.

In the days that followed an interpreter helped us communicate with the villagers giving us a window into their lives. We also spent time with Jean-Gabrielle, a priest who lived among the villagers and knew them well. Again the words found in my journal capture the experience:

He [Jean-Gabrielle] invited us to his home [and he] talked about his behaviors before dedicating his life to God, which included using drugs and alcohol. He also shared the inner voice that kept getting stronger and how he struggled against dedicating his life to God and marrying a woman. He didn't want to hear the inner voice but it only became stronger until finally he made the decision. It was powerful listening to someone who had been through a lot of pain, made many mistakes and chose instead to put his energy, passion and love into serving others [...] I think the distant pain I spoke of previously can be attributed to some of the things Jean-Gabrielle spoke of that day. I could relate to much of it; the inner voice especially. The final day was incredibly sad for a variety of reasons. So many feelings danced within me, bursting in all different directions. They included the realism that most of us if any will never get the chance to go back and see the villagers again. They are kind and helpful and loving people, who because of fate or God or whatever were stricken with a disease that society didn't tolerate and were outcasts in their own country. To have such depth of spirit in the face of such treatment is by far more infectious and powerful than leprosy. Jean-Gabrielle said these people think their bodies are rubbish, not worth anything. I have no idea what that would be like to truly feel that way and then have society affirm those feelings. What a tragedy. As we pulled out of the village the depth of sadness I felt by all was punctuated by the quiet that invaded the once rambunctious bus. I couldn't speak at all on the 20 minute ride back to our hotel and put to rest this life-changing experience with silent tears.

As I reflect back on the words I wrote all of those years ago, I more clearly understand that seeing people who have experienced difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss cast my own experiences in a different, gentler light. My perspective of how I define my experiences most certainly changed as a result of my time with the people in the leprosy village. I can still feel the humility that washed over me while in the presence of the people living there. My ability to recast my own life through a lens of gratitude while in the presence of those who demonstrated resilience on a daily basis became stronger. I wonder how they would define themselves. Would they use the words different, stigmatized, or marginalized? Perhaps, but maybe these are my labels, which are deeply embedded in my own experiences and cultural norms. I truly feel their lives were more defined by gratitude for simple gifts such as kindness, depth of spirit, and conversation.

Beyond the Leprosy Village, another memory that stands out is the 10K race on the Great Wall that I chose to do with a few colleagues in May of 2006. Although I was nervous about this race, I read in a running magazine that races become easier if each kilometer is dedicated to someone special. I dedicated all 10 kilometers to my father as a way to honor his life and the 7-year anniversary of his death. The day was warm and I hadn't slept much the night before leaving me feeling tired and not up to the task. Yet, as I began to run, the clouds parted making space for the majesty of the sun. As the sun's light warmed my face, I knew that my dad was there with me. Tears welcomed him as I ambled up the wall. I was proud of myself for participating in this race and although I finished the race by walking, I finished none-the-less. And as I crossed the line, my dad crossed with me and as we crossed, I felt reconnected to the father I once knew.

My time in China came to an end in June of 2006. Although my desire to reunite with Bryan, our dog, Fred, and the rest of my family and friends pulled at me, I was overcome with sadness at the thought of leaving this vast beautiful country. In fact, my longing to return to China dwells in me still—not returning just to the country but also to those memories and to my experiences while there. However, I have come to learn that life marches on and so it did.

I was glad I hadn't left when I first arrived as I learned a lot about myself that year. I learned that I am strong and resilient. This strength and resilience lessened my feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss. I reached back to my core, the core that was there before the world stripped me of my self-esteem, hope, and possibility. I took back that which was stolen—my authentic self.

Home once again. I secured a teaching job at a small urban charter school in the Minneapolis area that served immigrant and refugee students. I worked there from 2006-2008 as a social studies teacher. I also created and oversaw the service learning and internship programs. I loved working here, particularly because of the diversity (i.e., ethnicity, religion, and ideology) of students and staff, reminding me of my time in China.

Most of my students were new immigrants and refugees from Somalia, Kenya, Mexico, and Laos. I learned so much about the cultures represented at the school. I felt deeply connected to my students as I breathed in their stories—dedicating their lives to Islam, getting married back in Laos at age 13, growing up and trying to survive in refugee camps, watching their families murdered by militia forces, and moving across the world and saying goodbye to everything that was real to them. The connection with those who endure immense struggle and their stories profoundly impacted how I looked at my own life and history. As was true during my time in the leprosy village, I felt shame a few times for “making such a big deal” out of my own

experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss as I compared my story with theirs. Their resolve to do well in school and try and fit in to American culture was admirable. I often wondered how their identities were affected by contact with different norms and belief systems. I still wonder what stories still reside in their hearts, too painful to share. After two years and with sadness in my heart, I said goodbye to these students accepting a teaching position in a suburban school closer to our home.

The final teaching years. After a year in China and two years teaching in an urban school in Minneapolis, stepping foot into this homogenous school was painful. I was struck by the lack of racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. I also came to understand that most of the teachers had spent their entire careers in this school and district having grown up in the surrounding areas. I don't think there is anything wrong with committing to a school for an entire career, but I was used to working with teachers who had lived in many different places and had a myriad of experiences. My heart ached for the first few months as I tried to accept this "new normal." I found myself hoping that this teaching job would be temporary.

As much as I missed what I had the three years prior, I eventually fell in love with my students once again. The class schedule was created to accommodate the musical inclinations of some of the students so one section of my U.S. history included only those in band, while another were my choir kids. These students were some of the most creative and funny young people I had ever known. They so enjoyed learning U.S. history through projects, acting, and other creative endeavors. One of my favorite activities was the 1920's project. The students chose to act out certain events/main topics from this era as a silent film. These creative, intelligent kids succeeded beautifully, integrating their love of music into the films. They remain on my heart today and I am still close to some of them.

The other class I taught was Global Studies, comprised of juniors and seniors. This was a fantastic class as we searched out and analyzed the realities in the world, including poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, war, and international relations. As with my 10th grade U.S. history students, I immediately connected with these young adults. Whereas I love 9th and 10th graders for their somewhat immature and funny antics, I love the older ones for their maturity and depth of thought. One of our favorite activities was the African Unity Conference. Each student would research a country analyzing its history and how that history impacted the country's views on issues such as food insecurity. At the end, we sat in a circle and held a conference that was guided by rules and regulations. It was amazing to watch and listen to students sharing their understanding of some pretty complex topics. Working with students on projects like this one helped me feel more at home here in this school, in this place.

Unfortunately, my hope of this teaching job being temporary materialized.

During the first week of May, two of us from the Social Studies department were "pink-slipped" due to a curricular and building redesign, the economic crisis that hit during that year, and staff coming back from other positions (Teachers on Special Assignments). We were the last ones hired and did not have tenure so we were "let go." I share this experience of the loss of my job in The Ugly section.

When a teaching position opened up in January of 2010, I returned and would remain in this district until I resigned in June of 2012. Instead of only teaching at my former high school, I also taught two sections of Economics at the new high school, both in the same district. At the new high school, I was fortunate to serve on Diversity Council and advise International Club. Working with my colleagues and students to bring about awareness of issues of diversity through courageous conversations and activities was a bright spot for me while there. International Club

students tirelessly worked to raise money for children in need. We even slept overnight in boxes to gain an understanding of the realities of many people who suffer from home insecurity. These kids amazed me with their empathy and work ethic mirroring past students who were a part of the Amnesty International and Interact groups.

Again, as was the case with former students, I healed as I worked in relationship with these new students towards creating a world steeped in human rights, equity, and justice. The influx of positive hopes and commitment to justice of the young people with whom I worked slowly washed away the intensity of my feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss. Most of these students are now finishing up their time in college. I hope they carry their commitment for a better, gentler world with them as they move forward in their lives.

In September of 2012, I began what would become my final year of high school teaching. As I mentioned earlier, I left my former district in June for reasons that I will share in The Ugly section. My new high school was a bit more urban with more diversity in the student body. Since my student teaching experience, it has always been the students themselves that keep me coming back each year to the classroom. The students at this high school were no exception. These 9th graders were eager to learn, respectful, and saw value in their studies. They were funny, creative, and hard-working. I continued to love teaching and watching the magic unfold—students helping each other stretch their understanding, overcoming their fears of sharing their thoughts, and becoming more informed about the world around them.

One requirement for 9th grade students was to carry out community service at a location, or multiple locations, of their choosing. Upon completion, they were required to share their experiences with one another during class. Many shared how it felt good to help others extending their service well beyond the required time. One student shared that she served food

at a homeless shelter for her community service. She became teary-eyed as she talked about the impact felt when seeing a former friend and her family enter the shelter. The realization that life can change quickly and place people in situations where they experience feelings of shame affected my student. I wonder how my student's friend and her family internalized their experiences with financial insecurity and if resilience came into play. It was incredible to see how my student's words clung to her peers, some I imagine, able to identify with either her sharing, or the family's need to seek out food at a shelter. While she spoke, I thought about my own feelings of shame and how my family's financial state could have easily fell even farther to the point of needing to venture out to a homeless shelter for a meal.

Creating the space for my students to share who they are and what experiences they have is so vital to healing and wholeness. Classrooms can become sacred spaces that welcome hurt, difference, shame, and a myriad of other feelings. Classrooms can become holy communities where people feel comfortable enough to be who they are. My desire to provide hospitality to these strangers in my classroom and "relate to [them] with justice and compassion" through sharing our authentic selves is grounded in my own religious upbringing of trying to follow the example of Jesus in his teachings of love and acceptance (Fasching & Dechant, 2001, p. 7).

The authors' state:

The task of an ethic of holy is not to eliminate the morality of a society, but to transform it by breaking down the divisions [...] through narratives of hospitality to the stranger, which affirm the human dignity of precisely those who do not share one's identity and one's stories.

(2001, p. 18)

Throughout the years, I have tried to create these spaces for my students and myself where divisions and differences of lived experiences are broken down as we weave in and out of each other's stories.

It is in these spaces that my students and I have experienced healing, wholeness, and holiness.

Yet, it has also been in some of these same places where I have witnessed and experienced unjust practices, aptly titled, *The Ugly*.

The Ugly

From the beginning of my teaching career, I assumed that administrators would treat teachers in an equitable and fair manner; the same way they expected teachers to treat their own students. Yet, this was not the case in most of the places in which I taught. Although teaching contributed to my identity as a social justice educator and provided me a sacred space to heal, these spaces also furthered my feelings of marginalization and loss adding to the heaviness of my heart.

Most of the tension-filled experiences during my time as a teacher took place between myself and the administrators, all of whom were White males. This tension was particularly heightened during a four-year stretch in a suburban school district during my final teaching years. A former colleague illuminates this tension when he said, "When I walk up to the administrators, I feel as though I crashed a party that I was not invited to." I have felt this way so often throughout the years—uninvited, excluded, and different. These experiences further punctuated my inability to access the world of hegemonic norms, and in this case these norms were predicated on White patriarchy.

My assumptions that administrators treat their staff in a fair and equitable way began to erode during my first year of teaching in 1998. Yet, it wasn't until I arrived in the

aforementioned suburban school district that my naivety about the impenetrable political structures and power struggles at the administrative level and how these structures and struggles impacted the careers and lives of the teachers, that I truly realized the prevalence of such inequitable practices. Sadly, my own experiences in this particular school district strengthened my belief that most of the administrators with whom I worked cared only about themselves and their powerful positions.

In this school district, protocols with regard to hiring practices were inconsistent and biased. In May of 2009, a colleague of mine and I were let-go due to budget cuts. We were the two with the least seniority and were not tenured. She had put in three years in this district; I was finishing my first. In June of that same year I received a call from an assistant principal at the school who shared that the budget allowed for one social studies hire for the following year. I assumed that both my friend and I would have to interview and asked this administrator if indeed that was the case. He said, "Well, I want you to have the job." I immediately felt sick at the thought of the biased and unfair position in which my friend would be placed. She would come to the interview thinking she had a shot but I knew differently. I also knew that my friend's husband was out of work and for her to not have employment would devastate their family. I declined the interview and never told my friend the reason. In fact, most of my former colleagues do not know the real reason I declined the interview.

