

Integrating Arts and Art Education as a Health Practice

by

Lindsay Jean Beal
B.A., University of Victoria, 2000

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ABSTRACT

The arts enable unification of self, family, and community. There is healing potential when creativity is exercised. We can map out approaches to creative endeavors to guide us through confusion and ensure we meet our goals. I have outlined and enmeshed three mapping techniques: the directions as referred by many First Nations cultures, 5Rhythms®, and universal shapes. The archetypal Fool models a way of teaching the arts and accessing creativity. The Fool serves to make us laugh at our base and faulted human condition and to connect us to the sacred. Representing the innocent at the start of a journey the Fool may just as well be the wise one at completion. An educator must know her own journey in order to recognize and support others.

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Chapter One

The Fool's Way: A Teaching Philosophy

The Fool is the one who can respond with ultimate flexibility, strength, stamina, and coordination. Though these are the markers of physical fitness, he does not *appear* the self-contained proficient athlete. The ability of the Fool is not as physical as it is creative. His way is one of folly, yet there is nothing derogatory about it. Looking very carefully, one will find wisdom in the teachings of the Fool. His commitment to interconnectivity enables him to be heard, to be seen, to be understood, and to teach. The Fool's tasks are to hear, to see, to understand, to learn *and* to respond accordant with laws of connection. This is *my* practice and *my* aspiration.

The State of Play, the Work of Play

I have heard it said that the opposite of *play* is not *work* but rather *seriousness*. Practice is required in order to learn and develop new skills. Practice that is burdened with the need for an accomplished outcome gains a seriousness that impedes creative development. One needs to invest in a practice when there is nothing at stake. This, of course is not all that is needed. Serious work has its place in growth and development, but this is all too well known. When an individual is given leave to practice without risk of failure or loss, playfulness flavors the activity and new possibilities emerge. Giving credence to the importance of play, Johan Huizinga's (1938) extensive research identifies play as a central element of human culture. Simply stated, without play, we would have no culture.

Play is a state of mind that is experienced temporarily. Practicing the activities and cultivating the ground from which playfulness emerges, one learns to work in the

field of play. The Fool (Clown, Jester, Trickster) "... meets compelling human needs ... [and]...represents a vision of the world that ...cultures have valued highly" (Towsen, 1976, p. 4) The value is made obvious by the prevalence of the Fool in most human cultures. In many First Nations cultures the ceremonial clown "keeps the people in touch with everyday reality while fulfilling the need for a connection with the sacred"(Towsen, 1976, p. 8). This is the work of play.

Ways of Knowing

F. Heylighen, in his article *Epistemology, introduction*, summarizes the development of epistemologies. Through the ages we have analyzed how we attain and distinguish between 'true' knowledge and 'false' knowledge. We have learned from Empiricists and Rationalists the role of our senses, observation, and rational reflection. Kantian philosophy highlighted the importance of organizing the information gained by these approaches with innate cognitive categories, such as time and space. Subjective experience began to earn validity and pragmatic epistemology developed, a highly cognitive approach using representations or 'models' as problem solving tools. How these models are built, whether from empirical data, intuition, or *constructed* by the subject is not clearly defined in the philosophy. It would appear that constructivism dangerously leans toward relativism where the identification of truth or fallacy is impossible. Two means to filter false knowledge are individual constructivism and social constructivism. An individual evaluates knowledge using previously attained knowledge. "Constructions that are inconsistent with the bulk of other knowledge that the individual has will tend to be rejected. Constructions that succeed in integrating previously incoherent pieces of knowledge will be maintained." (Heylighen, 1993) Social

constructivism uses consensus to validate knowledge. In conclusion, Heylighen promotes the implementation of many criteria, even opposing ones to generate “a simple and general conceptual framework ... an epistemology that synthesizes and extends all of the traditional and less traditional philosophies....” (Heylighen, 1993)

He mentions intuition as a complement to the “trial and error” required for building a model, but a mere mention negates the magnitude of its function. While pragmatic epistemology dominates cognitive science, little attention is paid to the vital role of intuition. From the Euro-Canadian world view, intuition is likened to gambling. The sensation of “knowing” is quickly obscured with doubt, and practice in using this faculty is discouraged. Turchin (1991) goes so far as to say that intuition refers to “... some act of our thought which cannot be decomposed into any constituting elements and, in particular, cannot be further explained or justified.” If we were to regard intuition as a justifiable source of knowledge perhaps it will not be so mysterious after all.

In studying the hippocampus, a region of the brain known to be critical for learning and explicit recall, Hannula and Ranganath (2009) recently discovered that the hippocampus also functions in response to learned relationships that are not consciously recalled. The eyes too will respond to this learned relationship. In their experiment, human subjects are tested on their memory of recently paired images, by having to choose among multiple possible answers. Subjects will, within 750 milliseconds, respond by moving their eyes to the options, and linger longer on the correct answer. This action, paired with active firing in the hippocampus (as viewed with an fMRI) will occur regardless of whether the spoken answer was correct or not. This finding provides a tidy explanation of how we often know things without knowing why or how we know. Our

brains are constantly constructing relationships and later when we are stimulated by our environment that resembles a relationship of the past, we sense knowing something about it. Rather than disregard or doubt, we can learn to recognize and respond to what it is we really know. This is done with a careful practice of reflection. Whether intuition can be explained as a very complicated mental function or whether it remains an unexplained phenomenon, there is no argument that most people have experienced it, and some even expect to use it. Many First Nations regard the self as a wellspring of knowledge, and the quest toward that well requires an inner journey. “Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown” (Ermine, 1999).¹

The Creative Process is a Wellness Practice

Recovery from trauma, whether caused by illness, injury, or violation involves a process of re-integration. When we have a life-threatening experience, our autonomic nervous system takes control of our whole being, giving us the best chance of survival. Sometimes it's difficult to return to a normal state. The body continues to be hyper-vigilant and continued stress perpetuates fragmentation of the self. If unimpeded, most bodies will follow a course of recovery involving a series of physiological changes. Often we interrupt this course because we feel the need to regain mental faculties quickly, and we misjudge the physiological process or fail to recognize it at all. The body has a story. The body has information. It has a process for healing. It expresses without words, and thus the expressions may not always be of the conscious mind. The body can act without conscious ruling. From this perspective, the healing process is akin to the creative process. Peter London declares that “the creative process is ... a somatic act ... that expresses what is known in those portions of the brain that operate nonverbally and that

rely upon image and gesture to convey their knowledge.” (London, 1989, p. 97) In recovery the mechanical and chemical events that occur at the molecular level are usually beneath our conscious awareness. Supporting recovery that occurs subconsciously requires intuition – that implicit knowing. Intuition can serve as the means of uniting the conscious with the subconscious. This union, as discussed by Freud, Jung, and others enables “a whole, awake, compassionate person to step forward from the one who was previously fractured [and] incomplete” (London, p. 97). Creating wholeness *is* a creative process, and so it may be that engaging any creative process contributes to healing and health maintenance.

Interconnectivity

When I look at my art, I find collage, layers, mixed media and muted colors. I notice high contrast comes with effort. I often soften the edges. Interconnectivity is evident. When I analyze my teaching style, motives, and direction, interconnectivity is paramount.

I have a variety of work environments. For the purpose of this paper, descriptions of my work predominantly refer to the Creative Arts Project, which I perform through the Victoria Brain Injury Society. I call this a project rather than a program for two reasons: first, because ‘program’ is too passive, unidirectional compared to the interactivity implied by ‘project’, and second because it refers to projecting oneself into the future or onto the page or into another's feelings. This is what we do when we step into the arts. The Creative Arts Project runs in three courses of eight to fourteen sessions: Visual Arts, Creative Writing, Movement and Dance. Each session is two hours, and recurs on a weekly basis. Participants have an acquired brain injury but are from a wide range of

backgrounds, interests, ethnic groups, socioeconomic conditions, ages, and so forth.

Generally four to ten individuals register. While we do not engage explicitly in therapy, the therapeutic benefits of creativity are acknowledged.

In forming a group, we discover commonalities. A mixing and blending of colors brings the whole palette closer in hue. So it is when we are all active in the same exercise. Each brings their own colored perception but blends it with the others in order to nurture a common goal: to learn, grow and be well. By emphasizing connections and building bonds, we soften the edges between participants. This is how community is built.

In the same way that I look for the common thread among people, I do among teachings and philosophies. The common thread may be difficult to find if it is obscured by variance. The challenge of locating it is sometimes necessary in order to generate compassion and maintain a relationship. It is also a way of getting familiar with a new way of thinking. Start first with the ideas that make sense, ones that are easy to assimilate. Accessible ideas lead to the more complicated, less familiar ones, at which point I may find the ideas agreeable, or not. Sometimes identifying commonalities is necessary, and sometimes it is a matter of habit, in which case I may find myself in a precarious position.

Perfunctorily webbing the teachings of many cultures creates some awkward acrobatics at times. Connections can be stretched so thinly that there is danger of breakage. Far reaches sometimes necessitate us to just move camp, abandon the old, adopt the new teachings and start webbing again. Of course I'll purposefully and carefully trail a single thread between the two teaching camps. If I can travel from one to the other, there must then be a connection. This is my way. My goal is not to dress every

theory, every place, person, or thing with a uniform veil of webs. Rather, I try to identify points of reference from one perspective to another. At one time I was discreet about this practice, having been ridiculed, called ‘idealistic’ and ‘airy-fairy’. Now I am confident of the benefits of interconnectivity.²

I have explored deeply, even if briefly the teachings of the First Nations, Pochenko Baby Clown³, Playback Theatre⁴, Drama Therapy, Alternatives to Violence Project⁵, 5 Rhythms®⁶, trance dance, symbolism and dream therapy. These teachings have many overlapping points. In my work I bring forth even the finest threads of my learning, though the dominant lessons come from the First Nations and symbolism.

