

Living Love: Confessions of a Fearful Teacher

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All the questions I need to ask; the stories I have yet to hear. The heart's two chambers—everything I most desire, everything I most fear. (Keefer, 1998, p. 291)

There is no liberty in fear, there is only power. (Richards, 2010, pp. 92-93)

Can secular institutions of higher education be taught to use writing to foster a kind of critical optimism that is able to transform idle feelings of hope into viable plans for sustainable action? (Miller, 2005, p. 27)

... the world is, was, and ever will be full of wonder. (Cook, 2003, p. 81)

1

As an education scholar and poet, I am constantly asking questions like: Who am I? Who am I in relation to the world? How should I live? What are the responsibilities of a human being in the contemporary world?

When I first heard the news that Osama bin Laden had been killed by an elite team of American soldiers, I knew a complex and tangled nexus of emotions: relief, wonder, sadness, fear. For at least a decade, Osama bin Laden had lingered in my imagination like a spectre of destruction, mayhem and hatred. I seem to have no control over the objects of my fear. I fear terrorism and I especially fear the ways that terrorists are conjured as fearsome. Even when the most notorious terrorist in the world is killed, I cannot rejoice in the death of another human being. With the news of Osama bin Laden's death, the fears I know intimately and constantly did not evaporate. Instead the fears only grew. So, I turn again to writing, my writing and the writing of others, in order to understand my experience of fearfulness. In *Writing at the End of the World* Richard E. Miller (2005) asks:

Is it possible to produce writing that generates a greater sense of connection to the world and its inhabitants? Of self-understanding? Writing that moves out from the mundane, personal tragedies that mark any individual life into the history, the culture, and the lives of the institutions that surround us all? (p. 25)

As I write and critically reflect on my writing, I am constantly challenged by the ways that writing opens up possibilities for hope, even at the same time that I grow more aware of the dangers of writing, the ways that writing seductively weaves hopeful possibilities while always remaining wild and uncontrollable. Like Miller (2005) understands: "The danger of the written word is ... its promise; the fact that it can't be finally and completely controlled means that it forever retains the power to evoke new possibilities" (p. 194).

2

In *A Charlie Brown Christmas* by Charles M. Schulz (1965) Charlie Brown visits Lucy's psychiatric booth and seeks advice:

Charlie: I am in sad shape...

Lucy: Well, as they say on TV, "the mere fact that you realize you need help indicates that you are not too far gone." I think we better pinpoint your fears. If we can find out what you're afraid of, we can label it. Are you afraid of responsibility? If you are, then you have hypengyophobia. How 'bout cats? If you're afraid of cats, you have ailurophasia. Are you afraid of staircases? If you are, then you have climachaphobia. Maybe you have thalassophobia. This is a fear of the ocean. Or gephyrobia, which is the fear of crossing bridges. Or maybe you have pantophobia. Do you think you have pantophobia?

Charlie: What's pantophobia?

Lucy: The fear of everything.

Charlie: That's it!

With Charlie's exultant realization that his feeling of being in "sad shape" is connected to his "fear of everything," I, too, acknowledge how much of my life has been lived in fear. I have written about love and hope in education (Leggo, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2009, 2011; Sameshima & Leggo, 2010), but now I wonder if I write so much about love and hope because I am actually so fearful. I am growing old, and the past suddenly seems extraordinarily expansive while the future has grown brief and uncertain. I live a life full of privileges, but when I reflect on my past, I am most steadily struck by the memory of wanting something, always something more.

3

I have been a teacher all my adult life, and I have often promoted the need for love in education. Recently in a faculty meeting I recommended that our teacher education program ought to be focused on love. Colleagues smiled, and some even chuckled, but I was quickly convinced

that my proposal was not likely to be taken up any time soon! Why do we fear love? Of course, you might think that is a reckless, rhetorical question, too abstract, too romantic, too idealistic to be seriously taken up as the *raison d'être* for organizing and operating a teacher education program. Somebody might ask, "What has love got to do with it?" I just don't know how we can live together in the world without love. We all need to nurture an ongoing love ethic and practice. We all need to infuse our lives with love. We all need to refuse to let fear rule and ruin our lives.