As I briefly mentioned in The Healing section, I was able to return to this same suburban school district in January of 2010. Yet, at the end of each year, my job was cut and each time inconsistency and bias in the hiring protocols reared their ugly head. One year the "interview" consisted of the same assistant principal mentioned above asking, "Amy, do you want to work here?" The next year, the hiring process included a formal interview. With each year, my

anxiety grew as I continued to see, hear, and experience bias and inconsistency. I mattered only to fill the administrative staffing needs. Whether in teaching, or law, or medicine, our shared humanity is in danger when protocols, especially biased and inequitable ones, come before people and relationships.

The wounds I felt from being marginalized as a young person deepened as I continued to experience marginalization by administrators whenever I confronted their inconsistent and biased hiring practices. As opposed to working within a system of domination, hooks (1984) encourages us to not shy away from goals seen as threatening to the establishment because to stay on safe ground is to maintain the status quo. I have never been one to “play the game” and found that during my time in this district, my keen sense of social justice was triggered again and again and I reclaimed my art of questioning by challenging the status quo. Although it is tough work to struggle for transformation that “engages us in revolutionary praxis” (hooks, 1984, p. 28), I could no longer accept what I saw.

As I struggled in my final years of teaching with the oppressive “leadership” of the administrators, I was learning about a different kind of leadership in my doctoral program. This leadership was not the same that I had experienced in most of the schools in which I taught; in most of the schools I worked, I experienced leadership based on hierarchical norms, bias, and inequity. What I learned in the doctoral program has had a profound impact on how I think leadership should look and I can no longer accept leadership that is imbued with unbalanced power, domination, and oppression. This type of leadership demotivates teachers and I imagine this type of leadership would be demotivating for people in any profession.

I invite current administrators and those pursuing administrative roles to search within themselves for a deeper understanding of how marginalization can impact one’s mind, one’s

body and one's self-concept. Perhaps if administrators took to heart the words of Maxine Greene when she states, "My focal interest is human freedom, in the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise" (1988, p. 3), they would understand that leadership can look "otherwise" if only they would "seek alternative ways of being, to look for openings" (Greene, 1998, p. 2) filled with hospitality (Fasching & Dechant, 2001) instead of adherence to hegemonic norms that continue to oppress and marginalize.

As I envision myself as a school leader, I know that I would "invite diverse voices to dialogue" (Noonan, 2007, p. 4) as a way to create space for my teachers. Being dialogical in my relationships with my own staff would help me to develop as a consensus-builder instead of a person who marginalizes others. It would be beneficial to the health of any school district, or any organization, if the school leaders could re-imagine their role as *leader* as one that equalizes the relational nature of power so all can experience freedom, creativity, and joy in their workspaces. Moreover, movement by administrators and teachers toward a place of commonality that would centralize the experiences of women, who are often marginalized from administrative leadership roles, particularly at the high school level, offers the potential of unification and genuine and long-lasting change to systems that continue to oppress. To reconceptualize power as affirming life (Shiva, 2005), as opposed to dominating others, would advance a new conception of leadership. These experiences strengthened my identity as a social justice educator and with tenacity I struggled to change these systems of oppression during my teaching years. Yet, after so many years confronting the same marginalization, I realized that sometimes resilience is walking away.

The ugly episodes in my professional life have been countered not only through the healing I find in teaching but also through the joy in travel and the love of family. I have

ventured off to 24 countries, mostly with students as part of educational and cultural programs. These experiences deepened my relationships with students, helped me unpack notions of difference and normal, and led to a deep connection with the lives of those living elsewhere.

The Joy

As stated earlier, my stories of teaching as healing, the political and hierarchical ugliness found in schools, the joy of travel, and the familial relationships closely guarded in my heart flow in and out of one another. Joy was present alongside healing in my classrooms and joy ekes in and out of my family relationships. Yet, the joy I speak of here is intimately tied to newness, exploration, a broader connection with the world and its people—past, present, and future, and encounters with difference. This joy forcefully rushed into me as I stepped on a plane to Russia.

The Soviet seminar. I was able to travel to Russia in the spring of 1992 during my undergraduate study as part of a class I was taking. I flew into St. Petersburg with some classmates and stayed with a host family for a few nights. Alex, Tamara, Dana, and Serge were incredibly hospitable and kind. Alex, the father, was an engineer and at that time his salary provided well for his family allowing Tamara to stay home. Their sons, Dana and Serge, both in elementary school, were shy and very respectful. Their apartment reminded me of my grandma's house in which I grew up, including the paisley wallpaper and black-and-white television.

They shared their lives with my roommate and me, expressing sadness at the persistent poverty and lack of stability plaguing their country—the bread lines, the lack of merchandise in the stores, and the inability to earn a decent living for most of the country's people weighed heavy on their hearts. Tamara cooked us meals of chicken and cabbage soup which I gratefully ate and enjoyed. We were headed to Moscow after a few days and as we boarded the train, I

began to cry as I waved goodbye to my new-found family. At the time, I was unsure why leaving them affected me in this way. Reflecting back offers more clarity. Here was a family that, despite their hardship, stayed together. Moreover, they offered me the gift of hospitality treating me like family instead of the “other.” Their kindness touched and opened my heart, especially the little protected corner called “family.”

Beyond the home stay, the Soviet Seminar included visits to the Bolshoi Ballet, Peter and Paul Fortress, the battleship, Aurora, the tomb of Catherine the Great, the Kremlin, and the Hermitage, where Nicholas and his family were murdered as the Russian Revolution took hold. We also visited Red Square and my heart raced as I took in the beauty of St. Basil’s Church, its onion-shaped domes pointing to Heaven. We were also able to view Lenin’s body amidst rumors that it was not his real body but a copy made of wax. We spent some time shopping in “Gum” department store and took in a circus as well. Moscow University was so beautiful, and on that particular day, it was framed with dark skies and ominous clouds. We were told that this spot is where Hitler’s troops had to retreat due to the fierce winter many years prior. We also spent a few days in Kiev amazed at “Mother Russia” as it boldly stood as a reminder to the generation lost during WWII. We also walked on hallowed ground at “Babi Yar,” where over 100,000 Jews were killed during the war.

The beauty of Europe. As I prepared to leave my job at the middle school in Washington in May of 2001, I also welcomed my second international adventure. Earlier that year I applied for the position of chaperone for a group of 40 students to Spain, Switzerland, Germany, and France through the People to People Student Ambassador Program. I cried when I was offered the position as I so desperately craved travel as well as the joy I felt nine years prior. As a child, I never thought I would be able to afford to see the world. Growing up

financially insecure led to a suffocating hopelessness in me at times as I internalized the doubt that good things would ever come. So, when the call came, I was overwhelmed. It was during this trip that I met Ashley, who remains one of my closest friends to this day and with whom I shared my China teaching adventure in 2005.

As was the case when I ventured to Russia, the “Cultures of Europe” trip opened my heart to the history, culture, and people of these beautiful countries. In Madrid, Spain, we learned to flamenco dance and ate paella. As we moved to Toledo my eyes soaked in each tree, bridge, and church as the brown landscape went on for miles in all directions. The Alhambra of Granada, one of the final symbols of Muslim power in the Iberian Peninsula, drew me in immediately. The walls, walkways, and arches hid the colorful and cool to the touch tiles of the Gilded Room. Deep green exuded out of trees and bushes as an array of red and pink flowers adorned the pathways. I still think about the people who walked in this space, on these pathways, beginning in the 11th century. What stories would they share? What struggles and joys rested on their hearts? Did they experience difference or stigma? Why? How did they find wholeness? How did they demonstrate resilience?

In Cordoba and Seville, I let my heart breathe in the beauty found among the olive groves, the structures and art in the churches, and the ordinary yet extraordinary dwellings of the people. Plaza de Espana in Seville was enormous and full of fountains and artistic paintings of times gone past. I enjoyed a quiet contemplative time under some trees in Alcazar, a beautiful place that accommodated both Muslim and Christian royalty. What stories would these royals tell of their time in this place? My imagination and passion for history ignited my questions.

After spending some time in the south, we headed to Barcelona, an amazingly energetic and vibrant city. The Gothic Quarter exemplified baroque architecture—the city itself blessed by

the hand of Gaudi. My excitement to swim in the Mediterranean fizzled when the sea itself was closed due to a shark sighting. We all dipped our toes in though and I felt the past wash over me.

It was difficult to say goodbye to Spain but the beauty of Switzerland grabbed hold of me quickly. The cities of Geneva, Bern, and Zurich pulled me back in time with their cobblestone streets and architecture. The Mer de Glace (e.g., ice cave) of the Chamonix Valley was breathtaking mirroring the majestic Swiss Alps. When I sat in that cave and looked out, I felt small but not insignificant. Without a doubt, I knew that God was present.

Our final destinations included the Black Forest area in Germany and Paris, France. My father's side is German, particularly from the south so while I stood in Freiburg and Munich, I thought of his ancestors, my ancestors, living and loving, feeling sorrow and joy in these same spaces all of those years ago. Was I like them in appearance? Did my temperament match theirs? Did mental illness destroy some of their minds too? I often think of myself as melancholy and when I visited this area, it too seemed melancholy—the sky, the dark wood, perhaps its history too.

France felt lighter to me. I sipped coffee at a café in Paris and stayed with a family in Rouen. The cathedrals shouted “revolution” as Napoleon's voice whispered through the trees. Ashley and I celebrated Bastille Day in Rouen with our host family—the skies full of colors pulsing freedom with every boom. Montmartre, Sacre-Coeur church, Notre Dame, the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and Versailles exemplified French architecture, history, religious beliefs, and artistic command. These structures, churches, and roads were breathtaking.

Due to our schedule, we only had one hour to spend at the Louvre. Ashley and I became teary-eyed knowing full well that our hearts would never embrace all that rested in this space in such a short amount of time. We eked out as much as possible in the time allowed, at times

running from one artistic masterpiece to another. We then walked around the Palace of Versailles. Chills raced down my spine as I embraced the significance of this place where the Treaty of Versailles was signed which ended World War I and set the stage for World War II. To walk on the marble floors that world leaders had walked before me brought history even more to life for me and my students.

Italy and Greece. In 2004, when I was teaching in the rural high school in Northwestern Wisconsin, Bryan and I led a group of students to Italy and Greece. Many of these students were active in the student Amnesty International group. The connection that was forged during our work in Amnesty was strengthened as our hearts grew closer during our travels. For all of us, topics studied during our time in class became three dimensional, alive, and breathing.

While walking in the Vatican, my religious beliefs were reenergized. Millions of people have visited this holy place. I wonder if those who came before me felt God as powerfully as I did while standing in St. Peter's Basilica embracing Michelangelo's *Pieta*, or gazing up at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel internalizing *The Creation of Adam*. How different would my life have been had I been born in this country with this history—a history memorialized in the Roman Forum, the Roman ruins, the Colosseum, Trevi Fountain, and the Pantheon?

After Rome, we ventured to Florence, one of my favorite cities in the world. The jewelry shops and cafés wear bright colors in this beautiful birthplace of the Renaissance as the famous Vecchio Bridge spans the Arno River. Cathedral Square with its stunning Duomo pulls people in from the periphery offering a gaze of the Baptistery's bronze door, which truly is "the gate of paradise." We were also able to visit Orvieto, a large hilltop town where white wine quenches the thirst of weary travelers and olive trees dot the countryside.

So expansive was the view of the sea from Naples that I became lost in time, forgetting all else. Sadness accompanied me as we drove towards Mt. Vesuvius and Pompeii as I imagined the bodies that once hung from crosses which framed the old Apennine Road. Once I arrived at Pompeii, I looked towards Vesuvius and tried to imagine the hopelessness felt by the people as they watched the tide of death rush towards them. The heartbreak of the people in Pompeii who met certain death as the volcano erupted still hung in the air. In fact, the victims live still as their bodies left holes in the hardened ash, which were filled with plaster years later, showing what they looked like at the time of their death. One of the victims was kneeling down hands gripping her belly protecting her unborn child—a physical reminder of the fear, sadness, and loss of life on that day all of those years ago.

