

CHAPTER 5 HAUNTINGS

Finding Voices

The meaning of a word to me is not as exact as the meaning of a flower.

Georgia O' Keeffe, 'Georgia O'Keeffe', p.1, 1977

In the previous chapter research is understood within the context of reciprocal address between researcher and participant, the outcome of which may be unknowable. Here the notion is expanded in terms of the 'hermeneutic conversation' based on the work of the philosopher Gadamer. It is a perspective which sees reality as an 'horizon of undecided possibilities', 'unfulfilled expectations and contingency' (Gadamer, 1976; 1989; Karnezis, 1987). According to Gadamer the horizon can be seen and understood from the vantage point at which one stands at a given time and:

because we are all always moving in time, accumulating experiences, ageing, the horizon of understanding – and of self understanding – is not a rigid boundary, but rather something into which we move and that moves with us. (Berman, 1998, p.5).

The methodological direction of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic provides another challenge to traditional positivist notions of truth, discussed previously, and sits comfortably with the feminist post-

structural and Foucaultian theoretical perspectives employed throughout this project which privilege the voice of the participants in an interactive relationship with a reflexive and non-hierarchical researcher (St. Pierre, 1996; Lather, 1997; Atkinson, 2001). Gadamer states that:

Hermeneutics has to do with a theoretical attitude toward the practice of interpretation, the interpretation of texts, but also to the relation to the experiences interpreted in them and in our communicatively unfolded orientations to the world (Gadamer, 1987, cited in Annells, 1996).

This approach, rather than seeking a theory, seeks understanding and therefore, according to this constructivist paradigm, 'the interpretation [of data] is open to re-interpretation and is dialectical in nature' (Annells, 1996, p.708). Gadamer articulates a horizon of understanding that is always moving and this idea appeals to me because there is provision here for multiple interpretations of data-story-reality and in this chapter I am intending to explore another reality that I see evident in the data, from where I stand. As Janet Miller writes, 'We hear the multiple voices within the contexts of our sustained collaboration and thus recognise that 'finding voices' is not a definitive event but rather a continuous and relational process' (1990, p. x-xi). In this chapter I felt a need to find a creative way to present voices not already reported in the data, but which have called to be heard. These voices reflect a different reality to that heard in Chapters 3 and 4 and therefore further destabilise notions of fixedness of self and identity that might have attached themselves to the participants thus far. In his challenge to a one-dimensional portrayal of reality and the assumptions of 'totalising images' Slattery (2001) looks to the world of art

and surrealists Rene Magritte and Jackson Pollock for an example. Slattery writes, 'Surrealism provides an opportunity for viewers to reconsider their own perceptions of familiar objects and experiences by presenting reality in new and often disturbing ways' (p.375). He makes the case for an arts-based theoretical and methodological approach to educational research, drawing on a post-structural rejection of the notion of a true self and on the work of Foucault (1972) among others to support his contention that:

...language forms do not assert anything; rather, language reveals the tentativeness of all discourses, universal and totalising discourses in particular, and demonstrates the essential insufficiency of words for expressing truth. (Slattery, 2001, p. 373).

When Slattery rejects 'a unifying rational narrative in favour of the complexity and multiplicity of the unconscious' (p. 376), expressed through art, what resonates for me is the importance, once again, of continually posing (both literally and implicitly) the existential question 'Who are you?' (and Who am I?) within research and within human contexts. The aim clearly is not to locate a static self, a definitive answer, but rather to reach new and better understandings of the human condition at the time of asking. The function of the dialogue, in Gadamerian terms, is the 'fusion' of the horizons of those communicating to reach a shared understanding: the 'hermeneutic circle of understanding'.

Whilst qualitative researchers have perhaps been accused (I have accused myself, certainly) of self-indulgence, Koch (1998) reminds us that by returning to our personal history through reflexive processes such as

journal-writing we can remain conscious of our own experience (our own horizon of understanding) and can monitor the way we conduct research and what we bring to the process. This kind of reflexive awareness informs how I address sensitive issues of research, issues of representation, analysis and interpretation. Koch writes, 'Such reflexivity is the critical gaze turned towards the self in the making of the story' (p. 1184). In the context of nursing and aged care specifically, Koch writes:

Maintaining a journal helps to locate the personal in a health-care environment which is increasingly dominated by technology and the collecting of impersonal 'information' against a background of market forces and competition. This environment alienates nurses from each other and from their patients/clients, leaving them emotionally impoverished and distanced from the basic humanity of their craft. (1998, p. 1183)

I am assembling these ideas here to support the way I am going about gathering and representing data in this chapter; what I am 'making' of it. And I *am* sometimes literally, 'going about' the data; walking around it, looking at it from different angles (gestating almost), glimpsing the realities of the personal stories, of the group stories and of my own stories as reflected in journal-writing and reflected back into and with each of the other stories: engaged with the other storytellers, as Bochner might say (2001), in the existential struggle for meaning. I have been reluctant throughout this project to pin down the research participants who shared so openly with me, to break their stories up (or down), wary of categories, shy of labels, my task is to try to weave a kaleidoscope, write the colours, script the embroidered traces that clothe human life. It was in playing with

ways of telling and with forms of analysis, indeed playing with the notion of analysis itself, that the idea of synthesis emerged: synthesis-through-story, as a way to bring-together through story, rather than sundering. This is the process I employ in this chapter with the intention to perhaps 'unsettle readers into a sort of stammering knowing' (Lather, 1997, p.288) about the lived experiences (lifeworld) of the research participants, of the notion of home, and even of myself. This hasn't been an easy journey or an easy concept to embrace and indeed it emerged after prolonged struggle within myself, a process reflected in the journal entry below.

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I have seen this notion of synthesis playing in at the back of my mind for some time now and I had been almost afraid to articulate it for fear it would disappear, evaporate under the gaze. I find I do this with new ideas, I know they're there and I acknowledge them with a sidelong glance, afraid to look directly and disturb any substance that might be gathering as if my gaze were the sun and they too fine a mist. I am torn; if I look aside for too long the idea will seep away, but if I entertain it too deeply it might blush, embarrassed, and dissolve into uncertainty. I seldom talk about such ideas when they are forming as they seem too vague, amorphous or raw, subject to challenge but unready for criticism. This too is part of my process. Also I think perhaps that these ideas belong in the liminal space where in silence they may gather strength to emerge. And so I note these kinds of ideas floating in and out somewhat uncomfortably; I am excited by them and afraid they won't deliver on their promises. I toy with them, they tease me. We play this game. Eventually, I know, I will have to commit them to paper and see what they look like in black and white:

afraid they will lose their colour, I might find them to be artfully real.

Journal entry, 2005

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Stories in the fold

I had discovered earlier that when I let my thoughts write themselves they had quite unexpected things to say.

Marion Milner, 1986, *A Life of One's Own*, p. 124

As acknowledged in the previous chapter, the post-modern reading of the situation is that there is no fixed 'self', mine or others, although there *is* the embodied self to be considered: 'the slippery subject of lived experience' (Somerville, 2004, p.56/7) and the narrated self which articulates a certain continuity of the embodied identity (Meador, 1998; Frank, 1995). The fluidity and openness of the post-modern position presupposes that the human experience is indeed not fully knowable. It is multi-layered and complex, internal and external at the same time, embracing past, present and future in the moment. MacLure invites us to 'resist resolution and embrace in-betweenness' (1996, p. 273) and, even if I might wish it (*and I have wished it*) I cannot leave this honeyed place of uncertainty and becoming, this unstable middle-ground homeland rich with potential and possibilities, for a peaceful harbour of unquestioning and certain, seeing-unseeing, static.

The third way that I want to present data from this project is indeed slippery and arises out of an experience of disjuncture with regard to the data, a sense of a story *not* being told. The story not being told resonated

like an absence for me, an in-betweenness, being-in-the-middle (the fold) a place sensed more than seen, heard more than observed – what Somerville might term the ‘space between body and language’ (2007, p.236). I paused and pondered long what this was about (for me, for the participants) and how it might be expressed. I found resonance in the thinking of St. Pierre (1997 b) who has written about the problem of translating data into words so that they can be classified and interpreted. She talks about ‘transgressive’ data (p.180) that escapes language, specifying emotional, dream, sensual and response data as also holding important knowings. Highlighting the problem of linearity in narrative – she writes:

I often felt that all the activities of the narrative – data collection, analysis and interpretation – happen simultaneously, that everything happened at once (St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 180).