Teachings of the First Nations

Gleaned over the years from family, friends, participation in workshops, and readings First Nations wisdom infuses my approach to teaching. Two distinctly prevalent concepts that greatly influence my curriculum planning and my approach to participants are the seven directions and animal medicine.

The Seven Directions

There are common associations with each direction, but there are also personal experiences that contribute to personal associations (Andrews, 2001). Each of the directions holds significance to the degree that one has been attentive to its qualities. Being approached from a particular direction (by a totem animal, a teacher, a student, etc.) implies the purpose of that approach. Being approached is an invitation to step into that direction for the same purpose. The following is my compilation of common and personal associations with the directions.

South: Child, innocence, trust, faith, purification, letting go, transformation.

West: Mother, empathy, goals, journeys, quests.

North: Father, teaching, knowledge, balance, building, rules, boundaries.

East: Elder, illumination, wisdom, imagination, spirituality.

Above: higher consciousness, awareness of the great star nation.

Below: being grounded, physicality, gravity, death and the underworld.

Within: centre, personal truths, the source of the lightness of being.

Animal medicine

Animal medicine comes through the study of the strengths and weaknesses of particular animals that a person feels connected to. The study can include everything about the animal: its habitat, behaviors, physical features, what it eats, and what preys upon it. It is also relevant to know the other animals that associate with it or benefit from it in any way. If an animal provides medicine, you will spot it in nature or it will appear, perhaps in a dream, story, vision, or memory. It is said that the animal will not only reveal your inclinations, but will be a guide on your path in life, and warn of forces that could take you off course. Animal Guides are present for a lifetime. Sometimes evident, sometimes hidden, they carry medicine for each of the seven directions a person explores throughout life (Sams & Carson, 1988).

For example, the animal that guides me in the East is the Armadillo. The armor is an obvious strength. When it comes to connecting with my spirituality and path to illumination (the path East), I am guided by one who knows boundaries and can teach how to define and strengthen my own; this is helpful for people like me, who are highly empathic. As a large part of my spiritual practice and life's work is connecting with community, I have called upon Armadillo medicine many times throughout my

adulthood. Armadillo supports a practice of openness to potentially connect with the omnipresent and omnipotent, while maintaining the boundaries of self so I do not get lost in the egos of others. In studying the Armadillo further, it is no surprise that I have a strong attraction to community and therapy because this animal primarily eats ants and earthworms. Ants are the masters of community, and earthworms of ‘digging in the dirt’; both live underground which is symbolic of ‘dwelling in the subconscious’ where healing occurs. My spiritual growth and development have always been linked with shifting between groups and isolation, building community and privately digesting the experiences.

Universal Shapes

Shapes are static depictions of rhythms and energy patterns. I have been using these symbols to represent the predominant rhythm that exists in a work of art, a group session, or a life lesson. Recognizing this rhythm or pattern enables a person to work *with* it rather than against it, thereby supporting transformation. Recently I came upon the writing of Angeles Arrien (1992), who has explored “the meaning and significance of myths, symbols, and human values from a cross-cultural perspective” (p. 11). She discovered that “five basic shapes appear in the art of all cultures...[and] people in different cultures do give similar meanings to these shapes” (p. 12).

Circle: wholeness, experience of unity, search for individuation, personal space.

Square: stability, foundation, manifest ideas, build the plan, integrity, congruity.

Spiral: growth, change, evolution, impulse, surrendering.

Cross: relationship, integration, synthesizing, union of opposites.

Triangle: sacred mountain, objectivity, vision, higher learning, self discovery.

The Fool as Teacher

John Lash (1990) describes the Fool as having the “highest degree of human potential” (p. 273). This comes from a spontaneous engagement with the moment, and an unflinching “openness to its fullest possibility due to knowing that everything in the universe ... responds directly and cooperatively to the way one perceives it” (p. 273).

The Fool is intimately familiar with all directions and approaches to life. This means he intuitively knows what is going on, and without inhibition, what to do about it. He goes to where the people are and laughs at the predicaments. Being in the predicament, he may laugh as heartily at himself. What enables the Fool to laugh is that he is not stuck there. From any situation, he knows his way back home -- to centre. When others see the absurdity revealed by the Fool, they are more apt to recognize their own foolishness. Rarely does a situation call for an exactly ‘mid-quadrant’ response. There are infinite degrees between due East and due North, and the Fool knows them all. Emotions expressed are not limited to laughter, and never involve ridicule.

The Fool is ageless, and so is able to access innocence and wonder a moment after registering with the experience of a sage. He never forgets the possibility of a first encounter, even with a most familiar subject. He can also muster the confidence of an elder in brand new situations.

Given the range of experiences available to the Fool, he must respond with a variety of intensities. In seconds he can move from yawning on a park bench, to jumping from the jaws of a cougar. He can respond with any intensity between these extremes.

In My World

The spider makes webs in all directions. The web responds to vibration informing me of what has entered my world. Fool instigates a response.

When Fool moves from the West, he is Professor Skunk, scratching at the ground, looking for treasures (commodities, information, and food). He is a researcher and inspector. When Fool moves from the South, she is a young, boisterous Honey Bear. She plays wildly, enthusiastically in the company of others. Then uses her time alone to introspect and create. From the East, Fool becomes a gracefully dancing gardener, the Armadillo Girl who tends to the needs of others with compassion and joy. She aligns herself with the rising sun, and her mantra is, “Love makes thing grow”. A slithering Fool from the North, the old snake entwines the winged staff of Hermes, forming the caduceus, a symbol of transcendence and healing. The caduceus depicts the journey from the underworld to the heavens. His approach to knowledge is to unhinge the orifice and feed upon it in its entirety so he may transmute it into wisdom for the benefit of others.

Applications in my Work

I tend to engage the following cycle: Circle, Square, Spiral, Cross, Triangle. The logistics of this pattern provides structure for planning a curriculum and the result seems to work well for fostering a safe and stimulating learning environment.

Starting with a Circle in the West, we affirm a sense of self and generate the notion of wholeness and acceptance. Participants can begin to identify a goal or purpose for attending. As we relax into finding a personal way within the group, each gains confidence and the step into the Square of the North is taken. Guidelines have been adopted, some structure emerges, and people begin to come out of themselves more

boldly, to contribute to the community of the group. Soon after people have begun to collaborate and build upon the foundations, they enter the Spiral strait across the map to the South. New and complex communications break down into confusion. Individuals may feel storms blowing apart the structures that haven't been built with integrity. One-time cherished ideas and adornments become debris flying in all directions. If the group has been established with universal values and practical tools, then this can be a time of powerful learning. Lessons and passion are in conflict until we affirm our common intentions, surrender the claims to knowing, and finally open ourselves to trusting the process. At last, we come to the Cross in the East where we experience liberation from all that weighted us down before. In the centre of the cross, opposites no longer exist and there is a feeling of connectedness. Joy opens the heart to compassion and the remaining step is made into the Triangle Above, otherwise called Sacred Mountain. The activity slows to near stillness, while the energy vibrates within. It is also possible to witness the stillness within that calms the outward actions. In this place we come back to a sense of self with a renewed vitality, and a greater perception of the personal journey.

While the cycle described above is one I commonly use, it is not the only one at play. There are many factors that determine the approach a group or individual may launch into. One determinant is whether a group is open or closed. In spite of the request that participants pre-register in my groups, there is always a need for keeping an open door. People with health issues are often conflicted in their commitments to a creative arts program and attendance is especially low on the first day. There will be a rise in group size before a fall to the number of regular attendees. This means some participants are accessing the group at a point in the cycle very different than the one I planned.

In another view of visiting the directions, rather than progressing in stages, we jump in and out, looking to create balance in our lives, or habitually avoiding tenacious personal issues. When students begin a program, the initial launch will be determined by motives for participation, as well as the student's usual default approach to life. Is she ready to be challenged or would a *gradual* slide into a new mode be most beneficial? Information about particular artistic interests can inform me of the direction to take, just as having a direction can inform me of what exercises to provide. Once in motion, the group may be cycling very differently than an individual is with his own art work. The result is a simultaneous ride on several merry-go-rounds of varying sizes and speeds. When we look at our lives, and all the projects and relationships and hidden dreams, there are indeed many cycles in motion.

Recognizing where a person is does not always mean going to where they are. It might be that what is presented is an attempt to hide entrenchment in the opposite mode. For example, insistence on judging others may show a person's hidden need for mercy. A look at some of the attractions and challenges associated with each direction follows.

In the West, aspirations to draw realistically bring students into the act of seeing without naming. It is an opportunity to 'get into the zone'; creating empathy for the subject, the artist finds a way to mould into its being-ness, like a river in a riverbed. She feels her way with contours, over edges, into crevices, glides across the sheen, and splashes into texture. It is difficult to quiet the over-active categorical thinking that interferes with deep empathic seeing, listening, or touching. The drive to translate the world into an equivalent of one's own making inevitably leads to honing one's skills.

In the North we practice the laws of manifestation. Here the artist pays equal attention to process and product. The challenge is to be mindful of the techniques in unison with the 'I' who applies them and the Great Spirit who infuses the action with life force. The art piece is evidence of involving body (including medium and technique), mind and soul. Asian brushwork, mandala work, or meditative walking as a dance exercise, all offer contemplative art forms with clear boundaries.