It was difficult to leave Italy, but as we boarded the ferry for our trip to Greece, I knew that the country beckoning to me held its own beauty, its own history, and its own chance for connection with those who came before me. Athens welcomed us with its white buildings and quaint cafés. I trembled as I walked in the footsteps of Socrates and Plato breathing their air, seeing what they saw—more deeply understanding how this place inspired such creative thought and contemplation. The tremendous impact that these philosophers had on notions of democracy, freedom, and education still guides world leaders, professors, and others today.

While in Greece, I reflected on my own teaching of history, thinking about how I could more authentically bring this ancient land into the minds and hearts of my students who were not able to join me on this trip. As I look back now, I am thankful for all of my travel experiences as they have allowed me to bring my intimate awareness of the social soil of those we studied to my students.

The Acropolis rose up into the grey sky, its pillars commanding reverence from all. Visiting the oracle at Delphi gave me a glimpse back in time leaving me to ponder the immense trust the Greeks placed in its message. We swam in the Mediterranean Sea, its warm waters sharing secrets of the past inviting us to go deeper. During my time in Greece and Italy, it was encouraging to watch my students step outside of their comfort zones and interact with other cultures and ways of living. As was the case during the Soviet Seminar and Cultures of Europe trips, the importance of the interdependence of life—past, present, and future left an imprint on not only my soul but also on theirs.

Central Europe. Bryan and I were lucky enough to travel again with students to Germany, the Czech Republic Austria, and Hungary in the summer of 2005. I loved visiting Germany again, particularly the black forest region. Yet, on this trip I also spent time in Heidelberg. This city contains the oldest university in Germany and while there, I thought about the Jewish professors who most certainly lost their jobs due to the Nuremberg laws—laws that concretely constructed Jews as different while marginalizing them at the same time. This horrific period of German history lies in sharp contrast to the beauty of this old city with Heidelberg Castle displaying its Gothic and Renaissance past. This place also holds remnants of Martin Luther, who ultimately led many people to reject Catholicism and embrace the Lutheran faith.

While in Germany, we also visited such historic places as the Berlin Wall Memorial, Bryan and I snapping a picture of our feet on either side of where the wall once stood. Walking around in the Checkpoint Charlie Museum brought me greater understanding of how physical barriers sequester not only the bodies of people, but also their minds. The Reichstag, this historical edifice, was disturbing to look at—hatred and prejudice still lingering in its walls. The

Reichstag was not the only structure that contained hatred. Our visit to Dachau, a concentration camp in the south, brought this hatred painfully into the present. There were hundreds of people visiting that day yet no human voice could be heard. As people were murdered, their stories seeped deeply into the ground. I should have knelt down and placed my ear on that soil to hear their tales of loss. I left with a heaviness I had never carried before.

Our group also passed Hitler's bunker where he took his last breath. The history teacher in me often wonders about the thoughts that went through his mind before death set in. Did he ask for forgiveness in the final moments for the atrocities he had committed? From everything I have read and studied, probably not.

This expedition also brought poverty and its effects clearly into focus. As we crossed the German border into the Czech Republic, we saw prostitutes modeling in store-front windows. Bryan shared with me his sadness at the thought of me or his sister having to make a living in this fashion extending this feeling to the women in front of us. I imagine these women endured violence and loss in their lives. Our bus continued forward, and I am sure it was not the first time that these women felt left behind. I hope that since seeing them on that day all of those years ago, they have also experienced wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

We had a chance to spend some time in Prague and the beauty of this city emanated from every building and street. Yet, walking around the Jewish Quarter, located between Old Town Square and the Vltava River contrasted such beauty. During the 13th century, Jewish people were ordered to live in this one area representing deeply-held anti-Semitic prejudice. The marginalization in this place and throughout Europe set the stage for the atrocities carried out during World War II. I often wonder how the Jews made sense of being seen as the "other" or the "stranger" by those in their community. Did anyone in Prague show them gracious

hospitality? What stories would they tell if they could reach out from the graves? We left Prague shortly after our visit to the Jewish Quarter and headed to Austria.

What sticks in my memory while in Vienna, besides the beautiful churches and people, are the cafés. As is true in most of Europe, the cafés here emphasize a commitment to slowing down, enjoying life, and relaxing. Animated conversations dominated as we walked past one café after another popping in every once in a while to grab some serenity ourselves. I love this aspect of Europe in general, and Vienna in particular.

Our final destination was Budapest. Separating the cities of Buda and Pest is the gorgeous Danube River. As I embraced the rhythm of the water while floating along on a riverboat, the sense of calm that drifted into my soul abruptly left. My eyes could not dismiss the metal shoes holding flowers that encased the river paying homage to the thousand Jews who were shot off of its bank by the Nazis. My heart wept at the lives that were lost. As our journey came to an end, I quietly and with deep sadness bid farewell to these countries. My heart secretly hoped that soon I would once again walk on this ground.

Singapore. My next adventure took place in October of 2005 while on holiday from teaching in China. John, Ashley, their son, and I went on holiday to Singapore and Tioman Island. Initially, we planned to go to Bali but the night before we were to leave, there was a terrorist bombing in areas frequented by expats. At the same time, the news reported killings in and around Islamabad as well as Guatemala. At the time, I wrote, “It is just so sad. I don’t understand it. I need God to help me through this-quite depressing and such great loss of life.” Unfortunately, as I write this today, bombing, killing, and devastation have not subsided in many parts of the world.

Our trip to Singapore was incredibly fun, but before I stepped foot outside of the airport, I was met with police officers carrying AK-47's. This took me a bit by surprise; yet, with the recent terrorist attack in Bali, it made sense. I came to understand though that security in general is taken very seriously in Singapore. While there, we spent time looking at a jewelry exhibit, read books and magazines in a local bookstore, and drank Starbucks coffee. I also celebrated my 35th birthday in Singapore beginning with a glass of wine in the morning and ending with the movie, *The Nightmare before Christmas* by Timothy Burton.

After a few days meandering around Singapore, we ventured off to Tioman Island. I spent my time swimming in the pool of our resort, which looked out into the deep blue ocean—an image I tightly embrace. The ocean has always calmed my mind and body; its waves reassuring me. I think about the ocean as a metaphor for my own life—the crashing waves are my experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss; perhaps the waves calm me because of my familiarity with such intense experiences. The calm and still moments represent the disruptions to these experiences, the resilience and healing of these experiences. In the past, I never found comfort in calm and still moments, whereas, now I welcome them.

As I sat there looking into the expansive waters, I offered silent respect to those who lost their lives in the Tsunami that ripped apart neighboring areas with ferocity a year prior. I intimately knew that the calm bestowed on me during those few days were not extended to the people on that day. There would be no resilience or healing for the people who perished, only perhaps for their friends and family who still breathe in the calm and still moments of the water before them.

Beijing. In December of that same year, Bryan visited while on Christmas break from school. After only a few days, we ventured off to Beijing. An email that I wrote to our family and friends dated January 15, 2006 offers some details:

Our first day there we journeyed to the Great Wall—a very remote section. We hiked up and enjoyed the blue sky and mountains and the realization that we were together experiencing this historical wonder. I often wonder in whose footsteps I am walking, particularly here. [...] The next day, we visited the Forbidden City, which is where the emperors and all their wives lived. Then, off to the Summer Palace—a gorgeous area with an artificial lake. Finally, we briefly visited Tiananmen Square, the site of the massacre in 1989.

As I sit reading my journal again, I think about how connection with other people has always been something I craved and cherished. Maybe the pursuit of connection is a reaction to feelings of difference and marginalization. When I am connected to others, my feelings of difference are lessened, the heaviness in my heart shared by those around me—lighter, I am able to move in from the margins.

I realize that visiting places helps me feel connected as well—connected with nature and history and all that has gone before. I also think about the artificial lines that denote countries and places, which reminds me of the movie, *The English Patient* (Zaentz). Katharine, one of the main characters is waiting in a cave for her lover. She writes,

My darling. I'm waiting for you. How long is the day in the dark? Or a week? The fire is gone, and I'm horribly cold. I really should drag myself outside but then there'd be the sun. I'm afraid I waste the light on the paintings, not writing these words. We die. We die rich with lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we've entered and swum up

like rivers. Fears we've hidden in - like this wretched cave. I want all this marked on my body. Where the real countries are. Not boundaries drawn on maps with the names of powerful men. I know you'll come carry me out to the Palace of Winds. That's what I've wanted: to walk in such a place with you. With friends, on an earth without maps.

(<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116209/quotes>, September, 28, 2014/1996)

My body carries in it experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss but it carries light, too. I have marks on my body and in my body—imprints of feelings and places and people. My body also bears witness to collective connection and heartache throughout time and space. The world resides inside of me and I inside the world.

Vietnam. After our time in Beijing, Bryan and I went to Vietnam. We began our journey with a stay in Ho Chi Minh City. We were guests at the French Majestic Hotel on the Saigon River. We toured the amazing and intricate Cu Chi Tunnels that the Vietcong used during the war, which the Vietnamese call the American War. We also visited the War Remnants Museum, which was incredibly sad.

War Remnants Museum very sad-effects of napalm dioxin on fetuses, kids and adults- truly sad. I oftentimes wonder how I escaped so much pain (war, rape, genocide, etc.) when so many don't. I ponder this a lot-what if I'd been born in a different country and a different time? I don't know if its luck, Karma, or something undefined. I am certain I'll grapple with this the rest of my life-hopefully. (January 4th, 2006 email)

Reflecting on this entry, I am drawn to the word “hopefully.” I always want to relate to the lives of others—their hardships and joys—because I think this cultivates empathy towards others and their authentic selves. I have always tried to find connection with others and wonder if even

before knowing it, I found healing in this connection. In an email sent to family and friends dated January 15, 2006, I shared the following:

Some areas of Vietnam still look like a war zone—a struggle between modernity and the past. As a teacher, I've taught about the war and this country but being here puts so many things into a different light and perspective. It's really important for me to learn as much as I can about other people and countries and their perspectives on things that happened. The only way I can describe how I feel is that these experiences fill me up in a way that not many other things do.

This continues to remain true for me as travel is not only joyful but offers healing, connection, and a feeling of wholeness.

While in Ho Chi Minh City, we visited Reunification Hall, a gorgeous building reminiscent of France's influence and power that in time became home to South Vietnamese president, Ngo Dinh Diem. Although it was closed, we were able to view the grounds. As I walked around the building, the fear and desperation in the hearts of the people all of those years ago who endured such pain and loss trickled into my mind. We ate lunch in a café right across the street from Reunification Hall and as I ate, I listened for whispers of the past wondering how the lessons learned during the American War, as the Vietnamese refer to it, could guide future relationships between our two countries.

We left Ho Chi Minh City and headed to Hoi An, a quaint coastal retreat offering an incredible view of the ocean and delicious locally-grown food. I can still taste the salt that leapt up from the ocean's waves as we enjoyed massages while lying on the soft sandy beach. We enjoyed a calm simplicity in Hoi An, which contrasted sharply to the hustle and bustle of former

Saigon. I wondered what impact the war had on the people all of those years ago far from the city-centers—I am certain they did not enjoy the calm simplicity that I savored while there.

We finished our trip to Vietnam with a stay in Hanoi. My journal from January 5th reads:

To me, traveling and experiencing all I can (including time with family) is what is valuable. I miss people and Fred, of course, but I wouldn't trade the last 5 ½ months for anything. I oftentimes wonder why I didn't put more of an emphasis on living overseas when I was younger-Yet, then I think I realize it was fear that held me back [...]. It's almost ironic-the stronger I become, the less need I have to be 'close to home' because home is not only a place but a feeling-a confidence that life is good, my family and friends are okay and I couldn't prevent anything that is supposed to happen and I am on good terms with those I love and I know that they love and support my 'wanderlust.'