What do I mean when I promote love as the heart of a teacher education program? I certainly don't mean that I will like all my students or colleagues equally. I certainly don't mean that I will not sometimes well up with despair and frustration and hopelessness. Of course, teaching is tough. So is living. Most of us seldom ever live a whole day without some inconvenience, nuisance, disaster, tragedy poking us behind the knee or crashing down on top of our heads. Life is full of unseasonable rain and sun, strong winds that invariably seem to blow in the *wrong* direction, good news and bad news, gifts and bills, praises and insults. Some suffer far more than others, but none of us is immune to pain, and hopefully none of us ever becomes inured to pain because pain is a reminder that life is complex and mysterious, never to be taken for granted. In the tangled midst of the events, experiences, and emotions of each day's living, we need to be careful that we do not perceive the world as fearful only.

4

In his moving memoir *There Is a Season* Patrick Lane (2004) reflects on his childhood: "I can ask myself when I was first afraid of love and go back to my childhood and find there stories enough to illustrate my fear" (p. 210). Like Lane, I too can find lots of stories to account for my fears, especially the abiding fear of love. And like Barbara Gates (2003) I am

always seeking “to see beneath the individual story to the ways of human beings—fallible, sometimes poignant, with our fears and our yearnings” (p. 149).

5

Nan’s Brooch

My grandmother could never understand how
young women could kiss old men on *Another World*.

Oh, that old thing. She loved Bob Barker
like she loved salt, ordered from Carter’s Store

pickled pig’s knuckles, herring and turbot,
sneaked salt meat into the pot when Carrie wasn’t
looking,

laughed over salt cabbage, craved salt
like winter-starved deer on *The Forest Rangers*

where Gordon Pinsent, the only Newfoundland actor
we knew after Joey Smallwood, took care of the world,

while my brother and I resurrected Camelot in blankets,
our grandmother trapped in a kitchen corner

with a cup of tea, nowhere else to go,
till the crash of knights in battle left her

a damsel in distress. I’m going to tell your mother,
as soon as she gets home. She never did.

One Christmas I gave my grandmother a sterling
silver brooch from Silver's and Sons on Water Street.

I asked Mr. Silver to engrave the back,
I love you, Nan,

words I'd never said to my grandmother, though
at sixteen, home just left behind, I wanted

to say the words. I gave my grandmother the brooch.
Read the back, Nan. She rubbed her eyes.

She couldn't see the words. Carrie read the words.
We all smiled. Always so many silent letters

in our story, but in the back of the brooch, concave,
I saw my grandmother and me upside down,

as I ride vertiginous each day a playground ride
spinning on an axis while I cling to the edge of a circle

and remember my grandmother who lived in the margins,
never in the world, never out of the world,

brought to her by neighbours, TV, and *The Western Star*,
and our final New Year's Eve, long ago, not so long ago,

when I stayed with my grandmother while Skipper
and Carrie went to a party. I slept in my old bed.

When the year ended with gunshots and pots,
I found my grandmother scratching the floor.

I picked her up. I put her back in bed.
I tucked the blankets in tight under the mattress,

the way my brother and I once built Camelot.
After decades when she seldom left the house,

my grandmother in her last year was bent on escape.
I didn't tell Carrie. My grandmother never told on me.

6

In a recent conference presentation I commented that as I grow older I feel like I have less courage than I once had. When I recall how I lived in my thirties and forties, I grow concerned that I have lost my characteristic commitment to speak truthfully, to engage with prophetic imagination, and to challenge the dominant discourses that shape my lived experiences in both the academy and the community. I wonder if I have grown complacent, compromised, and complicit. R. Michael Fisher heard my comment and invited me to address my concern by considering his writing about fearlessness. I have known Michael for many years, and I have always been challenged by his art and his writing and his scholarly and pedagogical commitments. With Michael's invitation, I read his book *The World's Fearlessness Teachings* (2010) and I wrote a short response which Michael included on his blog (<http://fearlessnessteach.blogspot.com>). I am grateful for Michael's invitation, and for his teachings, and especially for motivating me to continue writing about fear and being fearful.

I regard R. Michael Fisher's (2010) *The World's Fearlessness Teachings* as essential reading for educators. It is a complex and wise book that

deserves careful attention. Reading *The World's Fearlessness Teachings* reminds me of experiences with Atlantic Ocean winter storms. I grew up in Newfoundland on the North Atlantic coast, and storms were a frequent part of daily experience. Even as a boy, I learned that I needed to lean into Atlantic gusts, to embrace the wind, snow, and rain, not with stoic fortitude, but with poetic enthusiasm. While I learned to live with Atlantic storms, I was less successful learning to live with the storms that blew frequently through each day's quotidian and domestic circles. I grew up in a home where fear resided like a ghost who was too familiar to be evicted.