Like St. Pierre I felt a need to break the linearity of my own research narrative, the imagined line that goes from planning the project, data collection, analysis of the individual stories, pulling together of the group stories and so on to draw conclusions. I cannot continue along that line because there are ‘data bits’ disjunctures I want to present in this chapter which are located in the middle of conversations. They were more like interruptions in the narratives already reported. They were like shadows sowing doubts and questions and unease at the same time as I recorded the often inspiring, gracious and always interesting interviews. These shadows, ‘hauntings’ (Rashotte, 2005), were not quite fully formed at the time of hearing. In conversation with my friend and colleague Laura, I have thought of the stories I heard as *traces* of lives and that traces too are

what are left behind after the story is told: the marks that are made on the page (the marks on this page), the treasured possessions, the valued places, the art works, the transcripts: all traces. Writer Ursula Le Guin tells us that:

To tell a story is...a way of leaving a trace, of telling how someone lived and died. If nothing else is left, one must scream. Silence is the real crime against humanity. (1992, p. 27)

So, while in the main I found the experience of gathering the stories for this research project both positive and uplifting, delighting in every single individual I met, some of the silent traces interrupted this positive storyline and were like cast shadows that darkened the main narratives of self. They disturbed and haunted me. My inner experience of these traces or shadows was that they would not stay in silence. Rashotte (2005) writes:

The word haunt embodies the notions of intimacy, frequentation, home, thinking, building and dwelling, notions that help us to understand why the stories that haunt us are so important in our lives and our nursing practice. (p. 35).

Rashotte specifies nursing practice – and I specify a research practice – that brings forth both stories (and shadows) that culminate in ‘a new story of uncertainty’ [which] ‘offers us a safer passage and a safer home than can be found in either one story alone or in subjective or objective certainty’ (Rashotte, p. 38).

The shadows that haunted me came from the more incidental messages that participants told to me; not something that one might say they inadvertently 'let slip', not something they were trying to hide or deny, it seems to me; more like silent shadows cast in the background of the conversation: something that 'slippage' itself allows, something belonging to layered experience. In the silence where the shadows gathered I heard what I shall term an *under-story* and to leave this story in the shadows would be to edit out information of importance that I gathered from the participants and to deny the responses and questioning I was feeling in my own body, the images being conjured in my brain. The under-story contained hints that all was not well and pertained mostly to the experiences of those participants who were living within aged-care accommodation. The voicing of my concerns may result in some disenchantment about the experience of older age: this reality is a bit less inspiring, a bit shorter on hope than the stories already presented. But at the same time the optimistic stories of coping and contentment may be too neat without this shadow side, too one-dimensional. In any event, having reviewed the transcripts, it seemed certain to me there was something more to tell, questions to be raised.

The questions, feelings, and images that resonated in me concerned loss, loneliness, grief, societal values and power and disempowerment structures and these are the themes, traces or shadows I now want to explore. While these themes are widely discussed in the body of literature on age and ageing (Vaillant, 1993; Nay and Garratt, 1999; Fiveash, 1998; Biggs 2005; Pilkington, 2005a), because of their shadow quality in this research project I will employ a process that plays fictively with the themes and images (Marlatt, 1990): I will 'think with' a story (Frank,

1997). My intention is to use a fiction – in this case a well known Irish myth – as a process, an interruption, that may ‘uncover[s] analytically that territory where fact and fiction coincide’ (p. 15), and, following Slattery (2001), might present another reality in a new and perhaps disturbing way. As Angela Bourke, the Irish writer and scholar, comments, ‘Fairy-legends...like any other art form...carry the potential to express profound truths and intense emotions [and] ...are particularly well suited to the expression of ambivalence and ambiguity’ (1999, p. 206).

The Children of Lir

The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers

J. Butler, 2004, p. 146

There’s a story I know, it is the story of The Children of Lir. A familiar story, a story of families, a story of love and loss, of appreciation and engagement, a story you have heard before...

Fadó, fadó, i dtús an tsaoil agus draíocht san aer, do mhair Rí darbh ainm Lir. Ba de shlíocht Tuatha de Dannainn, an cine daonna diaga, a bhi i gceannas iath ghlas Eire é Lir, agus dob inion chríonna an Ard Rí, a bhean céile...

Long ago, when the earth was young and there was always magic in the air, there lived a king named Lir. Lir was one of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the divine race which ruled over all green Ireland, and his wife was the eldest daughter of the High King. They were blessed with four children: three sons, and a daughter, Fionnuala.

Fionnuala was the eldest and next came Aedh, and then the twins Fiachra and Conn. The king and queen loved their children more than anything else in the world, and, for a while, they were happy.

You will remember that the story continues with the death of the beloved mother and the positioning of her sister Aoibha as stepmother in her place and the subsequent alienation of the children, resulting in dire consequences.

Aoibha directed the children to swim in the lake and while they were there Fionnuala saw her stepmother draw a druid's wand from under the folds of her cloak and raise her arms. The queen began to chant a hypnotic incantation, and she brought the wand down, touching the children each in turn upon the brow. In an instant where the children had stood there were now four beautiful white swans. She doomed them to spend 300 years on Lake Derravaragh near their home, 300 years on the cold Sea of Moyle between Ireland and Scotland, and 300 years on the Isle of Glora (Inis Glóra) in the wild Atlantic Ocean. There to stay until the sound of a bell was heard.

'Oh Aoibha,' Fionnuala pleaded, 'Why are you so cruel?' Aoibha paused, remembering how she had once been a mother to the children, and her heart softened a little, 'You will keep your own minds, your own hearts and your own voices', she said.

Their singing voices were so sweet that their song could console all who heard it.

Aoibha hurried away from the shore, horrified by her deed.

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Here is a story where, through a direct violent address, humanness is lost. With their humanity taken, the children are separated from the human world; set adrift on the wild seas to fend for themselves for long years. As we will see, the story later tells how they are returned to the human world when their faces are restored through a different form of address. The central drama of effacement is clear; this is the primary experience of the children of Lir. To borrow from Butler (2004), they no longer come under the rubric of the human, and the alienation that results from this is complete. While the voice remains in some form and it sweetens the air, it cannot call for aid unless there is someone placed who will listen and see. Aid may come of its own volition through an address and action: there may not be a happy ending.

I will suggest there may be another story beyond this one overtly narrated, that perhaps there is more to be told than the surface story. If there is a hidden story it is the one in the fold: where the inside is an operation of the outside (St. Pierre, 1997b, p.178, citing Deleuze, 1988, p. 97 and Badiou, 1994, p.61). In other words I think we cannot always know what is on the inside of a life, of a story, but we can try, as I will do here, to get some

understanding by asking questions, by interrogating the clues and shadows and our own responses. In the echoes from the fold we can, as researchers, hear other voices to those we have recorded, we can hear the non-dominant stories, the alternative narratives (the under-stories). We can recognise multiple identities, as opposed to totalising images and, with a willingness to embrace this multiplicity, new stories and new ways of understanding and re-presenting reality can emerge.

The Children of Lir story, for example, invites easy judgements and taking of sides by presenting the convenient binaries of one-dimensional identities – innocent children and evil stepmothers. However, even in this clear-cut fiction, some slippage occurs in the questions that arise for me; not only from what is said but from what is left unsaid. For example, if I look at why the king married Aoibha, I can answer that it was in order to provide his children with a mother after the death of their own. But I could continue to ask: With their mother dead, did he think she could so easily be replaced? Could their home be so easily reconstituted? Did he not see how the relationship between Aoibha and his children was developing? Spot the dangers? Fail to see the complexities? With a kind of revisionist looking at the story I want to ask, ‘What has been edited out?’ Did the king lapse into a kind of mental laziness rather than take the trouble to see? Or did he have his own needs to satisfy while making himself believe he was thinking of the children: ‘I’m doing it for them’, ‘It’s for their own good’. What did he not see when we can clearly see in retrospect it was not for their good? Do we sometimes find ourselves saying: It will be easier for me to manage, it will be easier all round, more convenient, less bother to everybody, it’s for the best, better for you...? How often do we rationalise that we are doing something ‘*for their own good*’ or ‘*by the book*’ without looking at our own motivations or the motivations of those

we obey? If we looked more closely might we find we were in fact acting for 'our own good' or for that of a third party. Or for no good.

And Aoibha, what was it about her that caused her to take the action she took? Perhaps she was evil. Perhaps she was a young woman given in marriage to an old man, her own individuality lost, expected to take on the role of mother to someone else's children, expected to be someone she was not. Jealousy and resentment against her husband perhaps, her perception that the children were 'too demanding' perhaps; tiredness developing into anger perhaps; the development of a desire to dominate and control perhaps: the temptation to lash out, for are we ourselves not 'vulnerable to the worlds we enter'? (Mitchell & Charmaz, 1996, p.159). Striking out is easy enough when those we blame are under our power: Take away their choices; render them faceless, their humanity stripped away, their lives are made precarious. Did Aoibha deserve her fate, given her own story? Perhaps for the misuse of power she did.

*The treacherous queen was transformed into a demon of the air,
to be tossed on the winds forever. On a stormy night you can still
hear her howls.*

Why did the children not tell their father about her growing resentment, of their fears, before it was too late? Perhaps they tried to protect him from the truth. The weak protecting the strong. From what? From himself? From the burden of knowledge? Of having to do something? Because they loved him. Twice-made powerless. They continued to protect him in their own dire circumstances:

Fionnuala saw the anguish on her father's face, and longing to comfort him, she began to sing. Her brothers joined in, lifting their voices to the skies. Oh! The silver of the moon was in that song. It was softer than any human voice, and sweeter than any bird song. As the old king listened to the beautiful music his broken heart was soothed.