Throughout my travels, I walked in spaces where people had endured incredible pain and loss. I am sure for them -- as was true for me -- their understanding of and experience with "home" changed as external realities spilled into these personal spaces. I imagine some people throughout the countries in which I have traveled also experienced mental illness. As opposed to external forces invading their personal home-space, this pain begins in the home. When there is a war in the mind of the mentally-ill person which impacts the family, external hardships make life and "home" raw. Yet, as my pain and loss mingled intimately with those of others, I began to challenge my past understanding of "home."

While traveling, I gained clarity as I looked at my experiences differently. While in Vietnam I wrote:

The Vietnamese people were very kind and helpful. Of course there was a lot of poverty-children coming up selling trinkets to make money. It was quite surreal to see the disparity between the poor and the “white” tourists. I wonder if sometimes the Vietnam people feel they are on display. I mean we went there on holiday with our money and cameras taking pictures trying to eke out some understanding of this place and these people. Again, though, I can’t stress enough how alike people are all over the world and how for me, traveling and talking with people, continually emphasizes this fact.

As my view of the world enlarges, so does my view of myself, my present situation, and my past. As I see others who individually or collectively experience difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss I feel more connected, more whole. This wholeness is rooted in my relationships with others and their lived experiences. Again, the power of relationships and story would surface four years later as I ventured to Scotland and Ireland.

Scotland and Ireland. During the summer of 2010, I had the privilege of traveling again with students, whom I deeply loved—this time, to Scotland and Ireland. Every time I travel, it is as if my heart licks the flames of a raging fire carrying me back in time where all touchstones of reality are invisible. On this particular journey, I walked in the footsteps of Michael Collins and James VI. I toured Edinburg, stopping in The White Elephant Restaurant where J.K. Rowling wrote the beginnings of her famous “Harry Potter” stories. I walked through castles and on holy ground of churches that held stories of others who ruled and worshipped.

One of the most incredible sites I had ever laid my eyes on was the Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland. The large stones that erupt from the ocean’s floor tempted me to walk further

and further out into the sea, where with one wrong step, the waves would have whisked me away. I still lose my breath when I think about the water crashing over the cliffs—I can still taste the salt that leapt up from the sea on that day.

One evening, my students and I visited the famed Crown Saloon in Belfast. Upon entering I caught the eye of a young bartender. I have always found Irish history fascinating, which led me to invite this young man to sit with us. Patrick was from West Belfast and shared that his family had been a part of the IRA in times past, passionately talking about the incredible violence and instability evident in his country. He shared that this violence affected his own life, recounting how he had to walk over dead bodies on his way to elementary school. He talked with a fire that I recognized and although he never divulged the emotional toll these realities had on his life, I knew from that fire that these experiences with death and violence affected him greatly.

As he spoke, I couldn't help but think of the loss that he and all of the people of this country faced both collectively and individually throughout time. At that moment, the *History of Ireland* class that I took while in college became more personal. I still think about Patrick from time to time hoping life has been kinder to him than in his younger years. As I think about him, I often wonder how he learned resilience amidst such violence. What enabled him to move from day to day with such haunting memories? Perhaps it was the love of family that moved him forward.

Although I found joy in travels, especially with students, I struggled with the reality that the students who were able to travel came from a life that was foreign to my own at their age. Although some students worked and fundraised to secure money for the trips, most of them were fortunate to have grandparents and parents who paid the entire amount.

This internal struggle brought me back to 1989, my junior year in high school. I was taking French and there was a class trip to France scheduled for that summer—the trip cost \$500. During class one day, the teacher said, “Those of you who are planning on going to France raise your hands so I can give you the information.” I still remember sinking a little deeper into my desk chair as I knew there was no way my family could afford such a trip. The shame I felt sitting next to those whose hands were highly raised has never left me.

Yet, this experience shaped how I talked about international travel opportunities with my own students, always mindful of their differing economic realities. I announced the travel opportunities in all of my classes but held my meetings after school. Moreover, I shared with my classes my experience in French class and told them that if they ever felt I was being insensitive in how I spoke about these international opportunities to please let me know. I also shared that I first traveled at the age of 20 and that even if they couldn’t travel while in high school, they would have other opportunities in the future.

Beyond sharing the travel opportunities with my students, I told them what travel did to me, inside of me, often infusing my stories into topics studied. I let them know that when I am elsewhere I feel more connected to myself than when in a space of familiarity because I have to dig deeper and rely upon myself more in unknown lands. That perhaps the more I see of the world and embrace the numerous histories and stories, the more I realize that although I have felt different and on the margins in the past—we have all felt this way.

The Heart

In this section, I offer stories that I carry deep inside my heart that have greatly impacted me—stories of family. Throughout my narrative, I have shared other stories, such as loving and losing my father, healing through teaching, and finding joy in travel. In this space, though, I

share how my relationship with Bryan and my involvement in a 12-step recovery program continue to heal my sense of brokenness. I hold to the light my experiences with loving and losing aunts and uncles throughout the years. I then share the joy I felt at being a part of Bryan's older brother Chad's wedding in June of 2008 and the anguish of losing him in March of 2012. I reveal how motherhood has both opened my heart in ways I could never have imagined and propelled me to tackle with deeper honesty my feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss. I end with the day that Bryan and I said goodbye to our dog, Fred, after loving him for 11 years. I offer these stories with love, respect, and reverence to all the hearts that are involved.

Love and healing. I returned to La Crosse from Washington during the summer of 2000 to spend time with my family. Angie, a dear college friend of mine, invited me to a wedding of a former classmate of hers. We had a wonderful time together. It was at this wedding that I met a cousin of the bride and my future husband, Bryan. A few weeks after the wedding, he visited me at my mom and Aaron's house in La Crosse before I flew back to Washington to prepare for my second, and what would become my final, year of teaching there. At the time, he worked as a chemical engineer at a paper plant in a small town in Central Wisconsin so for the first year, our relationship was long-distance.

I was still in the throes of grieving my dad's death as feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss lingered with force inside of me. I shared with Bryan that I did not believe that I deserved love as I had not done enough for my dad while he was alive. I was embarrassed and ashamed of him and myself for so many years. I never visited him the Christmas before he died stating, "What daughter does this?" Bryan respectfully listened, finally saying, "Amy, we all do the best we can and we all deserve to be loved." I let his words sink in—they hurt as they traveled inside of me finally resting in my heavy heart. It was at that

moment that I opened my heart a little to God—my higher power whom I had turned my back on years prior without realizing it—the God that I met and loved, and served and honored during my time at Mt. Calvary. My resentment toward God diminished a little that day. I guess somewhere deep down I knew that I had done the best I could with regard to my dad. My faith in God, myself, and love came out of hiding.

When I returned from the “Cultures of Europe” trip with Ashley and our students in July of 2001, I moved back to Wisconsin committing myself to Bryan and our future together. We moved to northwestern, Wisconsin in October of that same year to be closer to friends. I served as a long-term substitute teacher while Bryan took prerequisite classes for entrance into a doctorate in pharmacy degree.

In July of 2002, we took a vacation to Madeline Island, part of the Apostle Islands in Lake Superior. We stayed at a bed and breakfast in a two-room suite that overlooked the lake. On the morning of July 29th as we stood on the deck of our suite looking out at the sun he turned to me and said, “I have loved you for the past two years and I want to love you for the rest of my life. Will you marry me?” What a profound leap of faith marriage is and I commend him for taking the risk to ask me. While growing up, and unlike some of my friends, I never really fixated on getting married. I most certainly had crushes and dated men but marriage was not my focus. I have known women throughout my life whose goal in college was to meet her future husband, and some of my friends did just that. Perhaps my background of struggle, my fragmented self could not entertain the idea of marriage until the day that Bryan proposed and at that moment, I said “yes.”

The summer of 2003 was full of change. Bryan and I married, we welcomed our dog, Fred, to the family, and bought our first home in Duluth, Minnesota. Bryan also started his

doctoral program in pharmacy. Planning our wedding kept us busy but it was so fun. At the time, we attended a Unitarian Universalist Church, which we both enjoyed. Our choice of attending a church whose beliefs were connected to but outside the realm of our faiths of origin (i.e., Lutheran for me; Roman Catholic for Bryan) stemmed from our own struggle with the faiths of our childhoods, and for me in particular, my loss of faith in the God of my childhood that I was just beginning to reclaim.

Our ethics and habits also informed our choice to marry in this space. My ethics and habits were grown within a conservative Lutheran community. Bryan's ethics were grown in a conservative Roman Catholic community. His ethical code arose from the Bible and its teachings. In this, we have the same foundation. However, Bryan has shared many times throughout the years that he feels no affinity toward Catholicism and has little memory of learning much while attending his Catholic grade school. We both agree that, although our moral foundation arose from the teachings in the Bible, in Catholicism the priest dictates those lessons in a more controlling fashion and thus personal connection can be lost, which is exactly what Bryan experienced.

Our wedding day saw a gathering of everyone we loved, but my heart still aches when I think about the physical absence of my dad. I felt so connected to those who honored us with their presence. We were spoiled with love and presents that whole weekend and I look back with gratitude and an acute understanding that I was no longer on the periphery looking in for as I joined my heart in ceremony with Bryan's heart, I felt connected to something greater than myself—God, perhaps. This connection with God and my authentic self grew stronger as I found healing and wholeness in Al-Anon.

Recovery. In the fall of 2000, I was introduced to Al-Anon by someone very close to me. He shared that on his own journey of recovery he had found healing and wholeness and thought I may benefit as well. My self-righteousness screamed, “Hell, no.” I was certain that attending meetings for people affected by alcoholism held nothing for me. After all, my problems stemmed from my father’s mental illness.

That same fall I attended my first meeting and felt I had stepped into a foreign land, not understanding phrases such as “one day at a time” or “live and let live.” I couldn’t live just one day at a time. There were things and people to control, obsessions about the future to hold onto to, and regret and guilt to cultivate. This meeting didn’t help at all. I actually felt marginalized from those who appeared to understand the peculiarities found here. Yet, I “kept coming back.”

It was only after Bryan and I moved to Duluth and I asked someone to serve as my sponsor, that I embraced the “experience, strength, and hope” of the program and offered my own experience, strength, and hope to others. Working the steps with my sponsor, including my attempt to “make a searching and fearless inventory of myself,” helped me realize that the survival skills and habits cultivated by those growing up in alcoholic homes were my own.

I continued to learn that experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss come from different settings and spaces, as I had learned in my travels. During the early years in Al-Anon, I also discovered that both of my grandfathers were alcoholics, as well as others currently in my life. This program and the people who so generously share their authentic selves every week continue to offer me a place of connection, knowing that I am part of something greater than myself. This connection continues to heal my past and present experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss.

The love and loss of family. The joy I experienced getting married and adopting our dog, Fred and my involvement in Al-Anon were vital when faced with the death of my aunt Peggy. During my time teaching in Washington, I became close with her. She was married to my uncle Stan, my mother's older brother. He had died 10 years prior and I have no memory of him. Peggy lived on the coast of Oregon in Reedsport and I would drive down the coast and spend weekends with her. I loved spending time with her and listening to her share stories about her life and my dad. She was a connection to my past and I reveled in our relationship.

Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with breast cancer while I still lived in Washington. Although it was difficult to leave her, I moved back to the Midwest to be closer to Bryan and my family. I called her regularly, though, to check on how she was doing and to share things that were going on in my life. I was very excited to share with her that Bryan and I had gotten engaged and that I was looking forward to seeing her at our wedding in August of 2003. My joy was dampened, however, by her email on January 14, 2003:

Hi kids:

Have been putting off writing to you until I could find out what's going on with me.