7

My Grandmother and Knowlton Nash

my grandmother's world
was framed by her bedroom window

with eyes almost blind she saw
a twilight world of shapes and shadows

the harbour and the paper cargo ships
on which her husband once sailed as cook

the world's largest pulp and paper mill
where her brother worked for a day

the Blow-Me-Down Mountains
where her father had been a guide

Meadows across the harbour and at night,
lights where a daughter's house had been

with eyes grey-sad my grandmother saw
a haphazard world, helter-skelter, no shelter

and like an air traffic controller
she tried to organize and direct her world

every night flitted back and forth
between her room and the telephone, calling,

checking on the children and grand-children,
everyone home? everyone safe?

always flying with the northeast trade winds,
said Skipper, I wish she'd get stuck in calms

but she was forever sailing on the waves
of her fears, unending tempests

the world like the underside of a tapestry
woven by Knowlton Nash in the multi-colored

threads of disaster, danger, disease, death,
destruction, depravity, debacle, damnation

when I told her from grade eight geography
Newfoundland was in the Tropic of Cancer

she was convinced we would all get cancer
and when Knowlton Nash reported the mystery

of Legionnaire's disease, my grandmother
heard engineer's disease and feared

her son and grandson, both engineers,
would get the dread unknown disease

nothing to worry about, Missus, said Skipper;
no, nothing, she replied, but I'm still

worried, and Skipper nodded, knowing
nothing cannot be fixed

and nights Skipper often drove downtown
and to the west side to confirm all was well

and nights my grandmother phoned the neighbours
of her children to confirm all was well

while death for me was almost always a fiction
on television, my grandmother knew death,

had not so much stared death in the face
as been smothered by death like heavy blankets

her father drowned on a hunting trip
a brother crushed by a hill of pulp logs

her husband lost in a truck-train collision
a daughter and three grandsons in a house fire

like my grandmother who framed her world

in a window, a resident, uncontrollable world,

I stare through a window and try to control
my world in words like erecting cairns

to guide navigation in treacherous country
but my grandmother and Knowlton Nash

remind me constantly that the world
cannot be contained in the frame of a window

8

Fisher (2010) writes: "Life is not divided up into such neat binary packages and sides" (p. 171). Instead, "we are struggling to develop maturity from fear to fearlessness as not mere surface behavioral change, but a deep structural transformation of the very way we 'see,' 'sense our self' and 'act' in the world ethically" (p. 51). Fisher reminds me to attend to "deep structural transformation," and I know this has been my expressed commitment, but so much of life seen from the current perspective of fifty-seven years in the earth now seems superficial, specious, self-serving. What might emerge from learning to lean into the Atlantic gusts of fear with "a critical literacy of fearlessness for the 21st century" (p. 101).

9

SOS

I have stories
to tell
and language

for telling them
but still not enough.
I need others

who know
the language.
otherwise why

tell the stories
at all
when I can

live them,
except in telling stories
I hope to weave

my stories
with the stories
of others lining

a text together
a textile sufficiently
close woven

to warm reality
to let real light
through/in/out.

my writing is
always an SOS
fear of desertion

alone frantic
for rescue
connection human

foot prints in the sand
wanting the search(ers)
to return

10

So, I lean into the strong words of Fisher's writing. I am glad he is calling out his erudite and energetic vision for an education of fearlessness. He knows that "Perfect Love, like perfect non-violence (i.e., non-revenge, non-hate, non-ego) is a highly demanding ethic and consciousness to attain" (pp. 161-162), but he sustains the hope that "if we look and trust radically and deeply enough" (p. 191), we can replace the "Law of Fear" with the "Law of Love" (p. xii). This is a timely and complex vision for education in our globalized and cosmopolitan world. As I continue to linger with Fisher's words, I also linger with my own words, decades of words, in order to attend carefully to the way that fear is woven through my poetry and living like a ghost I have simply taken for granted, as if there is no other way. Fisher shows us another way—a critical and creative way that lives fearlessly in the midst of wisdom, language, and conviction.