So, their voices remained, however the voices were marginalised now, located in bodies that are non human. Some say their father stayed by the shores of the lake until he grew old and died, others that after they flew north to the Sea of Moyle they never saw their father's face again. All the versions of the story tell of loss of home and family and of how the time was long and in time there was nobody to listen, no one to understand or care. Being very old the Children of Lir experienced many deaths, deaths of family and friends, and were doomed to live on lonely and bereft. They managed by sheltering under the wings of the stronger, doggedly hanging on, finding solace where they could. Bearing the pain. Making the best of it. Tired of this world and the griefs of a long lifetime.

The wind howled and moaned. Lightening tore the sky. The swan-children were buffeted about by the wild waves and dashed against sharp rocks. Fionnuala gathered her brothers under her wings and held them close, the youngest laid his head against her breast. It was a harsh life with little food and the years passed slowly in that desolate place.

This misery must continue until the spell is undone and the human face is restored. This requires a new way of looking and seeing, a new form of address:

At last they came to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and there they found the tiny island of Inis Glóra. Here at long last they rested. Once more they felt the gentle kiss of the sun, warming their bones. But things had changed. A new race now ruled the green lands. The old gods had gone underground, transformed into sídhe, fairy folk, and faded into myth and the people now worshipped the Christian god. The children of Lir had themselves become legends.

A hermit called Mochaomhóg built a chapel on Inis Glóra. He had heard the legend of the Children of Lir and sought them out, for he knew that the time of their release must be near. The swans heard the clear sound of a chapel bell ringing out across the island and drew close. The hermit listened to their story and their sad sweet singing. 'Do not be afraid,' he said, 'I will help you.' He blessed them and while he prayed the spell was broken and the swans' plumage fell away revealing not the radiant forms of Danann youth, but four frail old people.

As the feathers floated away they were free at last.

They lived to the end of their days with the kindly man and when at last they left this world the Children of Lir were buried

together in one grave, Fionnuala holding her brothers close as she had done in life.

The hermit returned the face to these who were dispossessed of it, those who had been made non-human. He sought them out and heard of their story: When Mochaomhóg listened to their account and heard their voices, the blessing he gave through this action brought back the face and they were made human again. To borrow liberally from Judith Butler's writing, he gave them the opportunity to become 'self-narrating beings' (2005, p.11). Perhaps the address was traumatic: traumatic for Mochaomhóg to be confronted by their grievous plight, by their ancient faces and bodies, for they are naked, exposed and vulnerable; traumatic for them too, but not so much as Aoibha's address had been. No, it can't have been easy for any of them, but for Mochaomhóg, on account of the vulnerability of the other, a 'primary ethical claim' (Butler, 2005, p. 31, citing Adriana Cavarero's *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*) had been made on him and he had to act, and his action brought them back into the community of the human.

*And so the children of Lir found peace at last. But the hermit, it is said, sorrowed for them to the end of his days.**

*Story adapted from *Clann Lir: The Children of Lir*, by D. Casey and D. Mayo, 2003.

Stories That Haunt Us

The point of a story should not be taken as a fixed formal aspect of the story as originally told, but rather may change in the course of the narration and surrounding conversation as speaker and audience negotiate for what the story will be agreed upon to be about.

L. Polanyi, 1979, *So What's the point?*

In introducing the idea that some stories become important in our lives and do indeed haunt us, Rashotte (2005) writes:

Stories express our concerns and anxieties, they deliver moral judgements, and they contain ironies and ambiguities that we may only partly understand (p. 35).

She goes on: 'The stories that haunt us create a path to meaning. They are the place in which we need to dwell' (p. 36). The Children of Lir is a haunting tale of the creation of the 'other' and the allocation of the other by force to a liminal place, here understood in the more negative light of a 'social limbo', a place 'where the familiar may be stripped of its certitude' (Turner, 2002, p.1). With human voices, songs and emotions, the swan children are ambiguous creatures and in this sense their liminality might be likened 'to death...to invisibility, to darkness, to the wilderness, to the eclipse of the sun and the moon' (Turner, 1969, p. 95). 'Betwixt and between' is often not a comfortable place to be.

The uncomfortableness of the liminal place, the threshold, has been discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to the patients at St. Jude's hospital where I visited my aunt and got to know some of the other women on her ward. I told how the discomfort (helplessness, despair) I initially

experienced there was unhelpful to me in my visiting as well as in my researcher role and got in the way of my being available in a positive way to those with whom I spoke. That was over a year ago at the time of writing, and at that time I used a Husserl-inspired bracketing technique to dispel the discomfort I felt in the face of the particularity of the patients' situation of dementia infirmity passivity as I saw it. Acting on my friend's advice I was able to put the barrier of my self-which-was-discomforted to one side and be more fully available to the person I was talking with. I have discussed the beneficial effects of this standpoint previously. Now I want to circle round and embrace the discomfort again because that very discomfort foregrounds the face that I am wanting to see and represent at this time. The juxtaposition of the narrative genres of myth and academic text is used to bring about the foregrounding of the experiences of face and no-face in relation to the work of this project.

This development in my thinking and way of being, tracked reflexively in my journal, can easily be understood in relation the Gadamerian horizon metaphor: 'the wide superior vision that the person who is seeking to understand must have' (Gadamer, 1975 cited in Annells, 1996, p. 707). In order to gain this wider vision one must of necessity be aware of one's own pre-understandings ('prejudices') and of how these change over time. Spending time with these women brought about a broadening of my horizon, a transformation. I would say, from a feminist post-structural theoretical stance – both ontologically and epistemologically – that this was an experience of my self 'in a process of becoming' (Davies, 2000; Somerville, 2007, p. 234). I have been reflecting as I write on the very great change that I did experience from that depressing (sad, helpless) period (for me) of visiting at St. Jude's hospital, and of attending to some of my aunt's needs in her dementia, to now, when I enjoy chatting to the women on the wards and shall miss the very attentions which I learned to

give joyously and which blessed me in return. My aunt has been present throughout this project so far, but now that story too has moved on:

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Last Sunday (July 2 2006 at the time of writing) I visited my aunt for the last time. She had become more frail in the two weeks since my previous visit when she had opened her clear brown eyes, my mother's eyes, my eyes, and responded with smiles and words when I evoked family names and memories: 'Dolores will be home in June. She's coming to see you,' 'That's nice.' 'Did you hear Charlie was sick? What did you think of him?' 'Oh, he's charming,' she remembers correctly her boss of 60 years ago, a prominent public figure who has just died amid huge media attention, but I don't tell her that.

She had clearly lost weight since the previous visit. Due to a chest infection she was given antibiotics and we thought she may also be sedated for she was unable to take the offered and essential fluids. I was worried after unsuccessfully trying for a time to give her a drink, and I rang my sister, a nurse, with my concerns. She would call to our aunt early in the morning. I would visit on Tuesday.

My aunty Ina died within an hour of my leaving. We took her home the next day and watched with her for two nights in my sister's front room. The extended family came during that period.

They prayed, remembered, drank tea, laughed, and some even made wishes. We celebrated her life on Wednesday with prayers and song at a funeral Mass. I miss her. I realise that even as she was in St. Jude's, she was herself and my world is changed for her being gone from it.

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By bracketing my earlier negative feelings I had been able to be helpful to my aunt. But, just as importantly, in the very act of doing so I believe I was enlarging my own vision and horizon of understanding, and therefore my aunt's face (identity) was restored to me. With this clear vision I wrote the response prayers for the Mass that honoured her life.

The idea of now circling back to the feeling of discomfort, the place of 'social limbo' the field where the 'shift in subjectivity' (St. Pierre, 1997a) occurred for me, is not with a view to going back there permanently because, as St. Pierre reminds us, 'once such a shift occurs it is impossible to go back' (p. 410), but in order to go on with the story of my participants and to re-own that discomfited self (which is now part of my own layered identity) and the ethical subjectivity that is informed by it. Into this experience of discomfort, re-experienced at times in conversation with the participants of this study, I wrote about the Children of Lir as a response to and a way of thinking differently about the data / stories / experiences and as a way of bringing to the fore field and story and sensation and shadow; shifting subjectivities, or what St. Pierre might term 'folded subjectivities'. She writes:

It is in the field that reality reconfigures and stalks the text. It is in the text that the subject grōans and twists out of signification. Subjectivity fails and reforms in the fieldwork and the text-work ...the real is lost and recovered; language touches bodies; words survey wounds (St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 411).

St. Pierre sees the shifting subjectivity of the researcher as a position that produces transgressive 'response data' (1997b, p. 184) and I look at Lir from this standpoint; a way to tell, to honour, to face. It takes me away from the participants to bring me back to them. It is not a device I deliberately constructed, but a story that intruded (emerged) into my thoughts from my own subjectivity / culture / land / horizon / memory.



Figure 14 *The Children of Lir*

An image that sticks in my mind is that of the bronze statue in the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin which depicts the changing of the children into swans, the terrible transition forever frozen in time. When I look at it I know what went before what comes after: it is all there in the image before me.