A jump to South forces the artist to abandon the rules (not the skills) in order to experiment and discover childlike innocence. This invigorates an artist's work with freshness. This is a most frightening place for many in my groups. Having experienced a trauma it is difficult to let the guard down. People expect judgments and stifling condemning thoughts or comments from others. Exercises that emphasize process over product are effective ways to wake up the inner child. Crumpling the paper or tearing it before drawing on it instills the fact that there is no right or wrong method for this approach.

In the East the artist's imagination has been sparked and she wishes to illuminate others. Art activism, art-based research, and metaphors are examples of the drive to communicate and raise the consciousness of society.

A single work of art is likely to have been created through a journey in many directions, some approached before the body was set to action. The more adept an artist is at gaining skills in all areas, the greater the transferability of those skills. In my experience, practicing formal and ritualistic exercises greatly affects my ability to spontaneously let go of the rules and play. If I am entrenched in one mode, my art and life suffers. For this reason I look to the Fool's Way.

The Fool allows for the greatest human potential because he knows it's possible. How does he keep this knowing? He does so, by journeying back to centre, the place where connection is affirmed. From this place he assesses the next move, the next possibility. The assessment arises from a clear reception and the move arises from the uninhibited directive to create harmony and balance in relationship. My intention is to maintain my alliance with the Fool and strengthen the web of the Fool's Way.

Endnotes

1.) “Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown.

Understanding of the universe must be grounded in the spirit. Knowledge must be sought through the stream of the inner space in unison with all instruments of knowing and conditions that make individuals receptive to knowing. Ultimately it was in the self that Aboriginal people discovered great resources for coming to grips with life’s mysteries. It was in the self that the richest source of information could be found by delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origin of knowledge. Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self.” (Ermine 1999)

2.) Heylighen hypothesizes “that in more intelligent brains, activation propagates farther reaching, less directly associated concepts. This facilitates problem-solving, reasoning, divergent thinking and the discovery of connections. It also explains rapid learning, perceptual and emotional sensitivity, and vivid imagination.”

<http://pespmc1vub.ac.be/HEYL.html>

3.) Pochinko Baby Clown refers to a workshop called Intensive Baby Clown.

“Richard Pochinko was a Canadian visionary who developed a style of creative exploration and/or performance training, drawing on three traditions: American circus clown, European clowning and North American Aboriginal mask work. John Turner studied with Richard and has continued to develop the work through 22 years of creating and performing professional clown shows (Mump & Smoot) and 20 years of directing and teaching across North America.

The workshop begins with a strong focus on the art of listening. Games and exercises are used to awaken and encourage a sense of pleasure, to heighten awareness of one's

immediate environment, and to develop an honest response to internal impulses and external events. Individual creativity is explored with colour work and body work and eventually the students begin the making and wearing of six masks. These masks mark out the playground for the clown (creative self), guiding the participants through their innocence and experience, extremities and normalcies, culminating in the "birth" of their individual clown.”

<http://www.mumpandsmoot.com/workshops.html>

4.) From Wikipedia: **Playback Theatre** is an original form of improvisational theatre in which audience or group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot. Playback Theatre is sometimes considered a modality of drama therapy.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playback_Theatre

5.) AVP is a training programme that enables participants to deal with potentially violent situations in new and creative ways. Workshops are run by facilitators and experiential (not based on lectures). They use the shared experience of participants, interactive exercises, games and role-plays to examine the ways in which we respond to situations where injustice, prejudice, frustration and anger can lead to aggressive behaviour and violence. <http://avpinternational.org/index.html>

6.) From Wikipedia: **5Rhythms** is a movement meditation practice devised by Gabrielle Roth in the 1960s. It draws from many indigenous and world traditions using tenets of shamanistic, ecstatic, mystical and eastern philosophy. It also draws from Gestalt, the human potential movement and transpersonal psychology. Fundamental to the practice is the idea that everything is energy, and moves in waves, patterns and rhythms. Roth describes the practice as a soul journey, and says that by moving the body, releasing the

heart, and freeing the mind, one can connect to the essence of the soul, the source of inspiration in which an individual has unlimited possibility and potential.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5Rhythms>

Chapter 2

The Fool's Studio

Becoming an Artist

My childhood was artistically rich. My grandmother, Gwen Nesbitt, lived very close by. She was an elementary school teacher in Special Education. Whenever I saw her at home she was seated at her kitchen table. Though it was large enough to accommodate six people, Gram was the only one who ever sat there. The table was piled with matte board, tracing paper, carbon paper, inks, pens, nibs, etc. She would doodle until she had a collection of motifs and figures. Then she designed her composition on the board. Gwen's pictures are like stories about one or more characters and occasionally are accompanied by her poetry. Looking at some of her art now, I remember how, in my childhood, I identified with most of her characters. There are no heroes and villains. Her characters reside between the spotlight of idealism and deep shadow of exile. Drawn naively they look innocent, without musculature, facial expression, or personality, but they are positioned in a wide range of situations that arouse some emotion and intellect. Many are depicted as not fitting the culture to which they belong. Sometimes scenes are framed with ornate flora, hinting at the art nouveau style; arbitrarily placed within the scenes are elaborately decorated pillars and wall dividers. Gwen's art shows attentiveness to unity and balance of shape and form. She used colour minimally. We used to say Gwen was a 'closet artist', as she literally had hundreds of pen and ink drawings stored away, and had her first public showing and local television interview when she was over

70 years old. My grandmother modeled artistic modesty, and pursuance of pleasure through creative expression.

While I was between 8 and 11 years of age, my mother, Arlene Nesbitt, worked on her BA in Art Education. I was not very aware of her enrollment at college until she neared graduation, but I benefitted from her studies. For one of her course projects, Arlene created a weekly art class. That summer, when I was 10, a few other children and I attended her class at my house every Saturday morning. I remember feeling anticipation before each class, powerfully motivated upon hearing an explanation of the exercise, delighted with my work, proud of my relation with the teacher and absolutely exhilarated with the final art show. I was so stimulated by the experience I decided to teach art when school started again in the autumn, to children ages six to eight years. I planned the classes, prepared the materials, and taught one afternoon a week for several weeks.

Arlene's graduation project included an "illustration" of a book with a single work of art. It was a rya knot rug in deep blues and indigo with a smoldering red/orange and flicks of yellow emerging from the darkest part. The book was *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Another of Arlene's final projects was titled *Summer*. This too was a rya knot rug – a grid of brightly coloured squares. I was very impressed by the communication of ideas and feelings that were translated into visual art works.

Around this same age, my eldest brother drew each family member as a fruit. Amazingly I could recognize our facial features, but more surprisingly his choice of fruit for each person told something about the person, that I didn't suspect could ever be depicted. To this day, I enjoy working intuitively to "illustrate" my impressions,

interpretations and my responses to a personality or situation. This is especially so in a small group setting, with people I will likely see again and again within a certain context.

(See Figure 9.)

Connecting with the group and helping strengthen the group's unity are often primary motives for me. Born into a family as the sixth and youngest member, I am accustomed to groups of this size and was perhaps destined to concern myself this way as a consequence of my place in the birth order. Early on I sensed that my well being was constrained by the well being of the group, and the relations between each of its members. When I was 11 years of age, four major events occurred, dramatically changing the course of our family dynamics. In January my parents separated. In April my eldest brother was a passenger involved in a motorcycle accident. He suffered many fractures and a major brain injury. In June my third eldest brother began experiencing symptoms of schizophrenia and he "ran away" from home. In August I packed my personal belongings into a single box and all but two of us, including my cousins, aunt and grandmother drove across the continent. We left New Jersey, and arrived at a campground near Victoria BC within a fortnight. Each of these events strengthened my bond to the others. Each was an opportunity to identify that which was most important to me. I decided I wanted to become a psychologist, so I could understand people better, and be helpful with their troubles. On our journey, the beauty and diversity of landscapes were inspiring, but my heart and mind were focused on family.

My first Canadian bedroom was decorated with calendar prints of the Group of Seven artists. I began to appreciate natural landscapes more and more. I took to the wild areas surrounding and veining through Victoria as if I had always belonged. I felt like the

move had brought me home. I stopped trying to blend in. I was comfortable enough to be myself, even if I stood out.

At age 14, my stepfather introduced his dear old friend, Molly Privet. She studied anthroposophy, the esoteric philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. As an anthroposophist she sought synthesis between the scientific/cognitive and the spiritual/mystical. Molly was also an artist. For a time, I remember her practicing a technique of Steiner's called veil painting. Washes of watercolour were applied one layer at a time, and allowed to dry for a whole day before the next layer was applied. The artist must apply many layers before committing to an emerging image. Only then would the artist begin to apply layers to purposefully enhance the emergence of that image. The technique creates a quality of mystique. Many years prior to my mother's friendship with Molly she knew and studied with Herbert Seibner; she associated frequently with the Limmers of Victoria BC. Molly was well known locally, but also showed her work in Montreal. At the time, I knew very little about Molly's social life and artistic history. I only knew her work and home which had a profound impact on me. I began to respond to spiritual and artistic yearnings in myself. Molly's paintings have blockish figures and simplified shapes; minimal lines depict facial expressions. The colours are dark, rich and layered.