11

Fire

in the Sahara-dry summer,
heat like a dusty musty rug,
everyone on Lynch's Lane wheezing

asthmatically in the pea soup
mustard peanut butter air,
houses exploded

God's judgment, Armageddon
on the doorstep, announced Uncle Esau;
spontaneous combustion, heat build-up,
boasted Dale, grade ten chemist;
arson, bad luck, evil spirits,
arsin' around, revenge, smoking in bed,
mumbled, whispered, wheezed others:
and only I knew though I couldn't tell

after Mugs O'Reilly's big boarding house
burned for twelve hours, the firemen left
a black rubble and I wished
I'd never hidden in the tall elm
outside Bonnie Lee's window
hoping to see her undress

Buck Cunningham's house hooked
into the side of a rock burned
and Buck like a baby crying
and running around in his underwear
telling the firemen what to do,
and I wished I'd never hidden
in the tall grass and discussed
with the boys what it would be like
to do it with Bonnie Lee and I
wasn't even sure what doing it was

and Maisie Shepherd's house burned
and I wished I'd never stared at ladies'
underwear on clotheslines, looked
at *True Detective* and *Stag* in Tom's store
when Tom wasn't looking, stood under the
iron stairway to look up Miss Robson's
dress, gave Eddy Mosher my recess money
to draw pictures of naked women, once
watched Jed and Pikey play strip poker
with Jan and Holly in the shack of spruce
boughs and cardboard deep in the woods

and I was Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
walking through fire a pyromaniac
in an asbestos suit firing the world

12

As Virginia Woolf (1976) explains:

That perhaps is your task—to find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity, to absorb every experience that comes your way fearlessly and saturate it completely so that your poem is a whole, not a fragment; to re-think human life into poetry.
(p. 22)

When I review my poetry, I am struck by how much fear is recorded, narrated, represented, and evoked in the poetry, and how seldom the fear is actually resolved. Fear dominates my life. Fisher writes about “the courage discourse” where “the focus is on ‘fears’ (fear of x, y, z), and documenting the fears and phobias *ad nauseum*, filling book after book with such classifications and ‘how to’ diagnose them and overcome

them” (pp. 140-141). When I review my poetry, composed during a quarter of a century, I find a seemingly inexhaustible list.

13

Like a Sears Catalogue of Fears

I am afraid of
the erotic, sexuality, the body.

I am afraid of
writing, especially rejection.

I am afraid of
taking risks and danger.

I am afraid of
hurting people.

I am afraid of
violence and silence.

I am afraid of anger
and disappointment.

I am afraid of
the unknown and mystery.

I am afraid of
others and insanity.

I am afraid of
bullies.

I am afraid of
loneliness and separation.

I am afraid of
growing old and dying.

I am afraid of
love and loving.

I am afraid of

being revealed as a shameful sham.

14

bell hooks (2003) claims that

[d]ominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community. (p. 197)

So, we need to embrace fear, to lean into it, to live with it as a part of the texture of everydayness. A cyclist understands intimately how cycling is sometimes with the wind and sometimes against the wind. The wind is not to be feared or despised. Instead, the wind is part of an ecological understanding of how everything and everyone is connected.

15

So, what do we need? What do we need in order to live with more courage, creativity, exploration, and experimentation? I once attended a curriculum conference in Monteagle, Tennessee. One evening a group of participants gathered in an old chapel at the conference site to read poetry and make music and share the kind of personal stories that are often not spoken at academic conferences. One woman narrated a moving story about her estrangement from her mother, and the long experience of emotional and physical abuse that led to the estrangement. All of us who gathered in the chapel were moved by the courage of our colleague to share a personal story that evoked deep and heartfelt connections to countless issues and experiences. A little later in the evening I was encouraged to read my poem titled "A Trophy." After reading the poem, a colleague I had not met prior to the conference spoke angrily about men's whining about their experiences. She

complained that my narrative was trivial and insignificant. She argued that the story of mother-daughter estrangement was serious and sincere. My story was nothing more than another boy's story of the loss of privilege in a privileged childhood characterized by masculinist hierarchical privileges where boys and men think that their every experience and emotion is somehow worth attending to and demanding attention from others! Of course, I am paraphrasing the colleague's objections to my reading "A Trophy," but I have at least alluded to the tone and intent of her criticism. I grew fearful that my fears are not sufficiently fearful! (I also learned that I need to stop taking others' responses so seriously.)