I bring other images to the fore now, specifically those that rested in the shadows of the participants' interviews. The image of Margaret, for example, sitting in a small lounge room identical to every other lounge room (except for the colour of the sofa which comes in red or blue) in the cramped campus of 50 small houses (lounge/kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, more being built). The handkerchief lawns are regimented in neat rows each overlooking the other behind the high metal fence which secures the aged-care unit. Margaret's small soft hands (no longer able to sew) are folded on her lap, her face is patient and kind, her voice gentle and considered, she waiting for dinner time / lunch time for there's no stove in this house:

I loved cooking...I just feel as if I'm being waited on instead of looking after myself...I feel so useless at times.

Waiting for whoever will drop by? Waiting with a bad heart. Waiting.

I live from day to day...I just feel I can't plan.

Her marital home waits, locked up now, empty, full of memories and dreams of her deceased husband:

The dreams were very clear...he was always with me...I'd wake up feeling very distressed...because I knew he was gone...it was

only a dream... I think that was one of the reasons why the family thought it was a good idea for me to move...

My grandson said, 'Nan, you never really let go...that's one good reason why you [should] move out of the house.'

She remembers clearly the day she left:

My son locked up and I never looked back...if I'd looked back I think I would have started to cry...the boys had an alarm system put through and I know nothing about that. I don't even know the numbers.

Maybe she will return home:

My husband designed and built it and we had a lovely garden and my home was always open for nieces and nephews...I always had more than my family there. It's just as I left it because if I can't settle here I can go home...some mornings I wake up feeling very homesick.

Fortunate to have the option of going home – *I just feel like... on an even keel, because I know it's there* – not really an option with the high steps to the house and the winter coming on, so her son would stack the wood in the laundry room to save her the constant trips downstairs and outside:

I felt I was depending on him, not that he minded, he didn't, but I didn't want him to feel that he was tied to looking after mum...I didn't want to be a nuisance

And the family advising what's for the best:

'If you don't want to stay here, Mother, you haven't got to.'

Oh I think they both knew how I felt ...the other son said, 'Think of it as a holiday, Mother.'

My daughter-in-law, she thinks I've made the right move...of course I can see her point of view too because I'm her mother-in-law, well there's quite a story about mothers-in-law, isn't there?... and I know she's thinking of my own good...

Margaret decided to plant nasturtiums under the window as she loves gardening, but there have been many changes:

I feel enclosed at times...I very much miss the birds...I had big trees around my home [and] there were always birds everywhere. But here there are no birds.

She doesn't dream as much, but the memory of her husband is very much with her, she hasn't 'let go'. In fact, she says:

Our life together is more or less what I'm living on...that's how my life was and I know I had it. But I can never have it again.

Margaret's past experience and inner strength helps her to manage:

I grew up in the country where you more or less had to depend a lot on yourself. And I think that has helped me to cope.

This is the story in the shadows – the one Margaret didn't emphasise, the one I didn't think I left her home with on the day of the interview because at the time I was filled with the resonances of love and fortune and appreciation of a life guided by the motto: *If you give love, you get it back*. The shadows continued to gather arising from my concerns and distrust, my fears. I don't want to imply that the life in the aged-care facility is in fact gloomy and negative or that the staff there don't care and that there aren't real friendships to be made, that family don't mean well. Rather I want to ask questions. I want to ask questions like, 'Do we render the older people faceless and powerless, and in what ways do we do this?'

Now I see the form of Stephen sitting on his easy chair easily on the small verandah of his aged-care unit; his mind always at home, his body

elsewhere. Tired of this world, ancient at 97 years. Wanting to be home on the farm or home with his deceased wife and with God, wanting not to be here:

No place like home. We loved home...I'm still out there but I'm in here...my mind's out there.

Time has passed and a new generation has taken over the old homestead, people with new beliefs and priorities. The old ways have gone. Things have changed:

They found a few white ants, so they said, 'We're going to pull it right down altogether.' So they are going to pull it down altogether and build a new one.

I've got nothing to do with it now. I'm right out of it altogether.

Family are nearby and sometimes visit, but Stephen can see how the land lies for him:

As far as I'm concerned I'm on my own.

He tells us about meals in the aged-care facility – the food served to our senior citizens may leave a lot to be desired and, in typical understatement, Stephen confides, *The cooking, I'm not at all in love with.* But he deals with the problem creatively:

I get a lot of biscuits...If anybody brings me a couple of pies I put them in the fridge...they've got a microwave and I've got my toaster...And if there's something I don't like at the kitchen I don't tell them but then I'll come down and I'll warm my pie up or get apples out home at the orchard. I'll bake a couple of apples in the microwave. It only takes eight minutes and I have two apples baked.

Stephen doesn't complain about the situation he finds himself in, he would rather spare the staff:

I sympathise with [them]. I don't like it but you've got to understand their position as well as your own...I save them all I can.

You don't talk to any of the staff here at all because they don't have time to talk to you...I can go all day here and won't speak to anybody.

Stephen adapts to a situation where there are not enough staff even to spend some time talking. This he admits *makes it a lot lonely*.

Pearl at 90 years also struggles with her situation. She wants to spare others from her pain:

In the beginning, when I was unhappy I told them and he said, 'Mum we are so unhappy because you are unhappy.' So I stopped... [My son] doesn't like me to be unhappy, you know, so I don't tell him everything...he wants me to be happy here. So that's why I don't...

Like Stephen, she also has concerns in relation to staff that she has observed closely in her ten years residency in an aged-care facility. She understands staffing and industrial relations issues and she understands the power differential between residents and staff and that it is not in her favour:

I see a lot the things, which I shouldn't...You should be there not seeing anything, not hearing anything, and definitely not saying anything. But I do. And that is what makes me difficult.

I have come across this word before – 'difficult'. Difficult is an interesting word (signifier). It is akin to *awkward*, which a registered nurse (RN) in

an aged-care hospital told me is practically a medical term there – what I might call a ‘discursive diagnosis’ – appearing as it does on the patient’s chart if they display ‘difficult’ behaviours or emotions such as anger, distress, crying or complaining. In a study of institutional aged care by Meddaugh (1993), the aggressive patient was labelled as ‘bad’ and the non-aggressive as ‘good’. The person may in fact be troubled, anguished or even fearful. For example, care staff reported to me that newly admitted residents often presented as upset and behaved in a clinging or distressed way, wanting to talk to staff and ‘taking up staff time’. These ‘problem behaviours’ were further pathologised as ‘emotional dependence’. I am concerned that there are inadequate staffing levels to spend time with and get to know people and their individual issues, and where medical solutions are given priority. This, in addition, can lead to the misdiagnosis and overmedication of people for what are underlying psychological / emotional issues (Harris, Hays, Kottler, Minichello, Olohan, Wright, 2005; Pilkington, 2005a & c; Nay, 1995). These patients or residents may be grieving loss of home, family and familiar surroundings; they may be anxious and unhappy and unable to see ahead to a continued fulfilling and meaningful life; they may be grieving the death of a spouse or child whose anniversary, unknown to anyone else, falls on that day. Pilkington (2005a) reflects that ‘losses may occur so frequently that there is insufficient time to really grieve each one’ (p.233). Their story will remain untold unless there is someone who can and will address them in a spirit of therapeutic caring for the Other, where ‘working with’ rather than ‘doing to’ the person is emphasised (Disley and McCormack, 2002) within a respectful and equal relationship.

There is little doubt that residents within aged-care facilities would benefit from access to particular and skilled psychological counselling support services to help work through deep emotional and human issues (Cadby,

1996). Suitably trained care staff could also perform a support function to help bridge the emotional gaps and to 'scaffold' the building of a new story of living when relocation has occurred. Currently this is not a priority within aged care for, as Stephen's story (above) and Joan's story (below) shows, existing staff have little enough time to attend to their regular duties in any case. One busy non-professional personal carer in an aged-care facility admitted to me that the carers try to do, 'amateur counselling on the run'. This level of response by well-meaning, over-busy but untrained staff is simply not adequate. Nay (1995) and Fiveash (1998) report that admissions to aged care are typically hurried with often no choice in the matter: and that this relocation constitutes an experience of substantial loss. Fiveash goes on to confirm the dearth of emotional, social and psychological support available for residents within nursing homes and to call for such services to be given further consideration. Chaudhury, who urges that the focus must be on the 'subjective meaning of quality of care', has similar concerns.

To the extent long-term care is based on institutional values, policies, and procedures, the residents face the potential of losing their self-identity. Identity and personal worth become institutional variables (1999, p. 248).

Awkwardness, an RN tells me, can earn one prescription medication such as anti-depressants and a defensive position from staff whose response is, 'Watch him, he's dangerous.' So, 'awkward' and 'difficult' can become 'dangerous' and 'aggressive' in a discourse that clearly demarks and maintains hierarchical power relations, and can invite the imposition of

restraint, sedation – control, domination. Garner and Evans attest to the ‘widespread prescribing of antipsychotic medication in long-stay settings.

Rather than developing imaginative psychosocial or behavioural ways of managing troubled or troublesome patients, a prescription is written for a major tranquilliser and all parties are momentarily calmed (2002, p.166).