In 1984 I saw a solo show of Herbert Seibner at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. I was amazed again at the impact of such simply shaped figures. Unaware of Molly's association with Seibner, I recognized a style that I enjoyed very much. Several years later, at the University of Victoria I came upon a bronze sculpture called *Coast Spirit*, by Elza Mayhew. Without knowing I had once again fallen for the work of a Limner. I have since found out that the artists who formed the Limmers in the early 1970s



were socializing and painting together in the 1960s. They were concerned primarily with the artistic interpretation of human and societal identity. This expressionist approach to this subject resonates so truly with my own interests and concerns, I cannot help but feel inspired, recognized, and spoken to by the work of Privet, Seibner, and Mayhew. I love the soft cornered squares and loosely fitted shapes. The roughness of the brush work is

energetic and honest. The simplified figures emphasize relationships to others, to the environment, to the situation. Many of the geometric elements used in Seibner's and Mayhew's work echo the graphic design shapes of mid-century fabric prints. Although the fabrics of the 50s that I find most appealing have a bold style that is pared down to planes of colour and black lines of curves and spirals, my own studio work is greatly contrasted with this.

The 1970s was a time when textiles came forward. My mother was very interested in textile arts and introduced me to several techniques with yarns and fabrics. Shops imported functional craft work from India, Tibet, and Mexico. I was thrilled with everything embroidered. We frequented art and craft shows, where ideas for projects were seeded. I especially liked to wear beautifully crafted garments, and was inspired to create interesting outfits from second hand clothing. I found a couple books on Erte and explored designing clothing and costume. Without formal training in tailoring or dressmaking, I sometimes found difficulty in making these comfortably wearable. I am resigned to alter clothing by cutting, sewing, dyeing and decorating it.

The Apparatus (figure 1) has a game board, galleries and storage areas for many artifacts and small collections. The artifacts are Artist Trading Cards (there are several sets including: Family of Origin; Adult Inspiration; Childhood Influences), found and/or broken objects, batiks, handmade ornaments, natural objects, etcetera. The game board comes from *Masterpiece* by Parker Brothers, published in 1970. As a child I attempted to play this art auction game with my older brothers. I have altered the board to reflect my interest in the connection between personal sharing and personal growth. A player may choose any artifact on *The Apparatus* as a token, roll the die, move the token, and pick a

card to match the landing space. The cards are marked with the Taro suits and correspond to regular playing cards suits. Each suit represents an aspect of life, and the task written on the back of the card relates as such. The original Private Auction space has been changed to Private Function and tasks include relaxation and rejuvenation techniques and affirmations.



Figure 1. *The Apparatus*, assemblage, 2010.

The Apparatus communicates who I am as an artist and educator. It is a structure that stimulates personal growth, collaboration, and intimacy with others. It is loaded with references to my influences, inspirations and history. I love variety of mediums like diversity in culture and ecosystems. I prefer to use what I have on hand to minimize consumption and waste. I save the smallest scraps and am charmed by the humblest objects: a broken mug, a bundle of twigs, threads. I work on the ‘edge’ of society, where many people feel they don’t fit into the mainstream. While listening to people interacting

with *The Apparatus* I hear the words “choice” and “choose” repeatedly, sensing their empowerment and delight. When people play they take their time, investing in the activity. One participant drew a card instructing her to choose an artifact and tell what it is thinking. She spoke for the salmon bone, “I’m so bare and exposed.” The woman then fumbled and dropped the bone onto the floor and under the table. As she dropped to her knees I responded “and now you’re discarded”. After retrieving the bone, the woman rose and looked at me with wide eyes, “You know that’s so true, that’s me.” She laughed as she made the connection.

I will continue to tend *The Apparatus*. Trading, making little things, and collecting are my past-times. Meditating, intuiting, and organizing are my strengths. Story-telling, arranging displays, and encouraging others to do likewise are my pleasures.

Being Artistic

If I am a Fool in the middle of the Universe I can create art by stepping in any direction. An art project can be a quick unidirectional endeavor or a long complicated multi-directional journey.

All along, and in many ways there is the reciprocation of energy and matter, the alternating current of expansion and contraction, receiving and giving, connecting and separating. The cycle can be as short as a breath or as long as the seasons. In my artistic process my actions are directed outward or inward. When I act *out* I make things happen; I interact with the world. When I act *in* I listen, absorb or receive directives.

Dance

Dance and movement in general has always been an expressive outlet for me. As my mother played the piano, I leaped and twirled behind her, keeping an eye on myself in

the large mirror spanning the piano wall. I abandoned dance for several years from my mid-twenties to mid-thirties, and as I started to move again I realized I had abandoned my deepest self. Through dance I am not only learning who I am in the moment, but I am integrating my history, and discovering a powerful creative process that permeates all processes.

For several years I have been participating in 5Rhythms® workshops and classes. Gabrielle Roth is the founder of 5Rhythms®, and although I have only skimmed parts of her book *Maps To Ecstasy* (1998) I am forming my own understanding of these five rhythms: flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, stillness. I cannot be sure that my articulation of a cycle through the rhythms (that Roth calls a ‘wave’) will match or diverge from her school of thought. I tend to feel and identify with the universality of any teaching, and therefore suspect that the deep knowing available to me through movement is similar for everyone.

Long before I was introduced to Roth’s work, my own dancing and listening taught me to heed the existence of many, many rhythms. I explored and discovered without verbalization, the way a shape can influence my dance, the way small and nearly undetectable movements can relieve great tension, the way movement leaves a trail that can magnetically repel or attract another, or even several others. My own dance was powerful and personal, but recently I’ve begun to feel that is changing. Perhaps formal training can lead away from expressiveness to predictability, effectively diluting individuality. For this reason, I am apprehensive of completely submerging into any one school of thought or training; likewise I am cautious of my influence on others. Even with my relatively limited exposure to 5Rhythms®, I recognize that my dance has

diminished in variety, and now neatly fits into categories. Nevertheless I see the value of embracing this approach as one of several that inform and affect all areas of life, including my artistic process. I have merged this learning with the universal shapes and directions.

Understanding the Wave and an Artful Life Journey

Dancing through each of the 5Rhythms® is called a ‘wave’. Similar to the telling of a story, there is a beginning, rising action, a climax, falling action and a resolution.

West – Circle - Flowing

Where boundaries have not been delineated and the separation between two forms is unclear, there is a flow of information, nourishment, and energy that is continuous and multidirectional. The goal is to grow, to realize potential. Sometimes the outcome is contained within – predestined. Sometimes the outcome is according to complete or clearly defined aspects of one’s environment. Usually the outcome is the result of both determinants. Without decision, one moves toward the goal of ‘becoming’ as if *everything* depends upon this movement. The goal is the process and the process is the goal. Usually a goal is fixed and defined but I believe our first goal must be a perpetual exploration of potential; this requires the kind of connectedness that has never been anything else.

Nature is the place where I am willing to completely submerge my identity and blend with my environment. Using observation, adaptability and responsiveness, I camouflage distinctive features of my personality and savor the experience of unity. This is a way of grounding, of establishing a sense of my being in the physical world. Nature is my most committed ally. If I need to feel connected, I will draw any plant in view.

North – Square – Staccato

When separation becomes known, suddenly, being alone is possible. Solitude calls for self-sufficiency. By reviewing information, repeating/reliving actions and experiences one develops skills and a facility with tools. The term ‘tool’ refers to anything used as a means of achieving an end. With skills and tools we build lives that are predictable and safe. Knowledge that has proven to be useful is maintained by routine, creating a sense of security to appease separation anxiety. As we encounter others with *their* tools, we imitate and conform in the hope of insuring our survival. Some practices and structures may actually hinder growth, but we cling to them nevertheless.

Writing is a tool I relish using. It is a mental, analytical, and discerning tool. To build an art project out of a theme or topic, I will formulate ideas and write notes. I imagine which techniques to employ. Knowing what the result will likely be, I can count on using beadwork here, or batik there, to achieve the effect I want.

Here I create and abide by rules. I declare parameters. With an active concern for the environment, I aim to build things that can be easily washed and possibly deconstructed and reassembled. I limit what I buy, and strive to use only reclaimed or waste materials. In valuing practicality I must guard against traveling too far in that direction, relegating endeavors to the field of artisan or craftsman, limiting my access to artistry. Sometimes my ideas are greatly altered by my skewed perception of scarcity. My artistic process stalls while I evaluate my actual resources and needs. This stage of the project calls for practicality, but not at the expense of progress.

South – Spiral – Chaos

Feeling sure, feeling secure enables a branching out, stepping out to explore terrain. The sense of danger develops as unexpected experiences beat against the structures that one believes provide stability. This point of the creative process is like tapping into a powerful surge of energy that has the potential to destroy illusions yet also transform and liberate the dream so it may become manifest. Surviving this torrent of experiences – moving through the storm without fragmenting requires connecting with ones centre and surrendering the structures that cannot withstand such force. A solid footing may be impossible to find, and so letting go of knowing and letting go of *wanting* to know is the only way to survive.

If my work feels shallow or stagnant, I may need to come to a deeper understanding, to reveal the undercurrents of the project. This is the emotional realm that infuses all actions, even without awareness. Underlying vibrations disrupt the knowing I previously worked with. Literally, shaking in my dance is a way of sorting, of bringing to the surface, elements that had been hidden. It is this revelation that provides a new understanding of the project, of the issue, of the process within. Here my art is all about process. I do not intend to share it – except with those who really wish to see it, who will give the art and me the respect of full *presence*. This work is a forfeiture of rules. It is an experiment, a risk, a rise to challenge the plan; it is a means of finding the true source of impulse.