Turns out the pills are not working. The Dr. has given me anyplace from 3 days to 3 months. We are already on the 4th day-guess I'm showing him what a tough old bird I really am. I don't want you to plan on coming out here Amy. There is really nothing you can do. I may end up in a nursing home or the hospital for a few days there is just no way of telling so naturally I have covered all the bases. [...] has your E-mail address so she will let you know when it's over. I'm going to leave it up to you and Marsha to let the rest of the family know. I am not having any services. I will be cremated and [...] and [...] will take the ashes to the sea across from the lighthouse. [...] has been here for

the last two weeks (spoiling me rotten). He's done all of the cooking and running me to the Dr. and hospital for more blood. But, he is leaving tomorrow. This is for the best. Amy, I am so thankful I got to know you-you just remember the good times and know that you will have one more guardian angel watching over you. Love Peg.

I cry every time I read this; it's been over eleven years and my heart still hurts. I called her the day after I read her email and wrote down parts of our conversation in my journal:

Peggy said I was the first one she's cried to and told me to laugh. She said she lives each day and it's a blessing that she has time to take care of the things she wanted to...that she remembers the good times of potato peels, deep fried turkey, the sand dunes when she and [...] called me a chicken because I was afraid to ride the 4 wheeler. I said 'thank you for everything- I love you...I will miss Griff's. I am coming out.' She said, 'You can but there's really nothing you can do.' I said, 'I can spend time with you.' I love the fact that she knew my dad. I loved talking with her, going to Griff's, and along the coast and turkey cookouts and our boat ride in Florence and 'Red Bull' beer and her stories and wisdom and her love for me. I love that whole area in Oregon, which reminds me of my time in Washington and all of my kids, friends, and experiences. Now, it's almost like that whole period of my life is completely over. I am very very sad.

She never made it to our wedding and died a month later. I regret not going out to see her even though she did not want me to. She wanted me to remember how she was when she and I were together and she was healthy. I understand this, which lessens my regret a bit. The loss of Peggy reached back in time and grabbed onto my dad and Jasper with overwhelming ferocity. As with Jasper and my father, a part of me went with her when she died.

Beyond losing Peggy, I also lost my aunt Mary Ellen and my mom and Aaron's dog, Alex, that same year. And again, these losses reached back in time awakening the pain that accompanied all that had come before. Mary Ellen was my mom's sister and she was so excited to attend our wedding. A medical condition not only denied her the chance to celebrate our day with us but took her life, too. She was buried in the dress she planned to wear to our wedding.

My mom and Aaron attended Mary Ellen's funeral, as did all of the other siblings and their spouses. It was amidst deep mourning that healing occurred for my mom and her family from years of separation—the separation, that for me, began on Easter many years before. As the siblings began to realize the shortness of life, their differences and grudges began to melt away. My mom called me after her time with her family asking if I would invite the part of my family that had shunned us for all of those years to our wedding. Although she had experienced a sense of healing and forgiveness, I was not there yet and chose to stick with only having the families that stuck with us during those incredibly painful years. I think she was disappointed but understood that I wasn't comfortable inviting them to such an intimate gathering. As I look back, I wish I would have been at a place where I was ready to extend them such an invitation. In time, though, I would embrace my family once again.

Many years later, on January 1st, 2012, my uncle Gene died. He was married to my mom's sister, Gloria. Although I was not close with him, his death brought great sadness to my mom and her remaining siblings as they embraced his loss collectively. At the same time that we mourned my uncle Gene's death, my aunt Marian, one of my mom's younger sisters, was losing her battle with diabetes.

Although her health was slowly slipping from her, she would remain stable for a few more months. Thankfully, my mom, aunts and uncles, her son, and I were able to spend time

with her in the hospital. As I bent down to kiss her, my hand holding hers, I softly whispered my love for her and that I was sorry we had lost so many years together—our family's brokenness keeping us apart. At that moment, my memory flashed back to George, my oldest son's first birthday party. Marian was so excited to be a part of this special occasion. George was drawn to her and she relished holding him while reading *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*. As I whispered my love to her on that day, I told her how much it meant to me that she was with George on that day.

Marian died a week later. Bryan and I attended her funeral, grieving the loss of yet another family member. My cousin's wife sang during the service and as I turned to Bryan, huge tears rolled down his face. Although he was saddened by my aunt's death, those tears were for his brother Chad.

Joy and anguish. Before I commit to these pages the anguish of losing Chad, I must share the joy of being a part of his wedding in June of 2008. Chad's fiancée, Yvette had cared for our elder son, George, since February of that year and we had all become quite close. A few months prior to the wedding, Yvette had asked me to be her matron of honor, which I accepted with humility and honor. Bryan and his sister, Angie, also stood up for Chad's special day.

Their wedding was absolutely beautiful—the weather was warm, the sun shone brightly, and our hearts were full of love and hope. Chad and Yvette were so in love and all was right with the world. During dinner, I cried as I gave my speech pouring out my love for them, emphasizing how much it meant to me that Yvette cared for and loved George. Yet, the beauty of this day would wither and fade less than four years later as our family would once again come together, our hearts full of anguish.

On the morning of March 7, 2012, Bryan called my cell phone while I was at work. This was unusual as he knew the mornings were my time to prepare for class, which was set to begin in 10 minutes. Anticipating that one of the boys was sick again, I answered the phone with: “Please tell me that one of the kids isn’t sick again.”

Bryan’s voice was shaking on the other end. “Amy, Chad killed himself this morning. I am heading to my parents. Can you meet me there?” “What? No...,” I remember saying as tears forced their way out. I hung up and fell to the floor. My student helper at the time rushed over to me. All I remember is being helped up off the floor by my friend and teaching partner, “Tom.” I was shaking and crying, wailing really. Tom led me to the teacher’s office where he and others offered their help. I called my mom to let her know. Bryan called back, apologizing for not offering to pick me up and that he intended to do this instead of meeting at his parents’ house. My colleagues took my keys assuring me they would get my car home safely. Others took care of finding someone to teach my classes for the day. I will never forget their support.

Tom walked me downstairs. I left him as I walked out to get in our van. Bryan’s face was red and splotchy—his eyes wet. We hugged and then headed to Waconia. When we arrived at his parent’s house, I hugged his mom tightly. Upon hearing the news of Chad’s death, my father-in-law had developed chest pains and was taken to the ER by my sister-in-law, Angie. Chad’s son, who was 13 at the time, arrived with his mom. It broke my heart to see him grapple with the loss of his dad.

The police had been trying to get a hold of Yvette at work and, after many failed attempts, left her a phone message to come home as soon as possible. Bryan and I volunteered to go to Chad’s house to be there for Yvette, who was still unaware that Chad was gone. As she pulled up to the house, Bryan walked down to meet her gently sharing the sad news. She

immediately fell into his arms sobbing and handed me her cell phone too consumed with shock and sadness to tell her mom what had happened.

The police explained that earlier that morning, Chad had called 911 saying that they would find something in the garage. Up until his last moments, he tried to protect his family. As the police came upon the scene and walked into the garage, they found his lifeless body. Bryan and Yvette walked out to the garage together and held his hand. I could not do this. With splotchy faces and wet eyes, they returned to the living room. Bryan took a few deep breaths while Yvette found comfort petting her dog, Missy, while looking out the window. Shortly thereafter, my mother-in-law arrived and Bryan led her to see Chad so she could hold her son's hand.

My journal reflects my agony over his loss:

It is Sunday, March 11, 2012 and Wed. the 7th Chad committed suicide-his depression (in his words) "was a strong opponent and today it has me." Our family is devastated, as are hundreds of others. Although I've cried and ached, I still feel as though I'm in shock (and despair). Life is certainly brought into perspective...interesting that a few days before I made the decision that this is my last year teaching at the high school level so I could simplify my life by focusing on my family and doctorate-well, now I am focusing more on my family, myself, and my relationships. I need your help Lord.

Whenever I looked into Chad's eyes, I saw something just below the surface—sadness, maybe even anguish. I know it is common for survivors to blame themselves for not intervening, but I lived with someone who struggled with mental illness and should have felt the undercurrent of hopelessness in his eyes. He tried to beat this "strong opponent" with medication, therapy, and prayer as he was deeply committed to feeling better. Many times I asked him how he was

feeling and if he felt the medication and therapy sessions were helping but my love and support weren't enough to penetrate his depression and anxiety.

We laid Chad to rest in a beautiful ceremony where family and friends spoke of their love for him and shared memorable stories. He was my brother through law but in my heart, he was my brother. I always wanted to be closer to him, as did Bryan. We often talked about how we could connect more with him, both physically and emotionally. As we sat there on that day in that space, our hearts throbbing as we said goodbye to Chad, we realized that if he could have, he would have stayed here with us but his illness, this “strong opponent,” held on too tightly.

I imagine that throughout his years of struggle, Chad felt different and marginalized. As with my father, Chad watched as illness pervaded his body and mind, unable to find a way out from underneath the deep and heavy sorrow that mental illness carries. Although I lost Chad on that day, I fear that he lost himself many years before. These losses—my dad, aunts and uncles, and now Chad are engraved inside of me, a part of my being. Grief is there and I try not to dwell in that painful place but each loss re-opens this part of me, of my being, and I remember as the griefs intermingle. Each funeral brings back the memories, the loss, the injustice, and the anger. Yet, each grief gently reminds me that I have loved deeply, so deeply that with each loss I scream to God, “why” because I want them back, here with me.

Sometimes when I am alone and the grief from these losses invades my thoughts, I find it difficult to breathe. It is at these times that I read my Al-Anon literature or call a program person. It is also at these times that I fall to my knees and ask God for a reprieve and to direct me on how I can use my grief to help others.

Three months after Chad's death, I led a student tour to Italy. This trip was different than those that came before—my heart unable to hold the joy that is typically present. As I sat in a

pew in the Church of St. Agnus in Agony, I thought about my dad and Chad. On June 19, I wrote, “I prayed [...] for my dad and Chad (and all who suffer with mental illness) as well as for peace and healing for the survivors.” I cried as I dedicated a candle to each of them in that holy place. I continued praying and writing for the remainder of the summer. On August 8th I wrote, “Today was a difficult one-missing Chad-thinking back to our weddings and my heart aches. God, please ease my grief...help me channel it to help others.” Later that same month, I promised myself that I would stretch toward life—the life that I found in the love of my sons, George and Henry.

Motherhood. In March of 2007, Bryan and I welcomed George into our lives. He was a beautiful baby who immediately captured our hearts. He reminded me so much of pictures I had seen of my dad as a baby—dark brown hair, beautiful brown eyes, and olive skin. It is at special times like George’s birth and Henry’s less than two years later when I miss my dad the most.

My love for George was equally matched by my fear that something bad would happen to him. My depression took hold immediately and while still in the hospital, my doctor told Bryan to watch me closely, especially because of my dad’s illness. My heart was so full of love but my mind was ill. This depression was more intense than anything else I had ever experienced and it scared me. I couldn’t sleep and felt as though I would swallow my tongue. I know many mothers who have glorious birth stories and I didn’t—difference and marginalization set in once again.

After George was born, I took maternity leave from the charter school in Minneapolis where I was teaching. When it was time to return that August, I decided that I should stay home with him. Maybe I felt pressured by society or myself to stay at home. My depression had ebbed and flowed since his birth but around the beginning of October, it intensified. Why wasn’t

I happy staying home? I felt as though I was a failure as a mom—that I was different than those mothers whose smiling pictures graced the baby-and-me section of our community education magazine. Some of my feelings stemmed from the notion that a baby should be enough for a mother and that any desire to continue following other passions is selfish. I turned my back on the baby-and-me classes and turned my nose up at the mothers who, although they were smiling in the pictures, couldn't possibly be happy *just* staying home.

My arrogance and self-righteousness were back but I had Al-Anon to help me navigate this new terrain of motherhood and my worn-out habits. I so desperately wanted my role as mother to fill the void that in the past was filled through teaching. For so many years, teaching helped heal my brokenness while defining who I was. When I was no longer a teacher, I felt fragmented and unrecognizable to myself. When I thought about how other women appeared so happy with “just staying home,” I felt different once again. Years later, though, I would come to understand that many of those women felt the same way I did, craving fulfillment beyond their roles as mothers, and that this craving was not selfish at all.