When behaviours are labelled ‘difficult’ it could be asked, Difficult for whom? When becoming fond of a staff member or wanting extra time to talk can be labelled ‘emotional dependence’; when a terminally ill patient is labelled *bold* for not eating; when an incontinent older patient is told his *nappy* needs to be changed (as a registered nurse has reported to me), there are still more questions to be asked about language usage, about service provision, about power relationships and about negation of the Other:

The infantilisation of older people [is] an emphasis of the split between staff and patients. The ‘us and them’ in the power hierarchy may result in the inability to think clearly and humanely, which can occur on wards of older people. (Terry, 1998, cited in Garner and Evans, 2002, p. 165).

Easy enough when those we blame (or fear?) are vulnerable under our power: Rendered faceless, their humanity stripped away, their lives made precarious. Pearl provides a vivid insight:

I think that there are staff members who definitely shouldn't have the job. ...But I'm not supposed to see that... I trust you that you won't go to [the Manager] to tell her all these things. Because they are all true. She wouldn't like it...

I told her. Nothing happens. They are still there and they do still the same thing. She must have staff and it's very hard to get staff. So staff is very important to her. She tells them, but they don't change. Because they feel they won't be sacked. They won't be sacked!

Most of the staff thinks... that they can boss us around...

There are more residents who see it. But most of them, they go with the flow. I wish I could go with the flow but I never will... I don't know anybody else who says something. Not anybody.

Ideas from Foucault and post-modern feminism foreground the dominant power relations constructed and reflected in language and representations of knowledge and authority. Foucault identified that each society constructs for itself a 'regime of truth':

...the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1980, p.131).

Domination comes in many forms. Pearl tells me:

We are not allowed to touch the TV... only the staff...It's on the whole day, for whom I don't know...

...you have to eat what they put in front of you. When you are cooking for yourself you make dishes you like and now you have to eat everything that is put in front of you. But the dietician thinks it is good. She reckons three fish dishes a week, this is good. I don't like fish.

There was a course for the staff about dementia a few days ago and Pearl reckons:

I should have been there too. I would like to know about it. I would like to read something about it. You know how to deal with them...but I am only a resident.

Pearl lives in an aged-care facility which in the past ten years, following the current trend, has changed from a hostel-type setting where people are old but most have all their faculties, to a higher dependency setting where most of the residents suffer from dementia and Alzheimer's disease. There are not many people she can have a conversation with. She wonders how

to deal with the demented residents surrounding her and she sees that the disease affects individuals in totally different ways. She wonders how best to interact with them in response to their confusion. Pearl's family don't want her to be upset and she doesn't want to upset them. Is love rendering her twice powerless? Editing out some of the facts, she embarks on her Sea of Moyle. She doesn't know why she's feeling depressed, she tells me. It's not that she's unhappy, she tells me – working in her garden, doing her washing, her ageing body enjoying carrying out the daily tasks. '*I don't know*', is her constant refrain and her constant question is '*Why?*' What does she not understand? What does she not quite grasp? She goes to the family every Sunday for the whole day.

Like Stephen, Joan is also not 'home'; she is *here*, that is in an aged-care facility. Why? Because she is in a wheelchair? Needs lifting into bed? Uses a hoist? Because of her physical disability she was placed in the high-dependency wing where most residents suffer from dementia. She tells me:

It's not so bad. The staff, most of them, are good.

Joan reads a lot. Reading occupies her mind and she keeps her books close at all times, quickly and happily stuffed down the side of the wheelchair whenever a visitor calls. Joan is certain that important qualities that staff need are humour and patience. She notices staff being short-tempered and impatient, hurrying patients-residents who have dementia when they are slow in taking their medications or spitting their tablets out or upset. She

says to herself *don't interfere* when she witnesses these encounters, and silently advises the staff member:

Ohh... Just give her a few more minutes, you know, she's really not in control of what she's saying... Just slow down, it might be easier [on] both sides... give her another 10 minutes...

Joan can see the particulars of the situation and she has an intuitive grasp of the areas in which staff might need training and supervision. Others are also aware of what happens:

We do not always remember our common humanity. Confused older people are the most vulnerable to a definition of being 'less than fully persons'. Once so defined, 'the way is clear to forms of behaviour and treatment which would be unacceptable to those not so stigmatised and '...the corruption of care is closely connected with the balance of power and powerlessness in organisations'

(Wardhaugh & Wilding 1993, cited in Garner and Evans, 2002, p. 165)

However, Joan remains a silent witness. She believes has no voice in this situation:

But it's none of our business to sort of say, 'Hey be careful!'

Joan also knows that there is a limited number of staff under pressure to complete tasks:

[The carer] hasn't got 10 minutes to give. She's got a string of people who still haven't had that pill down their throat...She's only got 10 minutes to clear the dishes, wash the people, to put them to bed.

Numerous studies have shown that inadequate staffing levels result in a poorer quality of care in long-term care facilities and confirm that 'the vast majority of nursing homes do not have sufficient staff' (cited in Sikorska-Simmons, 2006; Kash, Castle, Naufal & Hawes, 2006, p. 609). Joan knows this from her own experience and observation, as does Stephen (above). Joan confided that there are things she doesn't tell the family and when I asked her who she tells about her concerns she replied:

Well...to date I don't say it ever happened. I would say that if I have a concern I don't speak out in a hurry ...I think probably I don't want to make a fuss.

Lorna tells me she is happy here but, like Joan, she sees things around her that she doesn't much talk about. She sees rudeness from staff towards the

sick and demented too – *not all staff of course*. She recalls a particular staff member who could be *very, very nasty to somebody*. Did she say anything? I ask.

No. You're not allowed...if we saw that happen there's none of us can butt in...

Well, if the person was bad enough, yes they might.

Noticing my concern she assures me, *'I would if it was [happening to] to me.'* In this facility there are residents' meetings held each month facilitated by an outside person. The manager *comes in on it later and sorts things out*. At none of the meetings that Lorna has attended has a resident brought up a complaint about the particular staff member although three residents (of the four I interviewed at that facility) mentioned the concern to me. I am bursting with the rhetorical question, *'Why do they not tell!?'* Lorna thinks any resident who is directly affected themselves should complain, but admits:

I don't think they would, but they should.

Lorna has a serious heart condition and she knows her position is precarious:

If you just sort of butted in you could start a big argument. But I just keep my tongue between my teeth.

It is worth noting in this context that behaviour such as labelling, thoughtless practices, rough handling, limitations of personal choice and isolation is defined as 'covert abuse' Meddaugh (1993). Unfortunately such instances often go unreported as it is not unusual for older people to ignore unpleasant interactions and adopt an attitude of not wanting to 'make waves' as active strategies to deal with discrimination and ageist treatment (Minichiello, Browne and Kendig, 2000). Therefore while Sikorska-Simmons reports that 'Resident satisfaction represents an important measure of the quality of care from the resident's perspective'(2006, p. 590), Koch (1995) points out that the patient perspective has been neglected in measurements of quality assurance and that reliance on patient satisfaction questionnaires are dubious. As with participants in this study, where residents do not express their emotions and concerns at facilitated meetings or to management, for whatever reason, satisfaction might be assumed but certainly cannot be assured.

When I ask Lorna who she would talk to about her concerns she tells me:

I don't know. I've got nobody.

Performing Older Age

Travellers, there is no path, paths are made as you walk.

Antonio Machado, 2003 *There is no Road*

What of Hal and his friend Daphne, Ted and James, Greg, Gerald, Doris, Madeline and Grace – other remarkable people whose stories are told in Chapter 3? All but two of these still live in their own homes and communities and the two, Hal and Daphne, live in independent units within an aged-care complex where they run their own lives. Where do these people fit into this scenario I'm telling? Maybe they don't. Maybe they still have their face / identity in their interacting with each other and the world. Certainly the people for whom images of concern arose in my mind most particularly were those who resided within aged care where they were vulnerable to emotional isolation, poor quality of care and to systemic and individual (covert or overt) abuse of themselves or others. This concern finds echo within the literature on aged care as Glendenning writes, 'There is chilling evidence that elderly people living in care are more likely to be at risk than those who live in the community' (1997, p. 151). 'Abuse' is another strong word (signifier) that needs to be considered within this conversation and it can take many forms. Deikman writes that when a person is harmed it is indicative of the aggressor being psychologically disconnected from his victim and continues, 'In order to harm another person, 'barriers must be raised, the Other must be established as different from oneself, inferior, bad (2000, p.314). That perceived difference may be large or small but its effects can be great:

Abuse is active maltreatment or neglect: it may be intentional or due to ignorance or thoughtlessness. The abuse may be a criminal act, a violation of human rights or a minutely subtle interaction in

which the older person feels denigrated. What links the range of behaviours is that they occur in situations in which the victim is dehumanised. (Garner & Evans, 2002, p. 164)

I have thought about how the participants who are still living in the community are active and involved in the world and they are making their own rules still, they have connection and continuity with their own community and friends. In fact all of the participants emphasised the importance of being useful to others, helping, or in the way of making things and being productive. For example, in their frailty Margaret and Lorna, residing in an aged-care facility, still try to knit squares that will make blankets for the poor. Ted and Grace, in their own homes, give tuition. Madeline, is glad that she can still offer to take people on short trips in her car. She thinks it is important:

That you not just have to be looked after yourself. That you can look after somebody or do something for somebody.