East – Equidistant Cross – Lyrical

A good storm will wash away everything – leaving only the essence of the dream. There is no more need of ‘letting go’. The experience of ‘not knowing’ comes with ease

rather than fear. One is released from the illusion of stability, the illusion of opposites, and the illusion of separateness. The meeting place is clear of obstacles; it is visible and attainable. So with a lightness of being comes union. Relationships are evident, renewed and celebrated, and community engages in spontaneous, honest display.

My art in this arena is most often expressed in the functioning of my home / family and work / groups. While I recognize my personal investment with these relationships, I also identify my creative attentiveness to the repair, maintenance and growth of the groups and individuals therein. With any gathering, I may have planned and prepared but I cannot assume to control or even predict the outcome. This allows me to be fully present in the moment, fully connected to the people.

If display is honest, it is just as likely to be of hardship as of joy. My concern for well being extends to marginalized communities. So here my studio work could be a celebration of community or an intentional message illuminating a serious issue.

Above – Triangle – Stillness

Having embarked upon a journey, traveled and grown, a cycle prepares to begin again. Of course growth means boundaries have been broadened; changes have occurred that make repetition impossible. Expansion provides a broader view, one where we gain objectivity, a perspective of self in relation to that larger world. Seated upon a great mountain at the apex of the triangle, little movement is required to experience wholeness. In fact, *stillness* is required to view and sense all the pulses, rhythms and activities in motion.

In quiet contemplation, I gaze upon my artwork. I aim to see it in its entirety and in relation to the rhythms of its making. Is this a piece with integrity and meaning? Does

it convey my source of inspiration? Have I skillfully and knowledgably chosen the mediums and techniques used? Have I tapped into the raw emotion, the hidden issues, and responded without censorship? Is it complete on its own or does it require a particular context to speak its truth? Is this a piece I'm willing to share?

The Actual Artful Journey

The above description is a tidy (though poetic) explanation of a progression, a development, or shall I say a growth pattern. In actuality, my artistic exploration looks more like the following.



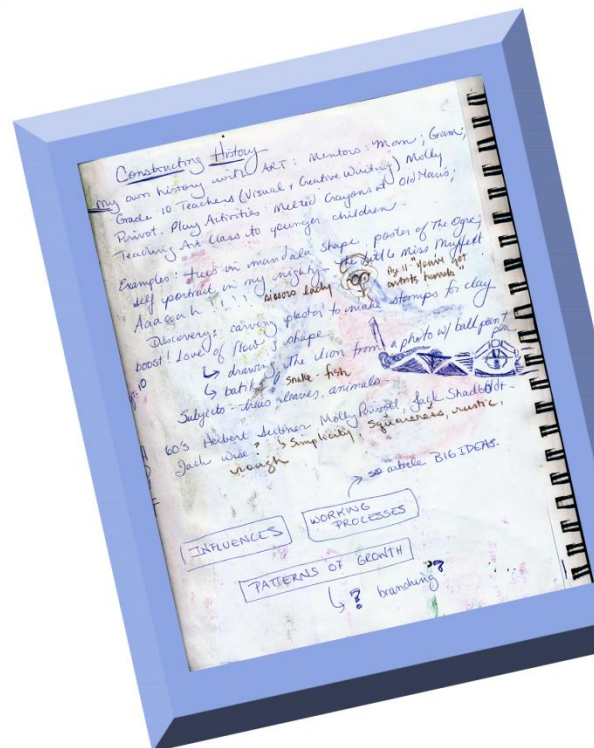
Gathering

*slowly or quickly, over days, weeks, or months... a quiet gathering of ingredients
thoughts, sensations, emotions, memories, ideas*

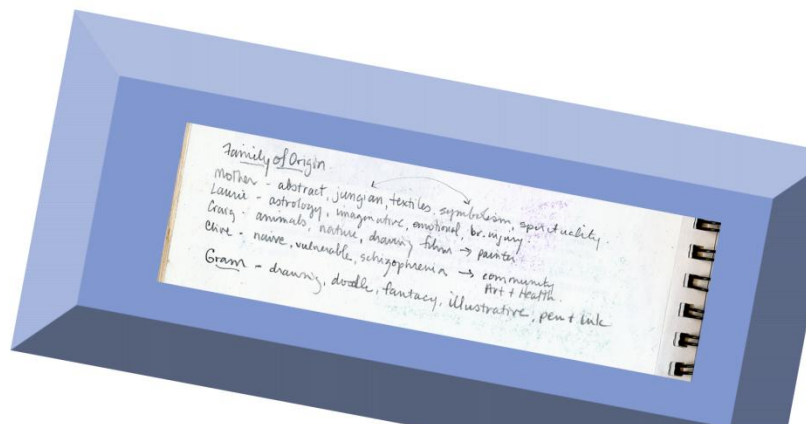
*simmer in the back
of my being*



BUILDING



NOTES ARE THE INITIAL
BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE PROJECT.
WITH THIS OUTWARD ACTION
I BRING THE PROJECT
TO THE FRONT BURNER,
NAMING THE INGREDIENTS
AND DISCERNING WHAT IS
NECESSARY OR SUPERFLUOUS.



Engaged in spontaneous drawing while I stir the pot
can be a point of overwhelm as thoughts and feelings

become intensified and consuming...



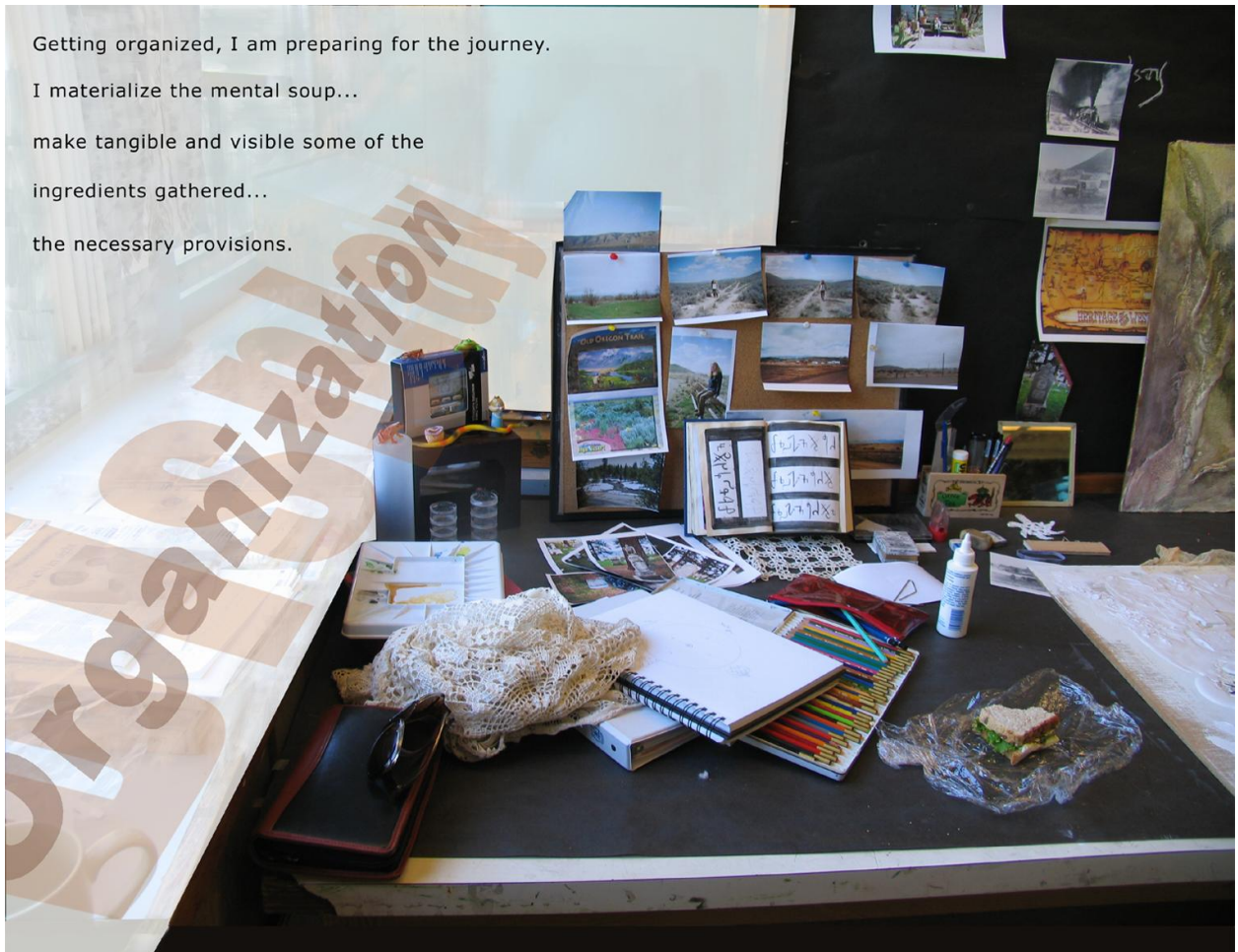
Getting organized, I am preparing for the journey.