16

A Trophy

instead of hanging out in Gushue's Pool Hall
where most of the boys squandered their mothers'
quarters in pinball machines, instead of stealing
empty pop bottles from Hank Hicks' truck
while he delivered Coke to Carter's Store,

I signed the Salvation Army temperance pledge,
learned catechism for Sunday School,
memorized English kings and queens,
and tied enough knots for Boy Cubs
to win the Outstanding Cub Trophy for 1962-63,

and for years I stood like the loin-clothed
golden figure with arms stretched high,
a torch in one hand, lined abdominals,
screwed to a wooden platform, even

Baden-Powell would have been pleased,

till one summer Saturday night I lingered
on West Street with Janet and Betty
under a full blue moon, drank too many Coke
floats, and sneaked into the dark back alley
behind the Humber Pharmacy to pee

when a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman
stormed up in his cruiser, jumped out,
like he was Mannix or Cannon,
barked, stretch your arms high, over your
head, lean against the fence,

and I was the trophy figure, stiff, arms
outspread, oblique, as he frisked me, like I
was a Hell's Angel, snarled, next time,
find a public washroom, and I leaned on the fence
a long time before I climbed Hospital Hill,

still longing to be the Outstanding Cub
I couldn't tell Carrie, waiting, sipping Nescafé
at the kitchen table, her first words, what's wrong,
I said nothing, with tears pushing hard
against my face, the trophy jammed in my mouth

17

As Fisher (2010) understands, "a lot of our judging is dependent on our perspective (worldview) and development" (p. 181). So, in order to know my worldviews, I need to attend to my worldviews. Margaret Atwood (2002) claims that "*all* writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all

writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality—by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead” (p. 156). As I grow older and know I will never live as long on the earth as I have already lived, I find that I am always thinking about mortality, especially because family and friends are dying at what feels like an alarming rate! So, perhaps writing is an effort to inscribe my initials in a rock face, indelibly and deliberately declaring to the world that I have wandered this way.

18

As Italo Calvino (1995) understands, “the word connects the visible trace with the invisible thing, the absent thing, the thing that is desired or feared, like a frail emergency bridge flung over an abyss” (p. 77). So, perhaps I explore the experience of fear in my poetry so that I can cross the bridge like a metaphor that carries my meaning from one promontory to another. In *Iron John* Robert Bly (1990) evokes a keen sense of my long life of pervasive and abiding fear: “As the boy leaves for the forest, he has to overcome, at least for the moment, his fear of wildness, irrationality, hairiness, intuition, emotion, the body, and nature” (p. 14). Now in the liminal space between middle age and old age, I have never overcome my fear of wildness. Fisher (2010) encourages me to lean into my fears and learn from my fears, but he also cautions me to avoid superficial explanations and approaches. He claims that many writers about fear offer shallow advice (p. 141). I suspect that Fisher might regard my advice as shallow, but, encouraged by him to address my fears, I also don’t want to wallow in the fear that I have little to offer, especially since I know I need to begin somewhere. So, with that disclaimer or testimony, I will next offer several words of advice for addressing fear with love.

19

In *Becoming Human* Jean Vanier (1998) asks:

Is this not the life undertaking of us all . . . to become human? It can be a long and sometimes painful process. It involves a growth to freedom, an opening up of our hearts to others, no longer hiding behind masks or behind the walls of fear and prejudice. It means discovering our common humanity. (p. 1)

Love is a commitment and a practice. Love involves a daily devotion. In order to love others, we must first love ourselves. We cannot learn to love by attending to the abstract and universal. We need to begin with small acts of love. We can begin with the person with whom we are drinking coffee. If we are going to change the world, if we are going to undo the damage and destruction of prejudice, hatred, and fear, we need to start with love. We can begin each day by asking: How am I going to live this new day? We need a curriculum of love. In order to learn the wisdom, philosophy, and practice of love, we need to acknowledge that we are not alone, independent, autonomous. We are part of a vast network of connections and interconnections, all ecologically sustained in rhythms and memories and hopes.

Vanier (1998) proposes “seven aspects of love that seem necessary for the transformation of the heart” (p. 22). I think Vanier’s understanding of love offers an antidote to the pervasive dis-ease constructed and maintained by fearfulness in our schools, communities, and nations. I especially think that educators need to address these aspects of love in their classrooms. According to Vanier these aspects are: “to reveal, to understand, to communicate, to celebrate, to empower, to be in communion with another, and, finally, to forgive” (p. 22).