Is productivity the key? Does the face start to disappear when we cease to be productive and useful? When we cease to be *perceived* as productive, or re-productive? There is the question of how do we define usefulness in our society. Who is the 'wicked witch' that condemns? What guises does the face-taker come in? What element in our society, construing individuals as deficient (frail, vulnerable, deviant, difficult, awkward, useless?) can take away the humanity and render life precarious?

Of course, Butler (2004) reminds us that not only the elderly are vulnerable. She demonstrates how any individual or group of people can be marginalised, placed in an institution, concentration camp, terrorised, dehumanised and begin to lose ownership of their own lives and identities, forced to live a life imposed on them, subject to timetables, rules, directions not of their own making. Admittedly an institution – school, hospital, aged-care facility, prison – can perform in a positive and benign way, but sometimes even that may transpose into a ‘benevolent oppression’ (Nay, 1999) of which the residents themselves are both witnesses and victims. To begin to understand and indeed move away from this situation, it is imperative therefore to examine the social-economic-political environment within which older people live, to question the perceived status of the self in later life (Phillipson and Biggs, 2004; Biggs, 2005; Biggs & Powell, 2001) and, again citing Chaudhury, to try to understand ‘the subjective meaning of quality of care’ (1999, p. 249).

Joan had a subjective understanding of quality care when she silently urged the staff member to slow down and be patient when giving pills to a resident suffering from dementia. Patience was a recurrent request:

Persevere just the extra few minutes...you know, if you're trying to persuade someone to take their pills. (Joan)

Old people need ...people with patience. If you haven't got patience don't go near the elderly. (Madeline)

You have to have a lot of patience, and a lot of understanding, and love I think. (Pearl)

Pearl had some further practical suggestions:

It is very important that they learn that elderly people have still got their dignity. [and] not to treat old people like children... [That] they are kind [and] like old people.

Garner and Evans believe that the elderly need to be made the subject rather than the object of our inquiry, believing them to be among 'society's most alienated citizens' (2002, p.167). If we address them as subjects, that is, as individuals with a shared humanity to our own, they will let us know the subjective meaning of quality of care, as has been demonstrated in the interviews presented in this project. They may also tell us something more about the shadows cast in their stories. Education at all levels of staffing is one requirement so that staff, at the very least, understand their moral, ethical and statutory obligations to those in their care (Garner & Evans, 2002; Weatherall, 2001). As Garner and Evans report:

Much abuse is unthinking. Most people referred to the UK Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

following allegations of maltreatment do not realise that what they are doing constitutes abuse. (2002, p. 168)

The work of Catherine Lutz on 'emotional discourse' (1990) informs this discussion on a number of levels. Lutz points out that emotions are more than individual internal states, but need to be understood more powerfully in terms of language, social and political practices and power relations. From this broad Foucaultian-inspired perspective of reflecting both 'culture and ideology' (p.9), language (discourse) is seen as 'something essentially bound up with local power relations that is capable of socially constructing and contesting realities, even subjectivity' (p.13). Language that labels and pathologises counts for more than personal opinion but reflects and maintains the discursive practice of a dominant group and legitimises its perceived right to impose control on subordinates, and in such a culture the one who is dominated must therefore remain silent or suffer the consequences. The words of project participants (above) demonstrate that they frequently live with a self-imposed silence; that there is often no audience to hear their authentic voice; and perhaps even that such conversations are unofficially proscribed.

In answer to the question, 'Who is the face-taker?' one must therefore take into account the dominance of bio-medical models of care which, in Foucaultian terms, subjects older people to the 'medical gaze' (Biggs and Powell, 2001; Wells 2005). Narrative therapists view the medical model as one of the oppressive 'Grand Narratives' within our culture 'which have tended to story certain individuals as deficient and place them in the margins of dominant cultural accounts' (Doan, 1998, p. 379; Parry & Doan, 1994). According to Doan the post-modern social constructionist

perspective seeks to question the power of normative formal and academic domains of knowledge 'against which people are measured and judged' (p. 380) and to privilege the voice of the individual 'and the liberation of their passions, intentions, and preferences' (p.380). Powell and Longino agree viewing biomedicine as 'a subtle aspect of social control and explicit power relations' (2001, p. 200) which:

legitimises the scientific search within older people for signs of problems, that they in some way require intense forms of surveillance and ultimately processes of medicalisation (Armstrong, 1983, cited in Powell and Longino, 2001, p. 200).

Madeline's story (told in Chapter 3) is also somewhat illustrative. For Madeline at 85 years old age *was coming on for a while before I went to the doctor*. After an initial consultation with her GP he diagnosed flu. A second consultation resulted in prescription medication for a kidney infection, which proved ineffective. Unable to diagnose her complaint, she says, *he got fed up with me* and passed her over to his partner in practice and Madeline soon found herself for some weeks as an in-patient in a psychiatric hospital being offered electro-convulsive therapy. She declined the latter and came home. In addition to agreeing to take a very low dose of an anti-depressant drug, Madeline exercised considerable personal strength to give voice to her own 'passions, intentions, and preferences' (Doan, 1998, p.380): she adopted a disciplined routine of getting up early, engaging in the loved activities of golf and bridge as much as possible, using relaxation tapes, keeping up her social contacts and being useful to others. Madeline has a firm grasp of what her 'illness' was about:

It was age. I was beginning to feel it...

I was upset that I was different. I couldn't accept it I suppose. At the time...until I thought about it and then realised the age I was...I realise my trouble, I can't expect to be as good as I was at 70 or even my mid-seventies...I can feel that I'm slowing up more and more. Well, that's because I'm ageing. I don't mind. What can I do about it? Yes, that's the way I feel.

Madeline has re-appraised her life in terms of her age and has developed realistic expectations of herself against which she measures her health and self-esteem. In the meantime she gives her former GP the benefit of the doubt:

Well, he isn't the best man for...He wouldn't be the best man to understand old people, in my opinion...I think he's a children's doctor!

Looking at wide cultural contexts, Simon Biggs (2001) provides a succinct overview of the genealogy of the post-World War II relationship between ageing and social welfare which parallels the narrative of decline evident in the bio-medical discourse on ageing. He explains that while the welfare state reinforced the stereotype of dependency, it also provided some financial security and the stable identity status of 'senior citizen'. However, in the post-modern world identity is no longer fixed but fluid, based somewhat in self-referential beliefs and decisions 'offering more opportunities for...creative narratives of the self and personal meaning'

(Polivka and Longino, 2002, p. 291). Promoting a diversity of lifestyle options which undermine the traditional roles and hierarchical cultural constraints carries risks as well as benefits for older people (Polivka and Longino, 2002; Polivka, 2000). In terms of benefits, it implies a certain freedom to resist stereotyping and to create and narrate a personally satisfying coherent self-story that fits one's life and lifestyle choices. And choice is not limited to lifestyles as advances in biomedicine conceive of the ageing body also as a *re-construction site* where the effects of ageing can be prevented, hidden or halted (Powell and Longino, 2001).

However, this post-modern world can be an uncertain and risky environment in which to live. The neo-liberal emphasis on consumer choice and individual freedom, built upon the principle of market economics, dictates that the power of choice becomes vested in those who can afford it. Freedom for older people to escape traditional stereotyping and to create alternative lifestyles (and bodies) in such an economy will therefore be limited. In addition, the same social-political system is dedicated to the reduction and privatisation of public health and social welfare programmes. Polivka and Longino (2002) cite Carter (1998) in describing this as a 'celebrationist Saatchi-style post-modernism', which discriminates against less well-off sections of the population and thus 'reduces social, political, and public life generally to participation in the market' (p.290) and 'makes personal meaning a product of individual consumption' (p. 291). Phillipson and Biggs summarise:

The marketisation of welfare and its accompanying consumerist rhetoric have led to an erosion of traditional supports to an

ageing identity without their replacement with a sufficiently inclusive and sustainable alternative.

(2004, p. 20).

Biggs (1999; 2004), seeking an alternative model, places 'narrativity' alongside 'masquerade' as a useful strategy to help resist age (and gender) stereotyping. Biggs agrees that the narrative approach to the construction of self allows people to bypass ageist categories and to make choices between the many expressions of identity available in the post-modern world. In this scenario, prescribed 'age-appropriate' behaviour no longer holds the same authority over the individual who can therefore enjoy a greater freedom of self-expression. Masquerade, on the other hand, involves a more or less self-conscious submergence of the expression of self to protect it from exposure or external threat, providing a refuge for identity in uncertain times and hostile environments. Biggs cautions that these strategies of self-preservation that can create safe 'psychological spaces' could also create an inward-looking protected identity rather than preserve an authentic sense of self. His concern here is when the sense of self ceases to be dialogical and the self-referential process of review and revision of identity is undertaken without reference to a personal, social and cultural past. Asserting the importance of recognising that the lifecourse is 'temporally embedded' Biggs writes:

Temporal location is a key aspect of ageing's originality, its specialness as a lifecourse experience, a source of potential opposition to social norms and helps define its significant horizons. Memory and connection to the past form a grounding for the self in an uncertain world, a reservoir to draw on for

future judgement and an alternative basis on which to make a stand (1999, p. 216).