I materialize the mental soup...

make tangible and visible some of the

ingredients gathered...

the necessary provisions.





needs no further hallelaloo:
 (1) Lynx tells me mirrors my
 inclination to create art &
 hold it so long as it is still
 true - still peaceful - show it
 only to those who really wish
 to see it - to those who will
 pay due respect to my sharing
 my art is a product of commit-
 to know something I cannot
 do so with a pencil for me
 WEST my mission as an artist
 my purpose is to camouflage
 my ego as I blend in w/ the
 universal - the natural - to
 create and obscure the difference
 between my creation & the inspiration
 it is not exactly copying -
 My goals are to be adaptable
 abstract, responsive, integrated
 ways of thought & action and
 to appear my deepest self.
 FOX mirrors my statement -
 Nature is my most committed ally
 My persistence of art is propelled
 by my need to feel connected to
 my world - to experience unity
 To feel the joy of knowing the
 playground of my life.
 NORTH - wisdom of my actions
 - I want my art to be dependent
 Squirrel warns against
 keeping too much of our
 possession - I as a global citizen
 need to check on the balance
 of HAVE vs NEED - often I prefer
 art objects w/ function which
 has tended to limit me to
 artisan or craftsman.
 CENTRE The one who, of my
 totem leads me to my goals &
 personal truth is real. The
 one who integrates my artistic
 strengths, who reflects my
 TRUE ARTIST - the Shunk (1)
 To know who I am, what
 what I stand for - one who is
 sensitive to energy & strives
 to orchestrate harmony among
 groups by handling energy
 flows.

NOTE BOOK
 Medea's
 VOICES OF OUR ANCESTORS
 Double Treasures
 From the Wisdom Tree
 Dharma Yashoo

When I'm seeking
 a clear path,
 I rise above my life - upon sacred Mountain.
 Using divining tools... meditation... journaling...
 I enter the stillness of Great Mystery from which answers emerge...
 I decode messages from the world around me.



AWAKENING

*Once a path is chosen
 I state my intention to embark.
 It may take several days or weeks
 depending upon distractions -
 for momentum to build.*

*Then as I am waking -
 lingering in the gateway between conscious and subconscious -
 an image will appear
 and gradually become clear, though NOT complete. It is only a starting point...
 I sketch it roughly and begin the cycle all over again...*





Centering

I return to a centering place to find myself
to ground myself with what I know
with what is sure...

I tune in to my surroundings
and quiet my over-active mind.

I might draw MY wall
or MY chair
or gaze upon
what I love – *Nature*.

Gathering

Slowly or quickly, over days, weeks, or months
A quiet gathering of ingredients:
thoughts, sensations, emotions, memories, ideas
simmer in the back of my being.

Building

Notes are the initial building blocks of the project.
With this outward action I bring the project to the front burner,
name the ingredients and discern what is necessary or superfluous.

Stirring

Engaged in spontaneous drawing while I stir the pot
can be a point of overwhelm as thoughts and feelings
become intensified and consuming.

Organizing

Getting organized –
I am preparing for the journey.

I materialize the mental soup
make tangible and visible some of the ingredients gathered
the necessary provisions.

Entering

When I'm seeking a clear path
I rise above my life – upon Sacred Mountain.
Using divining tools
meditation
journaling
I enter the stillness of Great Mystery from which answers emerge
I decode messages from the world around me.

Awakening

Once a path is chosen I state my intention to embark.
It may take several days or weeks, depending upon distractions,
for inner momentum to build
initiating the actual embarkation.
Then when I am waking
lingering in the gateway between conscious and subconscious
an image will appear
and gradually become clear, though *not* complete.
It is only a starting point.
I sketch it roughly
and begin the cycle all over again.

Imagining

Under influences again
I spend a lot of time imagining while sitting or lying still.
Some imagining occurs during pattering and some while dancing
and after revising, and reworking the image

in my mind,
 a few more imaginings get sketched.
 There's danger in imagining details
 leading to an illusory sense of completion
 and the project forever unrealized.

Displaying

At various points on the journey, especially after a rigorous work frenzy
 it's time to share
 to play and display
 arrange and rearrange the elements
 recognize the relationships.
 Which are strong or weak?
 Obvious or hidden?
 Which bring delight, surprise, harmony or contrast?

Critical Analysis of Recent Work

The body of work created in the past two years was exhibited with the title *Subconscious DIRECTIVES*, referring to my studio purpose and process. The potential of creativity is unification; this is the landscape I have been exploring. What are the undercurrents that affect my life? Can I dislodge the emotional plaque that dams creation and renewal? My finished art works now serve as landmarks. The map I used not only pointed directions, but also detailed the terrain on various paths. This map offered where, when, and how to build these landmarks, and in the exhibit – how to view them.

Journey into the Past

It was a lovely coincidence that my first year in this program was preceded by a quest to unveil the lives of my ancestors who travelled the Oregon Trail and settled in a

town called Union. Digging into the material I had gathered was personally grounding. I acquired a new sense of self that extended into history and affirmed my lifestyle, interests, and talents. On a westerly path, the art piece titled *Viewing Ancestors* (figures 2 and 3) speaks to the question, “what happens when I continue to follow without hesitation or doubt or distraction a perpetually unfolding path?”

I tried so
To see
I listened to the stories
I touched the earth they tread
I smelled the sage and dusty wind
I peered into imaginings
Vision
Gained and then gone
Yet I continue to perceive as if veils of history gently sweep over my skin.

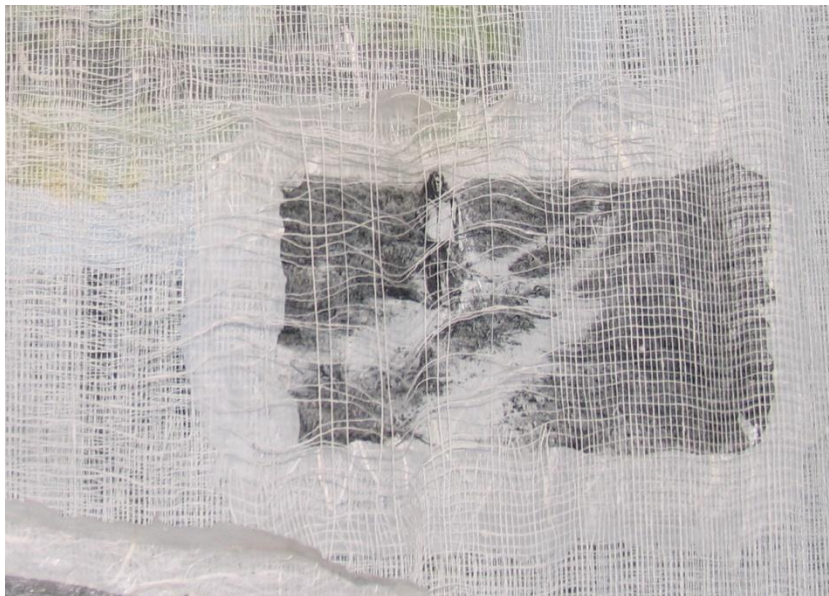


Figure 2. *Viewing Ancestors* (detail), assemblage, 2008 ○



Figure 2. *Viewing Ancestors*, assemblage, 2008. ○

Viewing Ancestors was created to share the unusual and profoundly flowing experience of learning from those who no longer exist. The effort of ‘viewing’ with hard working eyes into the past, took several days of concentration, of willingness, of imagining. As I began to see, I lost my mundane sense of self. In the middle of my journey, the present opened, and viewing became vision. This perception, not readily available, nor tangibly stimulating, fused dreams, memories and imaginings. The relevance of time dissolved. It became possible to know the merging of places in a person’s life. With a shift of attention, a wavering of intention, vision vanished and hard edges reappeared. The frame is like a window, or opening into another time and place; it is suspended to inhibit a long discerning gaze exemplifying the fleeting vision. The experience is bound by the structure that supported it. A quest involves: going there; being there; returning home. The suitcase handle reminds us of these ritual steps.

Interruptible Art

In the early spring of 2009, feeling cut off from my studio (having packed it up when I moved house) I set out to find a project that I could get into and out of quickly. I needed something to activate my artistry in spite of having little time to invest in it. Using long paper and graphite, chalk and an eraser – tools that pack up easily, I decided on a simple stroke / line / gesture and began to systematically travel from the left to the right (figure 4). Once I arrived at the edge, I started again with a new stroke in response to the one present. The staccato method proved to be very satisfying. The images appear in the northern part of the map and address the questions, “what are the patterns in my life that support me? How can I strengthen the structure without creating dependence?”

Maintaining the skillful use of materials can be simple and useful, but it can also reinforce a commitment to being an artist, and provide a stabilizing routine.



Figure 4. *Interruptible Art I and II*, graphite, chalk, and charcoal on paper, 2009. □

Emotional Wealth

The Great Disruption series (figures 5, 6, 7, 8) sprung from a wealth of emotional material that flooded my psyche through this past winter. When a family health crisis began to ebb it was clearly time for me to ‘head south’ and face the chaos of my internal life. Paints provided an immediate expression, allowing me to continually tap into the

spring, and practice letting go. While I spiraled into the depths of my subconscious for the series, each painting dictated its own rhythm.

On a quest slightly west of south I was a stranger in a strange city, and so I set out to establish my sense of self by seeing my life in the landscape. *Intruder* (figure 5) refers to this, as well as the disease that infiltrated the home front.

Blast (figure 6) expresses the explosion of energy unleashed and the crumbling of structures I had previously used to guide me. It also depicts a violent attack on disease. *Citizen a-rest* (figure 7) tells of the emotional turmoil of letting go of my husband and trusting his essence will linger and our marriage, though barely recognizable will continue to exist. These two paintings sit firmly due south and respond to the questions, “When quaking over-takes me, what rises to the surface? What falls apart and becomes debris?”