Tension grew between Bryan and me as I voiced my feelings of wanting to return to the classroom. He would have preferred I stayed home as we both were uncertain of daycare facilities and not excited at their high costs. Yet, my longing to return to the classroom wouldn't subside and I contacted the director of my former school. After speaking with him about the possibility of returning to work and after some salary negotiation, I was offered my former position. At this point, we choose a daycare facility for George with which we were both comfortable.

The first day I dropped off George at daycare, I cried all the way to school wondering, doubting, and second-guessing my decision. Many times I was plagued with the internal

question of “Shouldn’t I be raising my own child?” I internalized my doubt and moved forward with my teaching position. The joy on the faces of my students when I returned filled that space that had remained dormant for seven months. In February of 2008, we took George out of daycare and hired Yvette to watch him full time. He had numerous ear infections while in daycare and we had contemplated taking him out for at least a month so when Yvette lost her job it seemed like the stars had aligned. Knowing that my future sister-in-law would be caring for George calmed my doubts of going back to the classroom and I felt full in the way that only teaching can provide. Oxygen pulsed through my body and once again I recognized myself.

Although I loved teaching there, in December of that year we found out that we were expecting our second child. Driving 40 minutes one-way while pregnant wasn’t appealing so I applied to and accepted a job closer to home. I was sad to leave my students and colleagues in Minneapolis but felt the decision to be closer to home was more important as my desire to connect with George, and eventually Henry became stronger and stronger as the days, weeks, and months passed.

On August 25th, 2008 we welcomed Henry into our lives. A beautiful little boy with brown hair and eyes, he stretched the walls of my heart even further. I was given three months of maternity leave before my teaching position at the suburban high school officially began, giving me time to focus on the two little boys in my life. Although I didn’t succumb to depression this time, I felt much more overwhelmed with all of the work that caring for two so close in age entails. Once my maternity leave was over in November, I left my boys in the very capable hands of Yvette to return to the classroom.

When George turned 3, I began researching elementary schools. After meticulously looking at all of the options, my heart was set on the Friends School of Minnesota, a Quaker-

based school holding values similar to me and Bryan. The tuition was expensive and with my job insecurity and our student debt, we could not swing it. Instead, we sent George and eventually Henry to a public school that offered a Spanish-immersion program. George loves his school and has had tremendous teachers the three years he has attended. Henry is in kindergarten and is having a wonderful time as well. Yet, my feelings that I am not providing what I think to be the best education for the boys is something with which I continue to struggle, as it links my own past feelings of difference and marginalization due to financial insecurity to the present situation.

I still carry resentment towards this world, this country that does not financially value the noble professions that Bryan and I chose, and the resulting loss of my dream to provide the boys with a progressive education. I worked so hard in my life, beginning with my first job at age 14, and I am still unable to take care of my children in the way that I feel is best. Although Al-Anon and my faith in God help ease my guilt, I can still spiral down into a place of injustice as I think, “other people can afford it. Why can’t I?” I realize that some may view this as a first-world problem and I suppose they would be correct. I often have to give up to God what I think is best for the boys and know that I am doing what I can for them and that they are just fine. The boys love school and are on their way to becoming bilingual, opening many unforeseen opportunities for them as they grow older. They have great friends and are part of a school community that fosters respect and empathy. That in itself is a gift.

Although I worry about George and Henry every day, never wanting them to experience feeling different, marginalized, or stigmatized, the privilege of loving my boys has helped me stretch toward life. At their tender ages, they have already felt deep loss with the death of Chad and it will forever pain me as I think back to the night Bryan and I told them about his death.

We told them that Chad joined my own dad in Heaven and would be their guardian angel forever. I can't protect them from everything just as my parents couldn't protect me. But I can shower them with love every day for the rest of my life and through my love help them learn how to live and learn resilience. I have seen this resilience in them as they, too, stretch toward life holding on tightly to the memories of their uncle Chaddy. I continue to see this resilience as they come to terms with another, more recent loss.

Good boy. Bryan and I adopted Fred in the summer of 2003, the year we got married. At the time, the veterinarian thought he was 3 or 4 years old. We loved him deeply and have a million memories of him running around the park, laying on couches, and showing his love with licks and cuddles. In 2013 his health began to deteriorate. He no longer jumped on couches, he stopped running after rabbits, and had trouble going up and down stairs. He had many visits to the vet and was taking a lot of medication for pain.

In the summer of 2014, walking even became difficult. On Monday, July 21st, he couldn't walk at all. The vet offered to increase his medication, or take x-rays to see if surgery was an option. He also thought that Fred had a neurological disorder. We loved our good boy but knew that his age had caught up with him and realized that it was because we loved him that we had to say goodbye. We shared the fact that Fred's health was getting worse with the boys, a reality they witnessed each day. We told them that God would be taking Fred up to Heaven to join uncle Chaddy in the next few weeks and encouraged them to pet and kiss him as much as they could.

As was true with others I had lost, Fred would have stayed with us forever if it was his choice but his mind and body would not comply. His final day, July 25th, was heavy. The boys were at camp and Bryan went to work in the morning planning to return home to be with Fred

around 11. We laid down with Fred outside on the grass, the wind gently blowing against us. He loved the outdoors and his backyard, a place that provided him with peace for many years. I took a picture of Bryan lying next to Fred and we both hugged and kissed him many times. Around noon, the vet came. Sobbing, we held our good boy as he took his last breath. I sent the picture I had taken of Bryan and Fred to our family and friends, who grieved with us. I included the following sentiment with the picture: “Bryan lying next to Fred about 20 minutes before vet arrived. We were with Fred the whole time...he is now pain free running over Rainbow Bridge...our hearts will never be the same.” I hope that Fred felt our love throughout his life with us and especially on that final day.

On July 27th I wrote:

My stomach is sick...Fred went to Heaven on Friday, July 25th a little after noon. The sadness is so deep and has almost immobilized me a few times. I want to cuddle him, hear him tap-dancing on the floor, smell him and so many other things that I miss so deeply. I love him so much. I felt his spirit leave-Bryan and I held him close telling him how much we loved him-the imprint of us is still in the grass...looks like an angel.

Losing Fred that day violently ripped open every other loss I have ever experienced—the marginalization by half of my family for so many years, the deaths of my father, Jasper, Alex, Peggy, MaryEllen, Gene, Chad, and Marian. Why was life so difficult, so painful? Why did love come at such a high price? For the days following Fred’s death, I found myself lying on his bed sobbing so violently that my legs jerked. On August 9th, I wrote:

I want to feel happiness again. I am crumbling inside-shrouded in sadness-missing Fred as my heart aches for him; missing Chad as I want him back; Vetty’s [Yvette] moving in November-brings so much back both positive and negative memories of love, laughter,

and boys, and death, loss, and disappointment. I want to look in the backyard and see Fred sniffing the grass-cuddling with him-I want to scream-inside I'm screaming, sobbing, so angry about so much. Happiness eludes me. I search for it-under cushions, in cracks, in memories, in my boys-here I find it-relationally. I do not possess it-only in relationships does it exist.

I am unsure why I felt that grief is possessed, lingering deep inside of me, while happiness is found only in relationships. My thinking has changed since this time. Others held me up in my grief throughout the years, grieving with me—in relationship we grieved together. I think grief, like happiness, resides both inside of us and in connection with others. It is here in these relationships, in these connections that happiness, grief, healing, and wholeness can occur.

On August 9th, I also wrote the following poem:

Time is so cruel-never slowing down to let the pain soak in-to let the sadness rest-
mocking the loss.
forcing me forward-leaving you elsewhere.
My brokenness, my tears,
my aching heart are not
enough to convince time to
stop-it beckons me on-
"Things get better with me" it says.
I look away
"No, [back] there is where I belong. [Back][t]here is where I can hold him, kiss him. It's
comfortable there. Don't make me leave" I cry in response. "I can't get enough air" and
fall to my knees.
"Breathe" time says. "It gets easier. I promise."

Sometimes I don't want to move on. Sometimes I don't want to breathe. I may have superficially moved on from past losses but I am unsure if I truly let them go. Yet, I think it is a myth that people ever really let go of their griefs—the pain that grief offers becomes a part of us—attached to our organs, our memories, our soul. I feel that we befriend our griefs, find a place for them that we can visit from time to time, a place where we can wrestle the blessings

from the relationships that we mourn. It has been seven months since Fred died, and I have to admit that time has kept its promise. I still cry and ache at losing him but when I visit the place where my grief resides, I notice it is smaller than it once was, perhaps a result from wrestling away the blessings. Yet, I also feel that my grief has lessened because others have carried it too—our parents, our friends, and our boys. These relationships provide healing, and it is in these relationships, in these safe spaces, that wholeness is fostered and it is here that I attempt to stretch toward life...again.

Summary

In this chapter, I shared how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss impacted my life and also contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. Teaching offered deep relationships with students, most of whom had bought into hegemonic norms that delineated what was good and what was bad. My student's lives, their hardships, their resilience further shaped my identity as a social justice educator. My relationship with them propelled me to challenge, disrupt and deconstruct norms that hurt, stigmatized and marginalized both myself and my students.

My identity as a social justice educator was evident in my efforts at creating and teaching authentic, engaging, cultural and gender-sensitive curriculum, which were deeply rooted in my passion for human rights, equity, and justice. I knew I was positively impacting these kids, many of whom were marginalized, oppressed, and full of shame. Throughout my 15 years of teaching, I never stopped searching for ways to make the world better. As stated earlier, this quest for human rights, equity, and justice arose from my own struggles with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss. I continually shared my story, my resiliency and my hope with students and colleagues. Certainly, my background radicalized me towards social justice

activism and I was known by students as the “human rights teacher,” and “the one who makes us think,” which I still embrace proudly. I humbly hold letters, emails, and cards from former students that express gratitude at transforming their lives.

My relationships with administrators also contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. For me, teaching is personal. When my administrators perpetuated hegemonic norms, they did not honor my personal life, thus marginalizing me in the process. During these experiences, I felt as though I was a cog in the wheel, a warm body to fill a classroom—my authentic self invisible. Yet, these same experiences continued to strengthen my identity as a social justice educator for when I see, hear, or experience marginalization, exclusion, and inequity, I am compelled to respond. In this responding lies resilience.

I also learned and lived resilience in my travels and it was important for me to share the gifts that travel bestowed upon me, particularly with my students who could not travel at that time in their lives. Perhaps through my sharing I sparked their own resilience, offering them a taste of the calm and still moments, disruptions to their own experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss.

Travel offered me an opportunity to widen my mind and heart to the cultures and histories of the people of these places. This trip also connected me with my students and fostered deep friendships. Furthermore, as I spent time in other places mingling with the history of a particular country, I felt a strange connection to its people. I have always felt things so deeply, oftentimes becoming debilitated by the strength of my emotions. These emotions are always with me but gain strength when I travel. Perhaps my belief in the interconnectedness of life grips me with more ferocity when I am elsewhere.

My travels served as encounters with difference and led to the realization that hegemonic norms exist everywhere forcing me to question what normal is, and helping me help my own students question these same norms as well. Moreover, the realization of commonality of experiences that I gained while traveling, helped me open my heart, becoming a bit more vulnerable in the places that in the past I fiercely guarded. I have come to realize that living vulnerably leads to connection, which heals little by little the bits and pieces of our minds, our souls, and our hearts that internalized difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss along the way.

I also learned and lived resilience in my connections with family, and these connections also contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. For many years I equated “home” with pain, financial insecurity, and brokenness lamenting the family, the life that I had when I was young. While experiencing marginalization from many members of my extended family while young, feeling stigmatized by them because of my dad’s illness and losing those whom I loved throughout the years I learned resilience. I began to question my family’s marginalization and stigma. This questioning is resilience. I grieved the loss of those whom I loved and in this grief I found resilience. The resilience I learned and lived in these situations joined with those found in teaching and in travel. My questioning, my ability to help others question hurtful hegemonic norms is resilience and in this resilience, my identity solidified—I am a social justice educator.