Emphasising the importance of 'social and personal continuity' and 'the past as an anchor, as a source of embeddedness for authentic identity' (1999, p. 218), Biggs goes on to theorise a 'layered identity' (2004, p. 54), which includes an integrated use of the above strategies to balance the need for self-protection and self-expression and which:

allows a protective inner space within which to nurture transgressive elements of the self until they can be directly expressed, perhaps with peers or with others with similar experiences (p.54).

The 'layered identity' facilitates vertical (depth) and horizontal (surface) expressions of self and it is the ability to achieve congruence between these two dimensions (Surface – multiple options, interpretation, choice, and Depth – memory, embeddedness, life experience) that are key to achieving a mature and authentic identity (Biggs, 1999, p. 219). Significantly Biggs also specifies the order of priority to be given the two perspectives by the individual with 'Interpretation and choice in the here and now [to] be subjected to a rigour and direction supplied by lifecourse experience' (p. 219). He summarises:

How one appears to others and to oneself and why one presents a certain face to the world while keeping other parts hidden are

now seen to be key elements contributing to the active strategising of age. (2005, p.119)

The thesis of the 'layered identity' put forward by Biggs sits comfortably with the position of not-knowing that I have adopted throughout this project as a researcher and with the notion of folded subjectivities previously articulated (St. Pierre, 1997b). Any attempt to 'unfold' identity, to define it, would be, to borrow a phrase from St. Pierre, 'limited and partial and a bit absurd, like all attempts to capture the real' (St. Pierre, 1995, cited in 1997b, p. 180). It also fits easily with my approach to a counselling practice which refuses to ascribe fixed identities while respecting personal history and life experience, an approach which provides a safe space in which an *under-story* may also emerge. This safe space is a dialogical one and it can only open when there is someone available to hear the performance of story and emotion, without judgement. The (vantage) point at which I stand is one of an openness to wonder at the always-in-motion horizon, with a desire, as previously cited:

...for movement towards the other, without any desire for appropriation of the other, or for an end. Any return would be a return with difference. This is a knowledge that delights in its journey, a knowledge that takes pleasure in the strange (Game and Metcalfe, 1996, p.173).

Dwelling in the Open Cut

If I want you to get the feel of what the flow of a river is like and I bring it to you in a bucket. The moment I put it into a bucket it has stopped flowing.

Anthony De Mello, 1997, *Awareness*, p. 122

Older people are a vulnerable group and this seems particularly so within the aged-care setting where independence, agency and autonomy are reduced to allow the running of the institution. This is to be expected to an extent, and residents interviewed for this project showed themselves willing to accept limits to their autonomy when the needs of the group (other residents and staff) are to be considered. In fact, to some extent, the personal benefits they experience from living in the safety and security of the institutional setting outweigh the disadvantages for them. Nevertheless, from small portions of conversation noted, the horizon grows and with it the field to be reported on, even if it is in the perhaps oblique shape of an image in a mythical tale. Perhaps the telling of the tale of the Children of Lir (or any story with a point to make) can be considered a 'line of flight', 'a flux', 'a nomadic line of creativity' (St. Pierre, 1997c, p.380) or the birth of an image that disrupts the neat stories, that subverts the happy endings, that calls us to find voices, to challenge what we hear, to listen to the silences, to question ourselves, our social organisation, our values. St. Pierre reminds us that to take a line of flight is not to escape, and cites Deleuze and Parnet:

The great and only error lines [sic] in thinking that a line of flight consists in fleeing from life; the flight into the imaginary, or into art. On the contrary, to flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon. (1977/1987, p. 49)

'Weapon' is an interesting word (signifier) too, not least because it evokes an image of violence and, after all, I have been trying to avoid violence for these past four chapters! But weapon also evokes a readiness and an ability to stand against and to stand for something or somebody and I feel the need of such a capability. I have on many occasions during this project experienced what Bochner, citing Tomkinson 1987, might call 'old anger' – 'the cruellest and most acute kind of anger, the kind borne of exclusion, discrimination, and hurt' (Bochner, 2001, p. 134). I have felt such anger, and frustration, in response to individual stories – for example, when Paddy Hamilton (Chapter 4) must hide her beloved cat Putt Putt (*I don't think I would still be here if it wasn't for her*) from the staff of the retirement units where she lives; when the brave and cheerful Joan witnesses fellow residents having tablets hurriedly put down their throats; when both Joan and Lorna remain silent witnesses to poor care practices; when I note the lack of political and institutional will to provide counselling / emotional support services within aged-care facilities. I have also felt saddened on many occasions when I have seen the loneliness and grief that many older people endure alone, and this had engendered a sense of helplessness in me too. So a weapon sounds attractive to me some times – a shield to protect and a sword to fight perhaps! Or maybe the pen *is* mightier. And maybe my weapon is also my body, and the stories it feels and tells from the standpoint of a 'feeling, embodied, and vulnerable observer' (Bochner, 2001, p. 135).

Perhaps I can adopt *violence* and *weapon* as words 'under erasure' (Spivak, 1974), like *difficult* and *awkward*, words to be looked at / after / upon / through / with / for / against, in order to trouble language and 'to refuse to simplify issues that many, in the name of ethics, believe should remain complex' (St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 185). Words and stories and myths are full of complex meaning that embody hopes and fears and values. My

(re)writing of Lir is, as St. Pierre might say, 'just another fold in the research process' (1997a, p.408). Bochner writes:

... we do not turn stories into data to test theoretical propositions. Rather we link theory to story when we think with a story, trying to stay with the story, letting ourselves resonate with the moral dilemmas it may pose, understanding its ambiguities, examining its contradictions, feeling its nuances, letting ourselves become part of the story. We think with a story from the framework of our own lives. We ask what kind of person we are becoming when we take the story in and consider how we can use it for our own purposes, what ethical directions it points us towards, and what moral commitments it calls out in us. (Bochner, 1997, p. 436).

And this is exactly the point of the story, of all the stories for that matter, to tell and to reflect in a self-conscious way an ethical standpoint, in this case in relation to older people. Frank (2000, p. 356) explains that taking a standpoint is about ethically responsible behaviour where, having been a 'witness' (Lather, 1997) to the lives of others, one can seek to impact the world. I have been privileged to be a witness to the lives of the participants of this study, four of whom have died since this project began in 2004.

And so the children of Lir found peace at last. But the hermit, it is said, sorrowed for them to the end of his days.

*Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more
Complicated.
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before or after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment.*

T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker', 1963, *The Four Quartets*

CHAPTER 6 A PLACE OF LIVING

Back to the Future

We think with a story from the framework of our own lives.

Art Bochner, 1997, *It's about Time: Narrative and the Divided Self*, p. 436

In the previous chapter a mythic story is used to bring order to scattered ideas and events (Quinn-Patton, 1999). Here, there is a return to reported stories which likewise bring structure and meaning to real-life experience (Polkinghorne, 1988; Bochner, 2002; Davis, 2005). The context of the real-life experience told in this chapter was briefly introduced in Chapter 3 with the story of Grace. Grace, a religious sister in Ireland, drew me in a particular way: drew me back from my own scattered belonging, my own exile, for reasons that were at the time unclear. The original interview with Grace took place in Ireland in 2004 when my father was living and when much of my childhood world still remained intact, or at least so it seemed. On return trips home (to Ireland) I had customarily visited old neighbours, friends and teachers and on that occasion I asked Grace, who had taught me in secondary school and Enda, then in her nineties, who had taught me in primary school, if they would consent to be interviewed about their lives in the context of my research project. The latter declined shyly, while Grace agreed 'to help' me in whatever way she could. By the time of my return in March 2006, to continue the emergent process of my work and life, death had taken both my father and my primary teacher: he in 2005 at 87 years of age, and she on April 8 less than 3 weeks after my return, and

just 2 weeks after the death of my long-time friend Mary. Mary was just one year older than myself and we were friends for about 26 years.

I find myself cataloguing deaths as well as lives within these pages, and can time this precisely from the night I spent with my mother at Christmas 2002 reviewing with her the memorial cards of her family and friends long gone. It was 9 o'clock on a bitterly cold late December night when she lay in bed leafing through these pictured cards, musing on the prayers and names written there and on the lives she had known. I sat by her bed valuing this quiet time with her, unaware of how little of her own life actually remained and reflected then that I myself had few such cards. All that has changed and I share now the experience of my parents in their later years and of all of the research participants of having lost many of my dear and close family and friends, of being touched by the 'silent epidemic' (Neimeyer, 2007) of bereavement. My own litany of losses from 2003 to 2006 reads: Mother, Dorothy, Kay, Annie, Father, Mary, Aunty Ina. There have been many deaths. Those of my four friends being sudden, unexpected and remote, unaccompanied for me, and for various reasons, by the conventional rituals of grieving. Never to be seen again. Silent and numb time stops when I think of them:

I think of you

And your house of joyful welcomes

The daughter you longed for

The constellations you named

The sons you raised

Where are you and you and you and you?