Finally *Illumination* (figure 8) is a journey east of south where the experience is spontaneously integrated through the painting process and the learning becomes evident. In this case I learned a new way to embrace the community that embraces me. I tempered my sharing at times, and I also offered true and raw emotion. Experiencing that which had been so disturbing (the ochre/cream blocks in my landscape), and that which had been so disrupted (the ochre/cream blocks turned debris), exposed the core values (yellow/white block remnants) at the base of a nearly empty container. Carefully sharing my journey strengthened the bonds of my community. This is how I came to deeply accept and receive the gifts (yellow/white packages and people) in my life.



Figure 4. *Intruder*. mixed media on paper, 15'' x 22'', 2010, ○



Figure 5. *Blast*. Mixed media on paper, 15'' x 22'', 2010, ☯





Figure 6. *Citizen A-rest* 15" x 22", 2010 



Figure 7. *Illumination* 15" x 22", 2010 

Group Work

With the intention of relating to others and communicating my perception of them, I set out to create trading card sized portraits of each cohort member (figure 9). Initiated early in the program with very little history together I relied on instinct and innocence. These miniature works in the eastern terrain carry a lightness and playfulness stemming from the freedom of 'not knowing'. They approach the questions "Can I ever really know anything? How honest is my sharing?"

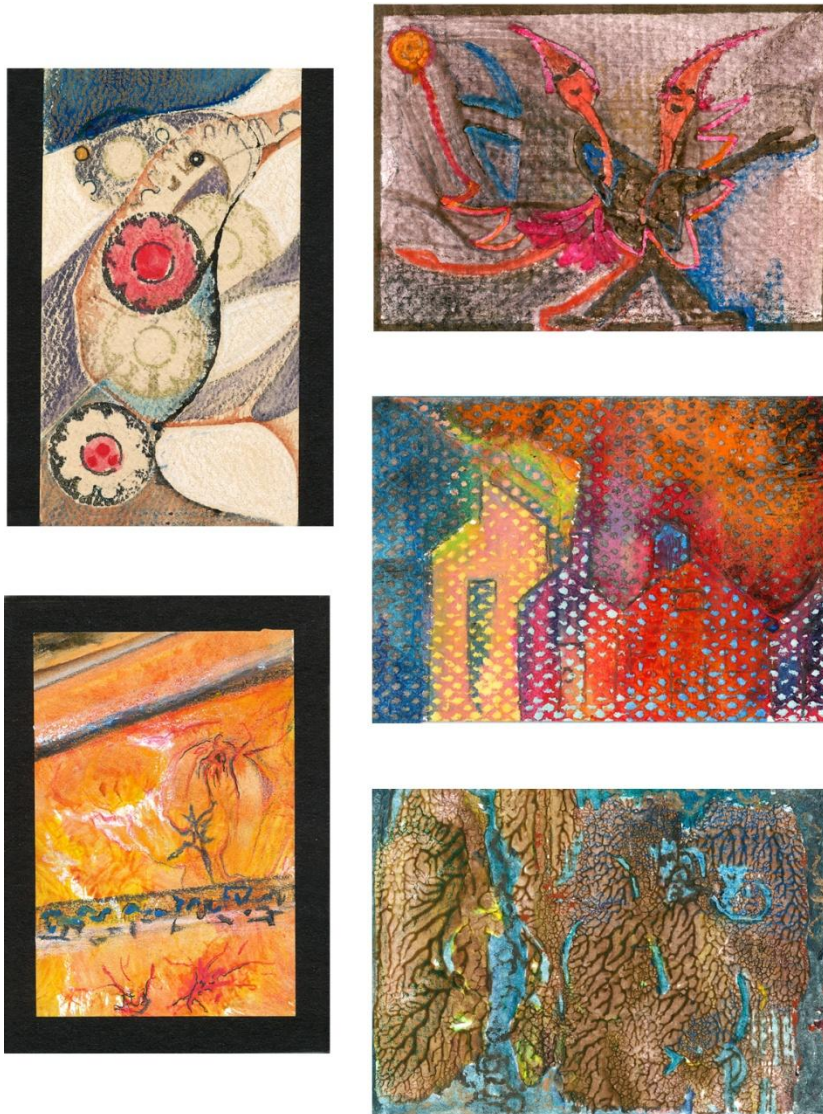


Figure 9. *Artist Trading Cards*, mixed media, 2008. +



Figure 10. *In Suspension: A Novel experience*, assemblages, 2010. \triangle Clockwise from top left: *Chapter I Away from Home*; *Chapter II Identity By Association*; *Chapter VII Glimmer*; *Chapter IX Beyond Intellect Into Being*.

In Suspension

In Suspension: A Novel - experience is a series (figure 10) in nine ‘chapters’. Primarily the series is an exploration from above where this question arises: “What happens when I get off the train and hold my position?” At the same time each piece holds its own rhythm placed within a wave. Behind glass, small fragments of cloth minimally stitched together hang from threads loosely wrapped around a wire, which is hanging from the top of a white, painted wooden box. Behind the fabric piece hangs in the same fashion, a small painting on a page from a Readers Digest story. One viewer commented, “Initially the words drew me forward, but when I looked closer I focused on the stitching and the words were like a quiet murmuring or chanting – subtle in the background.” Each pair is suspended in colour and protected from contact. My intention was to handle the textiles very lightly, to impose myself upon them as little as possible. Spaciousness and stillness are enhanced to demonstrate the sensation of being in a situation that I could not reference. In the hospital room as a partner and witness I felt like I was in suspension. To have the textiles and small paintings / collages hanging magnifies their stillness. When the boxes are moved the hangings move, and something exciting happens, and diminishes as quickly as the movement. The space between objects becomes more noticeable as well as the placement; sealed in a box behind glass. The tension between involvement and distance speaks to the continuum from wholesome witnessing to dysfunctional dissociation.

Style is the Common Thread

While there is great variation in the materials I use in my art work, there are also commonalities. My work is layered: layers of fabrics, fused with thread or distanced with

space between, digital images layered but slightly transparent, or objects placed in layers of foreground, mid-grounds, and background. Viewers comment on texture in my drawings and paintings as a reference to textiles. They see a gesture of line created with embroidery thread echoed in a digital painting and acrylic painting. Just as I move about into different mediums, I do so in my leadership work. My week is divided between leisure and rehabilitation, between teaching and facilitating, between groups and one to one. I work with people with mental illness, acquired brain injury, developmental disabilities, and those who have no special issues. Moving about is my style.

I love to hold things and play with them, to let form dictate a new relationship with another object, or to manipulate and push the potential of form into a new relationship with space. I treasure things, and once I've put them into an arrangement, I treasure them more. Since *The Apparatus* has been on exhibition (figure 11) I've noticed how my intention to collaborate on an ever-changing art piece is frequently challenged when the collaborators are gone. I am compelled to restore the arrangement I so delighted in creating, or to 'improve' a collaborator's recently added arrangement. Sometimes I stick to my goal. Sometimes I let myself be the master controller of *The Apparatus*. I sense though, that if the piece appears too 'beautiful' or complete, it makes a barrier for others to interact with it. With that simple sentence a whole aspect of my life comes to light in a clear and elegant way. This is *The Apparatus* in its full glory; through invested thoughtful interactions, people may come to know themselves in visual, enacted or narrative ways. I can see an exercise for me in shared responsibilities – letting go of making 'it' better, whatever it may be.



Figure 11. Gallery visitor playing with *The Apparatus*.

Chapter 3

Full Cycle: A New Beginning is to Touch Back on the Previous Beginning

What Good is a Map?

I want to know these territories and the rhythms because I will see them in my students, in my curriculum, in my own art studio and family – I will recognize these approaches and ways that are naturally occurring or stubbornly held or strenuously resisted. With recognition I will more likely be able to facilitate change or passage or simply offer gentle support. These are only two ways of mapping experience. All over the world systems of understanding human potential are passed down through generations. How can they all exist and all be true? How can one mind reconcile contradiction? Would I rather argue and test validity, or lend my undivided attention in an effort to assimilate and accommodate?

We use maps to help put our position into a greater perspective, i.e. in relation to other possible positions. We also use maps to guide us into regions we *need* to experience for expansion or balance.

Ken Wilber's Integral Vision

Ken Wilber (2007) asks “What if we took literally everything that all the various cultures have to tell us about human potential ... to make a comprehensive map...or integral map...?” (p. 16) I was recently given Wilber's book, *The Integral Vision* because his basic philosophy is akin to my own. As I do, he aims to interconnect various truths but more extensively so. Wilber's vision for this integral map, which is called an Integral Operating System or IOS is that it provides a common language that can be used to communicate across disciplines and cultures. He speaks of the IOS as a “neutral

framework [to] be used to bring more clarity, care, and comprehensiveness to virtually any situation” (p. 215). Exploring the IOS I found the language rather linear and hierarchical. Nevertheless in my imagination, I maneuvered the maps I’ve been integrating (directions, rhythms, shapes) into IOS. Wilber speaks to my intentions when he says the purpose of an integral approach is “to cultivate body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature” (p. 217).

The Integral Vision Stimulates New Directions

In my basic understanding of IOS with its Quadrants, Levels, Lines, States, and Types I could acknowledge its effectiveness for trans-disciplinary knowledge, but it seemed especially cognitive. It made me think about words and silence. Stirred also by the upcoming final weekend module of Undercurrents themed on Stillness (including gathering in silence) and the recent performance art about silence by cohort, Christine Kim, I wondered about the power of language to enlighten. Do we require language for understanding? I recalled a film documenting the transformational life of a young autistic woman. She was an adult before she was given a communication tool that enabled her to learn and use language. The woman reflected, “Before I had language I was retarded. I don’t know what I thought. I was lost.” It seems obvious that language can expand our comprehension of the world, but perhaps it can also limit understanding. If we experiment with our language will we expand possibilities of knowing?