20

To love is to reveal

I think that we live with too many secrets, even lies. We are afraid to reveal our frailties and failures, our fractures and fissures. Why? Some years ago thieves broke into my car. Books and bags were stolen. In one of the bags was my journal. In all of my life of writing, I had never written a journal as personal as the one that was stolen. I felt vulnerable and exposed. Two months after the theft, someone telephoned the police and told them my belongings could be located on a tree stump in Pacific Spirit Park. Everything was returned, even a bottle with a few Tylenol tablets in it. Everything was returned except the diary. Confronted with the blunt reality of being exposed I asked myself, "What secrets do I have that I don't want to share?" And I realized, with the theft of that journal, there are none. Now I want my writing to be a testimony to my commitment to revel in vulnerability, truth and love. I agree with Frederick Buechner (1991) who contends that we need to tell secrets because

by and large the human family all has the same secrets, which are both very telling and very important to tell. They are telling in the sense that they tell what is perhaps the central paradox of our condition—that what we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else. (pp. 2-3)

As an educator and poet, I live much of my life in public ways. Long ago, I deliberately chose to live much of my personal experiences in public and pedagogical ways. In my poetry and teaching and living, I seek to weave a text that calls out with love.

21

To love is to understand

When the Canadian poet Margaret Avison (2002) writes that "There's too much of us/ for us to know" (p. 51), I am reminded that I will always

live in places of misunderstanding and missed understanding. So, while I eagerly endorse the often repeated advice of Socrates, "Know thyself", I also know that I can never know myself, at least not exhaustively, even especially expansively. As a writer and teacher and human being, I am always in process, seeking enough understanding to make wise, or at least sensible, decisions about each day's demands and hopes. To live in love means that I need to stand firmly in the understanding that "There's too much of us/ for us to know." Therefore, I live in love as a daily response to all that I understand and all that I know I do not understand and might never understand.

bell hooks (2003) writes:

Love in the classroom prepares teachers and students to open our minds and hearts. It is the foundation on which every learning community can be created. Teachers need not fear that practicing love in the classroom will lead to favoritism. Love will always move us away from domination in all its forms. Love will always challenge and change us. This is the heart of the matter. (p. 137)

I am committed to understanding "the heart of the matter" as learning to live with love, not fear.

22

To love is to communicate

I agree with Azar Nafisi's (2003) claim: "To have a whole life, one must have the possibility of publicly shaping and expressing private worlds, dreams, thoughts and desires, of constantly having access to a dialogue between the public and private worlds" (p. 339). How much harm is done when we live with fear of communication? There can be no communion, no community, without communication. To love is to be committed to communicating, to sharing the joyful and the dreadful stories, to speaking with confidence that you will be heard, and to

listening with care because you really want to hear what others are eager to tell. Mark Kingwell (1998) understands that “personal identity grounds our individual existence but equally it lays the foundation for social and cultural life” (p. 142). To live and to love is to communicate: “we tell stories about the past to make sense of where we stand in the present” (Kingwell, 1998, p. 301).

At the same time that I promote a hopeful view of pedagogical and community relationships, I am not naively pretending that this way of living and loving is easy to practice. As Margaret Avison (2002) knows, “Many speak languages/ I’ve never learned” (p. 22). And often I think that others have never learned the languages I speak. Perhaps all I am really claiming is that a focus on love is a daily essential for learning to live together, for learning to communicate.

23

To love is to celebrate

In a tender memoir of childhood Susan Coyne (2001) writes: “Later that night, sitting on the dock and watching the moon spill her light across the dark lake, I thought of how many kinds of enchantments there are in this world” (p. 166). What would a curriculum devoted to enchantments look like? I am a grandfather to two adorable granddaughters who live each day full of fascination with enchantments, filling each day with enchantments. To love is to celebrate, but how often do we celebrate out of a habitual commitment to routine, to the annual cycle of greeting card events? How often do we celebrate without any real joy or engagement? We live in a culture of celebrity when we need celebration. We live in a culture of litigation when we need laughter. We live in a culture of complaint when we need commendation.

Classrooms need to be places for celebration, for laughter, for acknowledging the presence and accomplishments and joys of others. Too often classrooms are places of competition and contest, places where

there is an abiding fear that there are limited resources, that only one person can win the race, that failure is inevitable. What would a curriculum of enchantments look like? What if we devoted our teaching and learning, our living curriculum, to exploring “how many kinds of enchantments there are in this world”?