I brought this identity into my doctoral program and into my relationships with others in those spaces. What I have learned while in the doctoral program has had a profound impact on how I see the world and how I view myself. I found connection between my own experiences and concepts studied, including the notion of creating space, “giving” voice, as well as the

intricate nature of power, domination, oppression, and freedom (Anyon, 2011; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Fesmire, 2003; Foner, 1988; Foucault, 1980; Freire, 2000; Greene, 1988; Isbister, 2006; Noonan, 2007; Shiva, 2005; Takaki, 1993; Wallerstein, 2004).

I began to more deeply understand how ethics, rituals, myths, habits, and hegemony informed my understanding and beliefs of the world and others (Enomoto & Kramer, 2007; Fasching & Dechant, 2001; Fesmire, 2003; Lincoln, 1989; Noddings, 2007). My experiences with marginalization and sexism were affirmed in literature I studied and conversations I had with others. My understanding of racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination and injustice deepened. I studied these realities intensely and in communion with my cohort members, whose insights helped me understand the different ways these concepts can be seen, felt, and understood. I felt included and empowered.

In one of my first classes, I studied Maxine Greene. She states, “My focal interest is human freedom, in the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise” (1988, p. 3). When I read this for the first time, I thought it was written just for me, that perhaps she knew of my childhood and how my only way to escape was to “look at things as if they could be different.” This ability to “look at things as if they could be different” is resilience.

On my journey back in time, I remember hoping that my family would someday have enough food, that I would have nice clothes, have a dependable car, or go on trips. I was also hopeful that freedom from the effects of mental illness and poverty would find me someday. Through the help of Al-Anon, my childhood faith, family and friends, I was eventually able to grasp freedom and act from different habits, ones that transcended survival. Fesmire (2003) states that “As a necessary condition of growth, habits must be flexible, nuanced, and open to

intelligent reconstruction” (p. 17). I believe through teaching, Al-Anon, relationships, and my doctoral program I was able to grow; my identity as a social justice educator strengthened. My father’s illness and death, the poverty and marginalization, the shame and fragmentation, the resiliency and hope all contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. For my life, for my experiences, I am truly grateful.

Chapter Five

We-Search, Part One

Learning and Living Resilience and its Connection to Social Justice: Lessons and Insight

Throughout my life, feelings of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss are palpable. These feelings invade my organs and thoughts. These feelings are painful yet comfortable -- enemy and friend. However, on this journey of life, I realized that most people are not that much different than me. As I look in the mirror, beyond my own image, I see a multitude of others with their own stories—ones of joy, difference, loss, and gratitude. Moreover, while writing this SPN, I came to understand that life experiences cannot be defined as only bad or good, enemy or friend; rather, it is within each experience that lies an eclectic array of emotions.

This chapter offers lessons and insights regarding how I learned and lived resilience that I believe has a wider meaning and relevance for how people create social justice identities: first, to deeply reflect upon our lives and experiences; second, to understand that we have choices about how we look at our lives remaining open to other lenses; third, to critique hegemony in the places and spaces in which it resides; fourth, to forge strong and authentic relationships with others grounded in vulnerability; fifth, to know that the purpose of life reaches beyond oneself.

Deep Reflection

For as long as I can remember, I was a person who thought deeply about life and my experiences, particularly about my family and friendships. As a child growing up financially insecure and dealing with the effects of my father's mental illness, my thoughts rarely resides in places of frivolity leading to a serious disposition. This seriousness grew through my parochial schooling and its emphasis on conformity, what is normal and acceptable, and what is not. I felt things very strongly and would be immobilized at times when I believed that I had let someone down. Mistakes I made would grow to gigantic proportions and I rarely felt that forgiveness was

in my reach. Oftentimes, I reflected upon things to the point of obsession. Yet, through time and with different experiences, as well as with the help of members in Al-Anon, I realized that although reflection can be healthy, it also held me down at times.

I used to see life in extremeness, in the binary of good or bad. As a result, my reflections echoed this inflexible thinking. Now, though, I deeply reflect upon my life in a gentler way, realizing that it is okay to look back at the past but there is no need to stare. Learning from my mistakes, reflecting upon my life in a kinder way, helps me to see others in a gentler and kinder way as well. Out of healthy reflection grows compassion and empathy for ourselves and for others. Out of healthy reflection we realize that we have choices about how we see our lives.

We have Choices

I used to look at my life *only* through the lens of risk-resilience. Questions such as “Why and how I made it” illustrate this view. As a child of a schizophrenic father, living in poverty, and engaging in many documented risks associated with “at-risk” children, I wondered how I able to get out from under such a bleak trajectory.

I often turned to protective factors found in risk-resilience research as a way to understand the reasons I “made it” out of a bleak trajectory. These factors include a strong mother, being part of a community, a close group of friends, and academic and social competence (Werner, 2005). My own life mirrored these protective factors, including a strong and supportive mother, being part of a community while attending my K-8 parochial school, a close group of friends in elementary and high school, and academic and social competence. My mother financially supported our entire family through my father’s unpredictable employment status. She went to great lengths to encourage the necessity of college. Moreover, she was emotionally-available and generous with her love. Mt. Calvary offered an environment of

community and was instrumental in my faith-formation. Although my family struggled financially, it wasn't important to be wealthy with material things, only in God. The close friends I had were supportive and inclusive. During my parochial experience and into high school, I did well in school and played basketball.

I do not wish to minimize these “protective factors” evident in my life for they were incredibly important in shaping who I am today as well as my identity as a social justice educator. Moreover, I cannot overlook how my membership in Al-Anon also served as protective factor as it is grounded in faith, healing, and spiritual connection (Garmezzy, 1985). Yet, *only* looking at my life through the lens of risk-resilience undergirds the overcoming narrative as articulated in disability studies (Davis, 2006; Garland-Thomson, 2006; Linton, 2006). Overcoming is grounded in deficit thinking and places the onus of overcoming on the child herself. , This way of thinking does not take into account the role of hegemonic norms that lead to situation that need to be overcome. For if we choose to look at our lives through different lenses, we will not only have a more complete picture of ourselves but will also see the beauty hidden therein. Finally, when we look at our lives more complexly, we can more clearly see and challenge hegemony in the places and spaces in which it resides.

Critique Hegemony

As we practice deep reflection upon our own experiences and realize that we can view our lives more complexly through other lenses, we build compassion and empathy for ourselves and others. We then see how hegemonic norms invade our lives and experiences. As we become aware of the power of hegemony, we can critique its role in our families, our schools, our communities, and our world.

The very act of questioning takes issue with and challenges the “way things are” that continue to linger with force in our world today. This critique of the places and spaces where hegemony resides including our economic, political, and social institutions that continue to reproduce inequalities, is social justice in action because through the questioning and critique, we no longer accept what is laid before us as normal and the “way things should be.” Instead, we understand that what we see before us is the “way things have been created” by others, specifically those with power.

Vulnerability in Relationships

Resilience is found in authentic and vulnerable relationships with others. Resilience is found in the interplay of feeling different, stigmatized, marginalized, and in the despair of loss. We learn resilience in our reciprocal acknowledgment and care of each other’s fissures that won’t quite heal as a fleeting memory brushes against us awakening the bits and pieces of ourselves that want to move on from pain but continue to hold on. Resilience is found in our realization that if we look at our lives through different lenses, there is great wisdom to be found, wisdom that that may never have surfaced had our lives been different. For resilience is holding on to what is beautiful while gently caressing that which hurts. Resilience comes in the form of whispers that remind us to love the moments and the people who make those moments beautiful. Resilience is the realization that feeling different, marginalized, and stigmatized is part of life, yet it is *how we look at these experiences*, the gifts we wrestle from them, and what we do with those that matter.

As we learn and live resilience, we nurture our capacity for compassion and empathy for ourselves and others. As our compassion and empathy grows in vulnerability with others, we begin to understand that the reasons we need to overcome our lives is because of systems of

oppression. As we realize that oppression has firmly placed itself in our lives and in the lives of others, we critique these systems and the hegemony that supports them.

When we demonstrate compassion and empathy, when we look at our experiences, when we critique systems of oppression, and when we forge authentic and vulnerable relationships with others, we are learning and living resilience and in this learning and living, we foster identities that seek social justice. And, in these vulnerable relationships, we realize that the purpose of life reached beyond oneself.

To Know that the Purpose of Life Reaches Beyond Oneself

The understanding that the purpose of life reaches beyond oneself connects back to deeply reflecting upon our own lives. As we get to know ourselves in a more genuine way, we begin to understand that we have choices in how we not only live our lives, but how we frame our past. This realization that we can reframe our life story helps develop compassion and empathy for not only ourselves but also for others. As we reframe our story, we see that what we see before us as normal and the *way things are*, can be reframed as well. In this reframing, we critique hegemony as we see its' impact not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of others. With others with whom we've developed authentic and vulnerable relationships, we challenge hegemony and realize that the purpose of life reaches beyond ourselves.

Summary

This chapter offered lessons and insights regarding how I learned and lived resilience that I believe have a wider meaning and relevance for how social justice identities are formed. Resilience is learned and lived while in deep reflection about life and our experiences; in our realization that we have choices in how we look at our lives; in our ability to question and

critique hegemonic norms; through the nurturing of authentic and vulnerable relationships; through the realization that the purpose of life reaches beyond oneself. As we commit to make the world more equitable, more beautiful, and more welcoming for all, we engage in social justice.

Chapter Six: We-Search, Part Two

The Meaning of My Study for Social Justice Educators

In this chapter, I share advice and insight, derived from my own narrative, with other social justice educators. First, it is critical that teachers committed to social justice ground curriculum in the lives of their students using pedagogies oriented toward social justice. These pedagogies offer students ways to find connection and relevance with topics studied. While using pedagogies oriented toward social justice, teachers honor the lived experiences of their students and also help students both critique what is laid before them as truth and reject deficit thinking. Second, obstacles exist for teachers committed to social justice; yet, there are ways that educators can learn and live resilience in the midst of such obstacles.

Pedagogies Oriented toward Social Justice

It is difficult to pinpoint when I first became aware of the concept of social justice. When I look to my memories, it seems as though I have always held awareness when something wasn't fair or right. Throughout the SPN, I share experiences where I have felt different from others and at some point my own internal "justice barometer" melded with personal experiences and things I learned in school. My art of questioning illustrates this awareness of injustice.

This awareness intensified as I had more experiences of feeling different, as well as more time spent in schools. As a high school student in the 1980s, my social studies classes consisted of United States and World history, Economics, and Global Issues. My teachers were White males who approached the classes from a "presidents and wars perspective." Students were expected to memorize dates, legislative acts, and military conquests. I did not see myself reflected in the content studies within these classes which led to an internalized devaluing of self. There were no women presidents or soldiers. That which was valued by the teachers had no obvious connection to my life and certainly didn't validate my interests or concerns.

My experiences feeling marginalized in my own high school classes as well as society at large engendered a visceral understanding of how important it is for people to see themselves in a collective story and proved foundational in how and what I taught as a teacher. I covered required topics and units but did so in ways that validated my students' lives and their histories. Many students shared that my passion for history, teaching, and their lives impacted them greatly as it offered them a connection with topics studies and their world, giving life to Dewey's "unified curriculum".

Yet, as my years in the classroom accrued, I noticed an increase in state and federal mandates directly impacting schools and classrooms in the capacity of what to teach (i.e., standards) and how to measure teaching (i.e., common assessments). I experienced these directives, which choked my creativity and passion for both history and teaching, mainly because the focus on testing outweighed the importance of relationships. Moreover, I saw an increase in disengaged students, which troubled me greatly. This changing landscape in education served as one reason to pursue a doctoral degree in education with a focus on critical pedagogy. My desire to bring back passion, creativity, and connection to the classroom rests on a call for teaching grounded in social justice, which includes utilizing pedagogies oriented toward social justice.