Inspired to delve into these questions I looked up the Integral Education Network on the internet but was unable to access the page. Surfing on the site I found information on an Integral Theory Conference held recently. (http://integraltheoryconference.org/sites/default/files/2010%20Abstracts%20and%20Bios%20Final_0.pdf) In a list of

presentation abstracts, one especially caught my attention, *Between Attack and Accommodation: Integrally Redefining “Devil’s Advocate”*. The presenter, Michele Chase directs the Master of Arts program in Holistic Health Education at John F. Kennedy University. She is studying certain words metaphors and meanings in relation to healing. Chase’s presentation would likely speak to my queries in the first paragraph above – “Would I rather argue...” and her ongoing area of interest intrigues and beckons me.

Using My Map for Plans

In the west I’m going to start a new garden on my new property. Come rain or shine, I’m itching to get my hands in the dirt and create a landscaping plan. In the north I’ll investigate the Integral Institute and search for writings by Michele Chase. In the south there are textiles upon piles of textiles waiting to be handled. Some are batiks and quilts that recently revealed a woodland-type relationship. The quilt top, started last winter beckons appliquéd trees, and vines made from narrow, surged strips of fabric. In the east I am coming upon a period of listening. I will pursue an invitation to collaborate on a community art project for the benefit of Pandora Arts Collective Society (PACS) where I work. This organization was founded by people with mental illness with the mission to create studio space open to everyone. Recently the term ‘reverse inclusion’ came to light. I would like to learn more about the issues and obstacles widely associated with this dynamic. More and more people have been talking to me about needing a place like PACS. I’m curious to know if inclusivity can truly work harmoniously in this situation. Currently PACS struggles to survive while dozens of resourceful people are looking for artistic camaraderie. Other areas of interest for me include a lecture series

sponsored by PACS. I've begun outlining one lecture on exhibition, specifically the relevance of framing, and another one on Naïve Art is brewing. The intent is also to bring in guest lecturers to inform the public and vitalize the organization.

Changes are underway in my approach with the Visual Arts Group at the Victoria Brain Injury Society. Clarity with my own artistic process and familiarity with common needs of other artists is providing the impetus to work more individually with participants and directions they instigate.

Yesterday's Web

How I Grew as an Artist

When I applied for this M.Ed. program I made a courageous commitment. I'm not referring to time, money, or effort. The trepidation I had to overcome was linked to changing my self-perception. I was very aware of the fact that this change would ricochet into all aspects of my life.

In considering applying to various graduate programs I looked at my most developed and underdeveloped interests from my own perspective and also from a societal view. I felt like a strong and capable teacher. I felt highly creative and motivated to engage others in creative processes. Publicly I was well rooted in health services with a flair for creative arts. I decided to focus on Art Education so I could be recognized as well rooted in the field of Arts and Health.

At the same time I was curious about the Undercurrents dance program. I took a workshop with the teacher to help me decide whether to apply for that program as well. This workshop theme was *Quickening*. We focused on the rhythm of flowing to access our resources when faced with frightening situations. In one particular exercise we were

asked to dance toward that which we tend to avoid. I chose to dance toward myself with the title of Artist. Although it was difficult I wanted to meet this angst head-on in preparation for the M.Ed. application. Experiencing the dance toward and away from my artist-self activated my commitment to change. I recognized how I had begun this metaphorical ‘dance’ in my life by exhibiting my art work a couple months earlier. The recoiling that followed was automatic and debilitating. Even though I received positive feedback verbally and with many sales, I was uncomfortable with the attention. In the workshop I was learning how to move with stability and flexibility so that momentum could carry me past trepidation. While the old habits of doubt and worry tugged and sometimes caused me to falter and crash, my commitment to movement and change had been made in every cell. In these past two years, by using the resources of undulation and circling and by engaging my largest muscles to support a strong connection to the ground beneath my feet, I was able to pursue my artist-self.

The greatest challenge for me was claiming private space and time for studio work. A taste of this in the first summer semester propelled me to claim it in the winter. Ironically I not only had to pack up my studio but my whole house for a move. My new studio was even more central and shared than before; it was also darker and smaller and very exposed to others. At first I found it impossible to acquaint myself with an underdeveloped trait (to move toward being an ‘artist’) when I sensed I could be interrupted at any moment and worse – observed or questioned about this new acquaintance. I decided to write a letter from my smallest voice to my largest trait:

Dear Caregiver,

I really respect what you do and I know much of Lindsay’s inspiration is because of you. In fact I as an artist am greatly influenced by your care for others. I’m also inspired and moved by those you care for – my art incorporates how I feel about them – but to be

honest, I'm not allowed to do any art. It's really not working at all with a few hours here and there.

I need to explore. I need to indulge. I need solitude and attention. Please give me some loving care. Please protect me from distraction. Please guard my door from intruders.

Thank you,

Artist

During the second summer and winter, several different family matters became so pressing I was obligated to put my personal quest on hold. I kept very aware of the interrupted journey so as not to lose my place within it. With spring came a new-found dedication. Spurred by time constraints and an overflow of internal material to work with I declared a promise to my inner artist:

Dear Artist,

I will listen for your quiet voice. I will ask you to speak louder. I promise to care for you as well as anyone.

Sincerely,

Caregiver

I claimed space and as an artist I grew.

What I Learned

Community has always been very important to me, but over the course of several years, I lost touch with many people. I let go of groups and I narrowed my focus on work and family. Reviewing my journal revealed I was entering two educational programs – Undercurrents dance and the M.Ed. art program – with a conscious desire to regain community resourcefulness. I wanted to make new connections. In my journal I'd referenced Deepak Chopra, "In building community there are three things to remember. 1. In Gandhi's words, BE the change you want to see in the world. 2. Share your story. 3. Make a difference."

I look back at the first Undercurrents weekend (September 2008) and I recall disclosing to my pod of five dancers, “I’m lonely”. Having several work situations and little or no contact with peers meant my work life was quite compartmentalized and isolated. Though I had frequent contact with family my interactions were primarily practical. Time with friends had diminished as they grew busy with their own families. I needed camaraderie.

The intensity of this past year not only came by my husband’s illness but also by maintaining my life in the face of upheaval. I chose to work (for a small non-profit society struggling to exist with diminishing funds), to hold onto my M.Ed. quest, to care for the home and to *communicate*. My husband requested I keep friends informed on his behalf by writing e-mails. Many were *his* old friends who I hardly knew, and I was unsure about what to say. How much of my story do I share? How much of my husband’s story is my own? Despite questions and misgivings I slowly built up a network of people to whom I felt connected.

Having been a person who kept my sorrows private, I underwent a transformation this winter as a participant of Undercurrents. I experienced a profound liberation. Over several months my husband’s health crisis provided so much emotional material that it was difficult to dance. I felt like I was submerged in molasses. It was equally difficult to accept the dancing support of others, but this offered a way to open to possibilities. Frightened as I was, the engaging sway and gentle contact of others served to free me. In retrospect I was astounded by the interchange of vulnerabilities, and realized what had transpired was a strengthening of self and community.

Working with and beside artists in the M.Ed. program greatly bolstered my identity as artist. Within this circle the title became automatic, expected, less charged with angst, more fuelled with camaraderie. By spring 2010 I had developed a strong relationship with my artist self. I trusted and attended to my abilities, providing the time, space and privacy required for visually expressing a deeply personal and meaningful story.

All three of these communication feats (writing, dancing, and painting) were offered to friends as well as people I barely knew, and yet careful and deliberate revelation of my ‘deeper’ story proved to be mutually beneficial rather than socially dangerous.

Further Repercussions of Sharing Deeply

I have confidence in myself. I think I’ve gained skills in recognizing subtle changes in my physical, emotional, cognitive and psychic fields. I’ve practiced ways of negotiating commitments and obligations to others and my own needs, wants and goals. I’ve always practiced this, but never when the stakes were so high on so many fronts. These past two years have been monumental for all in my household. As a ‘hub’ type person I’ve changed. I can move out of the way to reduce my load of responsibility, to attend to private concerns, to allow others the opportunity for coordinating and strengthening their lines of communication.

Listening to my artistic needs has softened me. I do not hold onto my other roles so tightly. I do not hold onto my pain so tightly. I do not hold onto an image of stability – I just feel more stable.

My hope as an educator is that this confidence in my own artistic expression emanates to others and offers inspiration. I can now fully support artistic growth because I support it in myself. I used to promote others at my expense. How could that have continued? Now I can truly model enthusiasm. Recently one of my dance students wrote me a letter:

Dear Lindsay,

I'd like to thank you for your guidance on this, my special life journey. Your insight, sensitivity, and caring nature allowed me to explore and reflect on my inner self. Most appreciated was the safe and warm environment you created ... only then was I able to slowly let go of all that held me back from moving forward.

What you've also shown me is that, individually, we're all on a journey of life. May your journey be filled with courage, mutual support, and love.

You are a difference maker!

Sincerely, Sherri

I am more capable of offering these qualities because I received them from the M.Ed. in Art Education faculty and cohorts, and thus am able to offer these same qualities to myself. I have learned new ways to share my story. This in turn has led me to BE the change I want to see in the world, and has helped me to make a difference in others lives.

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