24

To love is to empower

In elementary school I was afraid of the teachers, the principal, the daily fingernail inspection, missing a gold star on the poster, missing a day of school, coming second in the class in June, forgetting the facts I had eagerly memorized, smudges of aqua ink from a leaky Sheaffer fountain pen (no ballpoints allowed), bells, shouts, bells, angry voices, bells, the air filled with Dustbane, perspiration, and egg sandwiches, the leather strap like a limp tongue, like a weapon, like a baseball bat, sitting on the teacher’s shoulder like a fox fur that might bite at any moment.

The poet Robin McGrath (2005) writes about “Tears for the lost language,/ The geography of the heart” (p. 52). Even though I am leaping into old age, I still weep for what I perceive as “the lost language” that I need in order to journey in “the geography of the heart.” Elementary school taught me the elements of fear. I knew no empowerment in elementary school. All claims to power were carefully guarded by the teachers. I knew nothing of love in elementary school. I am not sure I knew much about love anywhere else either. So, how might love contribute to empowerment? Love calls out the gifts in others. Love does not seek to shape others in images that are formulaic and conventional. Love does not seek conformity that only ever leads to deformity; love seeks transformation, the ongoing organic process of creative change.

25

To love is to be in communion with another

To be in communion with another does not mean that we elide our otherness with a commitment to uniformity (even wearing a uniform). To be in communion with an/other is to recognize the otherness of the other and to learn to acknowledge the connections that are possible when we attend to the common (*communis*) in all of us. To be in communion with another, with others, we need to learn to tell our stories together, to practice an ethic of love and loving in a relationship, one with another. Wendell Berry (1990) writes:

when a community loses its memory, its members no longer know one another. How can they know one another if they have forgotten or have never learned one another's stories? If they do not know one another's stories, how can they know whether or not to trust one another? People who do not trust one another do not help one another, and moreover they fear one another. And this is our predicament now. (p. 157)

I always know that my writing can be easily dismissed as the dewy-eyed dreams of a romantic radical who has been reading too much John Dewey, Herbert Kohl, and Ted Aoki, but I have now lived a long time on the planet, and I have not lost my idealistic, even idyllic, commitment to an ideology of love. In the introduction to *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis*, Amish Morrell and Mary Ann O'Connor (2002) provide the kind of wise encouragement that reminds me I am not alone:

We are most interested in the generation of energy for radical vision, action, and new ways of being. If humans are going to survive on this planet, we need new connections to each other and to the natural world. Changing political and economic relationships is part of

the larger project of reconstituting and revitalizing all of our relationships. (p. xvii)

Quite simply, I need to live in communion with others, not in terrible fear of the otherness of others. As Mary Aswell Doll (2000) understands, “to be disillusioned is to see through illusions, to open to an amazing otherness” (pp. 52-53).

26

To love is to forgive

I agree with the novelist David Adams Richards (2010) wisdom in *God Is.: My Search for Faith in a Secular World*: “how often one betrays those who love you, even when you don’t intend to. Then you must forgive yourself. And *that* in life is as hard as anything one will ever have to do” (p. 45). I do not read or hear the words *forgive*, *forgiving*, or *forgiveness* very often in the books and essays I typically read. Perhaps forgiveness is too closely connected to a suspect or rejected Christian theology for many writers, but surely the concept and practice of forgiveness deserves our attention.

From his thoughtful position as a philosopher and Christian, Jean Vanier (1991) reminds us that “as we accept ourselves, we enter into the paths of forgiveness and wholeness” (p. 104). I regard this as profound wisdom. I have lived my life in fear, full of fears. Now I am practicing accepting myself, acknowledging the hollow in my heart, giving myself the benefit of the doubt, acknowledging the holes that sometimes look like gaping wounds but are really integral to my search for wholeness. And as I learn to know myself as a subject-in-process, an encyclopedia of stories that are hypertextually emerging and evolving, a person under construction, I also learn to live in relationship with others in daily experiences written with words of patience, hope, and affection, giving each other, and all of us, possibilities for living with love.

27

Christina Baldwin (1990) expresses my experience and lingering connections to fear:

For a long time we have been schooled to trust fear more than love. We have been told to watch out, to be self-protective, not to trust, but to stay wary, not talking to strangers. But these instructions discount our ability to follow love's rule: to *think* and do what the heart leads. When we think at the same time as we open the heart, we are connected to a wisdom much greater than the fearful whisperings of our training. (p. 191)

In order to learn how to live fearlessly I must learn how to live with love.

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