It is critical for educators committed to social justice to ground curriculum in the lives of their students using pedagogies oriented toward social justice. These pedagogies offer connection and relevance to students, particularly those who identify as having marginalized and stigmatized identities. Using such pedagogies honors the lived experiences of students and helps them question socially constructed binaries such as normal-marginalized and good-bad. This questioning offers students a way to disrupt the impact that binary and deficit thinking can have on their own lives.

As educators committed to social justice, we must help our students see the complexity and multiple facets to their lives by rejecting the deficit thinking and simple interpretations of events. Moreover, it is critical to help children reject shame and embarrassment as responses to difficult situations and instead, help them develop a critique of the systems, perspectives, and actions that marginalize. Therefore, there exists a moral and pragmatic imperative for teachers committed to social justice to use pedagogies oriented toward social justice (i.e., critical pedagogy, multicultural education, culturally responsive/relevant education, democratic education, and social justice education) in their classrooms.

Teachers committed to pedagogies oriented toward social justice work with their students in the struggle against racism, classism, sexism, hegemony, reproduction, power, and privilege in order to deepen their consciousness (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). These pedagogies offer empowerment, inclusion of the “other,” and inward and societal transformation (Mathison, 2009).

Further, teachers committed to pedagogies oriented toward social justice help their students disrupt the socially-constructed grand narrative placed before them of what is normal and marginalized through questioning the status quo of oppression and discrimination. Additionally, as we teach our students about hegemony and systemic oppression versus personal condemnation we offer them freedom from self-demonization. In turn, this healing awareness helps students see history and their own lives in a more accurate, complex, and life-affirming way as opposed to something that needs to be overcome. As teachers resist the temptation to make unitary designations for situations where there is more complexity while helping their students do the same, we no longer cultivate the notion of resilience or else, realizing that within the complexity of experience lies wisdom, strength, compassion, and empowerment.

Living and Learning Resilience in the Face of Multiple Obstacles

Obstacles exist as we carry out this critical work of social justice. Some obstacles that I have personally faced include oppressive school systems, structures, policies and culture; lack of administrative, collegial, student, and community support; mandated curriculum/high stakes testing; a lack of resources (i.e., curriculum oriented toward social justice); a lack of planning/collaboration time; and job security. In the face of these obstacles, however, I learned and lived resilience through my relationships with students and also through collaboration with colleagues fueled by the same passion.

I learned and lived resilience in these schools by creating spaces in my own classrooms where I, along with my students, critiqued and questioned not only the mandated curriculum but also the oppressive structures, policies and culture found within the schools. I grounded mandated curriculum in the lives of my students, helping them make connections between their own lives and topics studied. I encouraged my students to make their voices heard when they saw something they felt was unfair, unjust, and oppressive, working with them in this struggle for equity.

I served on school committees that used counter-narratives to disrupt the hegemonic predominantly patriarchal culture that perpetuated sexism, racism, homophobia, and other oppressions. These committees provided a space of resistance where I was able to forge connections with others who were fueled by the same passion for social justice.

With lack of planning time, my colleagues and I met before school, during lunch, and after school to collaborate on creating authentic lessons and curriculum that were grounded in the lives of our students. We shared resources, ideas, and experiences that helped us create safe physical, emotional, and intellectual spaces for ourselves and our students. We also used this

time to plan events to heighten awareness and understanding of other ways of being and knowing, including school dialogues and Day of Silence.

Questioning oppressive systems, structures, policies and culture within schools, which in some cases may include questioning school leaders, can be risky, particularly for those who lack job security (i.e., seniority and tenure). Yet, surrounding oneself with others who are fueled by a passion for equity and justice, is critical in maintaining the energy and commitment toward justice. Relationships with colleagues who do have seniority and tenure can also help in the carrying out of justice within classrooms and schools as they have more leverage with which to use as they advocate for change.

Summary

In this chapter, I shared the meaning of my narrative for other social justice educators. My experiences of grounding curriculum in the lives of students using pedagogies oriented toward social justice helped students find connection and relevance with topics studied. While using pedagogies oriented toward social justice, I honored the lived experiences of my students and also helped them critique what is laid before them as truth and reject deficit thinking. I also shared the obstacles I faced in carrying out social justice education, as well as the ways I carried on in the face of such obstacles. I hope that my story helps other educators whose identities are grounded in social justice.

Chapter Seven

Summary and Implications

In this final chapter, I offer a summary of the intentions I held going into the process of SPN writing and the discoveries I made during the process. I also bring attention to the implications that arose from the writing as well as areas for future research.

Rootedness: Finding Myself and Connecting with Others through SPN Writing

While writing my SPN, I found healing in some of the broken places and spaces of my heart and soul. Because this methodology adheres to the belief that all stories matter and that healing can occur through the sharing of our stories, it appeared to be the best choice for my dissertation.

Central to SPN writing are the four components: pre-search, me-search, re-search, and we-search (Nash & Bradley, 2011). These different forms of searching offered me a chance to delve deeply into myself and pertinent research while at the same time forging connections with others. Pre-search, as articulated by Nash and Bradley (2011), invites the reader to “discover the formative/driving/motivating idea or conviction that you hold with such energy and passion that you are willing to take the time, and make the effort, to research and write about it in a sustained way” (p. 36). For me, the motivating idea was to understand what contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. Moreover, I wanted to respond to my husband’s assertions of how I could have such a keen sense of social justice but also be so self-righteous and unforgiving of other. As I thought about my own story, experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss rose up in my memory. What also came to the forefront was resilience. These themes drove my writing, serving as the narrative arc.

The second component is me-search. This form of search emphasizes the human quality in research helping the author reclaim her voice, one that is so often marginalized in academia. According to Nash and Bradley (2011), the me-search component comes “prior to research [as] [o]ur personal lives and experiences are central to our research and scholarship” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 58) and cannot be separated from them. I firmly grounded my writing in my story and while engaged in the me-search, I reclaimed my voice and became acutely aware of how I carried beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions into my own story.

Re-search encourages the author to connect her analysis to extant scholarship emphasizing that “data collection, literature reviews, and the analysis and interpretation of data [...] always emanate from the central themes and self-narration of the writer” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 87). As I engaged in this type of search, I was able to connect my life, including my beliefs, prejudices, assumptions, as well as the themes of difference, stigma, marginalization, loss, and resilience with the lived experiences of others found in the scholarship.

The final component of SPN writing is we-search, and includes connecting the themes found within my story to the themes found within the stories of others. My intention was “to find a way to connect the personal and the professional, the analytical and the emotional, and, most important, to show the relevance of these connections to other selves” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 57). I hope the reader found connection in my story of how learning and living resilience amidst experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization and loss contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. I further hope that the lessons and advice I offer help others who are fueled by the same passion.

The heaviness in *my* heart has lessened through the act of writing my SPN and I am now able to better articulate an answer to my husband’s assertion. I do have a keen sense of justice

and yes, I also hold self-righteousness and judgment too. I have come to understand through the writing, though, that these habits served as protective factors for me as I grappled with financial insecurity and the effects of my father's mental illness and death. I also know that these habits gained strength through my experiences with difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss but that in the same spaces, I learned and lived resilience. In fact, self-righteousness was a habit of preservation, a way that I was able to go on and move forward. Furthermore, I now know that my inability to forgive was misplaced and instead of being unforgiving of others, I am unforgiving of hegemonic norms.

Connection: Bringing Social Justice Elsewhere

Although I found connection, healing, and wholeness while writing my SPN, I also realized that the experiences in my life, including those of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss molded my soul to seek social justice and contributed to my identity as a social justice educator. This molding of my soul thus impacted my commitment to education and teaching that are grounded in social justice. I continue to carry this commitment in my heart and will bring it with me as I step into a faculty position within a department of education.

Yet, striving for social justice is not only the domain of schools as experiences of difference, stigma, marginalization, and loss are found elsewhere. The lives of people in other types of institutions and organizations could benefit from a commitment to building authentic relationships grounded in social justice. Having a commitment to relationships instead of a focus on the dollar in work-spaces across the country and treating people with hospitality would have a profound impact on people in their own healing and wholeness. Earlier in the narrative, I invited school administrators to take to heart the words of Maxine Greene when she states, "My focal interest is human freedom, in the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could

be otherwise” (1988, p. 3). I extend this same invitation to leaders and others who work in institutions and organizations outside of academia.

Leaders and all people who are part of organizations have the potential to “invite diverse voices to dialogue” (Noonan, 2007, p. 4) as a way to create space and affirm the lived experiences of all involved. As is true in the school setting, movement by leaders in other organizations toward a place of commonality, that would centralize the experiences of women and people of color, who are often marginalized from top leadership roles, offers the potential of unification and genuine and long-lasting change to systems that continue to oppress and marginalize. This work also contributes to social justice identities in people outside of “education.”

Baldwin (2005) urges each of us to put “our individual voices into the never-ending story” because “[t]elling our stories is what saves us; the story is enough” (p. 222) and we are enough. As we search for healing in our world, our communities, our families, and in ourselves we are invited to offer up our stories. “Our stories may [...] seem fragile and inconsequential, and yet they fly beyond the perimeters of the speaker’s and writer’s lives and provide succor, challenge, and inspiration that cast an influence of nearly unlimited potential” (p. 225), which is my hope for those who read my SPN. If we can grasp hold of the sacred stories and find connection with others and the stories that impacted them so deeply, then maybe we can “heal the rift that tears our culture in half” (Baldwin, 2005, p. 214) helping people uncover their authentic selves by offering a different narrative, one that is grounded in dignity for all. As our experiences combine with one another, our collective wisdom will be carried on by the wind for future generations to hear and from which to glean insight.

Extension: Opportunities for Future Research

Finding connection with others and extending the benefits found through SPN writing to spaces outside of academia would serve us all well. Equally important, though, is the invitation to explore even deeper the ways in which we *see* ourselves and how we make meaning of our experiences. It would prove insightful to research activist adults and ask them to reflect back upon their own educational experiences in an attempt at understanding what kind of schooling impacted their thinking and beliefs. What contributed to the creation of their social justice identities? Did they, too, experience difference, stigma, marginalizing, and loss, or were there other realities that contributed to such a commitment to social justice? How did they learn and live resilience?

Looking at my life and writing my story through the lens of risk-resilience helped me in my own understanding of how I was able to “get out from under” a bleak trajectory. Particularly helpful were the protective factors that are present within risk-resilience scholarship. Yet, limiting myself to only viewing my life through risk-resilience has the potential to act as an empty signifier, thus limiting the wholeness of life itself.

At the beginning of my dissertation, I state, “I remain open to other theories that may deepen and extend my understanding of the themes found in my story.” Therefore, an area of future research, which I intend to pursue, is to frame my story, and stories like mine, differently, beyond the binary constructs of risk-resilience. Disability studies (Davis, 2006; Garland-Thomson, 2006; Linton, 2006), Crip Theory (McRuer, 2006) and the “emerging theory of *dis ease*” (Kramer, 2011-2015; Radd & Kramer, pending publication) have the potential to offer all of us a way to more completely *see* our lives. For if we start our narratives from a place of deficit, of lives that needs to be overcome, than we buy into the hegemonic norms set by society

of what constitutes normal and abnormal. Bérubé (In McRuer, 2006) states, “you find people scrambling desperately to cast somebody else as abnormal, crazy, abject, or disabled” (p. viii), and I, am implicit in this. Only, instead of scrambling to cast someone else as crazy or different, I placed myself in these categories. When I do this, when others do this, we not only marginalize ourselves but we also normalize others. Through this process, the complexity that resides in life itself is not honored.

By bringing disability studies, Crip theory, and the emerging theory of *dis ease* into our life stories, and at the same time challenging the binaries of risk-resilience and normative-marginalized, we challenge deficit thinking and the overcoming narrative. I hope not to “change the realities [of my life], but [...] change how those realities are understood, and therefore, what quality of story is passed along” (Baldwin, 2005, p. 155) to my own children and future generations as well. If I am intent on becoming a fuller human being than it is important to view my own life differently and more complexly. I extend this same invitation to others as well.

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