Here am I.

The most recent funeral was Enda's, and I was there, and it was an inspiration in the way her life was valued by her community of sisters who afterwards brought her from the church singing:

And I will raise you up on eagle's wings

Bear you on the breath of dawn;

Make you shine like the sun,

And hold you in the palm of my hand.

596 Hymnal Worship Book

In this way they sang her coffin sweetly into the ground. She was so unlike the eagle. She was small and meek and kind. She deserved to be exulted and I saw her in my mind's eye being borne up by the eagle across the sky in smooth and skilful flight, her spirit now soaring. I think, 'This is out of your hands now, so enjoy the ride Enda.' And I think she smiles and enjoys the ride:

~

She left the church on the shoulders of her nephew and male relatives, borne on high a substantial weight to the coffin evidenced by their sagging shoulders and strain, despite her diminutive bodily form which I saw at the wake when she lay in the nuns' chapel. And her sisters in Christ sang, 'Nearer my God to thee'. I was reminded of the Titanic. 'Sweet shall my weeping be, grief surely leading me. Nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee.' The coffin was brought outdoors to the blue-skied early spring afternoon and people said, 'Wasn't she lovely?' and 'Didn't she get a lovely day?', as if the weather too conspired to make this passing perfect. And I thought how the day was bright and sure it was easier to bear the death and walk the slow walk to the graveyard without it raining and sleeting on you. For a change.

Enda's life did not go ungrieved.

~

Journal entry, March 2006

This funeral brought me tears and occasion to reflect further on the forces that drew me to begin to explore this story-line. John Welwood wrote that when we live in a state of 'pre-reflective identification' we are 'swept along by crosscurrents of thought and feeling in which we are unconsciously immersed' (2000, p. 108), out of touch with 'the lived experience of embodied being' (p. 91). Writing about the path to self-

knowledge, Welwood introduces Gurdjieff's term 'self-remembering' (p. 109) to advocate that we adopt an approach of 'unconditional presence' to our own experience – a path that includes self-observation and reflection on that experience' (p. 92). I have no doubt that the process of creating this reflexive text, my project, is one of tangible self-remembering for me as I see myself 'caught inside my own writing, observing myself observing, wondering how it [will] end' (Deveson, 2003, p. 179). With Art Bochner I can see that:

The projects we undertake related to other peoples' lives are inextricably connected to the meanings and values we are working through in our lives (2001, p. 138).

The process of self-remembering and reflection has taken me back to a pre-reflective time, to my home town, to monuments, to Grace and to the convent. Now orphaned and finding my place in this rapidly changing town, I think perhaps the ancient stone monuments in the old town centre are as a 'hinge', connecting me and drawing me back. They give me a strong sense of physical location and embodied being and I think that the convent similarly draws me on account of 'the subtle kinetic familiarity that comes from situating oneself in recognizable terrain the feeling of *knowing who you are*' (Huggan, 2003, p. 90). Isabel Huggan in *Belonging* writes:

The act of returning, as everyone knows who has gone away, is an attempt to know oneself, just as the original departure sprang from the same source. You think it's the landscape you want to

see again, but really you're looking for yourself. Coming back to the place you are from, after a long absence, you see things the way they were, not as they are – you come face to face with surprising ghosts, invisible to everyone else, and some of the ghosts wear your face. (2003, p.94)

In the familiar terrain of the convent I can follow a(nother) material thread back through the labyrinth of time and places in order to re-member, capturing memories, exploring categories and patterns that have enclosed my life in order to put together the missing pieces, trying not to be left behind. Perhaps this new movement towards the other will bring about for me, to paraphrase Cixous (cited in Game and Metcalfe, 1996, p. 173), a return with difference. My thinking from my subjective experience of this research is that this spatial and a temporal journey (Morley, 2000) may be bringing me to a pre-reflective time back through to embodied being where I can find my place in the world. I am reminded of the words of psychotherapist Sheldon Kopp:

For each of us, the only hope resides in his own efforts, in completing his own story, not in the other's interpretation. I must retrace my own steps to find my way home. No one else's way can get me there. (1972, p.46)

In terms of the research project aim to look at the issue of 'constructing home in older age', I interviewed five religious sisters from the convent in my home town, including Grace, and explored with them the themes of place, home and belonging in relation to their particular circumstances.

Since 1844 the Sisters of Mercy have played a pivotal role in the provision of education and welfare in my town and their Order was still there throughout my years of schooling. Grace and her colleagues were instrumental in setting up the now thriving primary and secondary schools and the latter has just been transferred to a lay principalship for the first time since its establishment. In May of this year (2006), there was a celebratory Mass, which I attended, to mark both the fiftieth anniversary of and the end of Mercy management of the school.

What I had learned in the past year was that the sisters, many of them very elderly now, are facing the prospect of leaving their home in the near future, in less than six months and perhaps as soon as two months at the time of writing. This is a story I want to tell now: their going from this place. I want to mark it in some way both for them and for myself. I am interested to look at their responses to this move from home to a new place (not yet home) within the materiality of the life and relationships they live. I want to look at how they adapt and cope and I am interested in how their situation might be the same and different from that of lay people who find themselves experiencing a similar loss, being obliged to move from a loved home-place in older age. In methodological terms the hermeneutic circular process (Gadamer, 1975; Koch, 1998) is again evident as I draw on personal and shared horizons (Todres and Wheeler, 2001; Walters, 1995; Annells, 1996) to further facilitate and enhance an incomplete exploration and understanding (Puhakka, 2000) of the issues pertinent to this study.

Living in the Fold

For us our homeland is in Heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour.

Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians, (3, 20-21)

The five women I interviewed are the older sisters from this religious community whose convent has become depopulated mainly due to sisters passing away and a lack of new vocations amongst young women. In addition, as a result of the freeing up of religious life, post Vatican II, and the many subsequent changes, eight of the mostly younger / middle-aged sisters have opted for community living and between them occupy three houses within the town. The old convent house, therefore, is to be sold and a new house is being built on land behind it, more suited to the existing number of residents who wish to continue to live in a communal setting. Grace observed of the old house now,

It [feels] empty... we say sometimes we're rattling around the house.

The old convent building now houses 11 sisters, compared with more than 40 back in the 1950s when it was not remarkable to have a recruitment of 10 new postulants per year. The postulants' training room, the Novitiate, at the end of the long, wide, high-ceilinged wood-panelled upstairs corridor, is now empty, as are most of the numbered bedrooms to the right and left of the corridor. The ground floor area that was once occupied by class rooms has been converted to bedrooms which the older sisters prefer to avail of, avoiding the steep stairs. From there they enjoy easy access to

their private garden known as St. Michael's garden, to the public church and to their own private chapel where:

You can go in and say 'goodnight' before you go to bed, come down first thing in the morning, hop in and talk to Him for another while. (Grace)

All I have to do [is] walk out of the corridor and when there was Mass, into the chapel. (Brigid)

The huge old oven in the kitchen is suited to catering for a large group and the lay cook still uses it. She affirms that things are still done in the old way and tells me that they (the older sisters) recently made apple jelly using a muslin bag suspended between two chairs, the liquid from the boiled apples dripping into the bowl beneath. The refectory where the whole community once sat in silence for their meals at long tables forming a U shape while a member of the community read from scriptures or the lives of the saints at a rostrum in the corner, now accommodates five six-seater tables, only two of which are regularly set. The building is heated by three ancient and inefficient furnaces *on their last legs*.

All of the nuns I spoke to held particular affection for St. Michael's garden, an area of about 640 square metres planted with borders of pansies, violas, geraniums, poppies and chamomile. Larger flowering plants and shrubs such as hydrangea, passion flower and wild iris bloom vibrant blue, purple and orange in the fine Irish summer of 2006. Fragrant

pink and red and yellow roses grow to one side of the statue of Mary (Our Lady), which holds a central place in the garden, and around and about her dahlias and rhubarb plants flourish. The old glasshouse shelters the potted tomato plants which, with the help of the mild August sunshine, bear ripening fruit. There are two small chapels situated in the garden known as the Nuns' Chapel – *the very centre of our day* – and the Childrens' Chapel, where in the long past days of the orphanage the children would come to pray.

The flagstones, which form the pathways of the garden, were salvaged from the nineteenth-century poor house, a workhouse institution where the nuns in times past would make visitation. One path leads to a narrow arched gateway in an old stone wall at the end of the garden. Garlanded by passion flowers, the gateway leads into a little cemetery where the first 26 nuns of this convent who died are buried. Their names are written in black on simple metal crosses marking their individual graves. Burial ceased here in 1911; however, the names of all the nuns from the convent who have died are recorded on wall plaques on each side of a large grotto containing statues which depict the crucifixion. All, that is, except for the most recently deceased – my former teacher Enda – whose funeral was held in April (2006) and whose name has yet to be added. There will be no further access to St Michael's garden when the nuns leave the convent. This will be their last summer there, I conjecture, and I pick pansies and violas for pressing, feeling the loss.

The five sisters I interviewed are the longest residents of the convent house, having joined the order between the years 1933 and 1951 at an average age of about 18 years old. While they all spent some time away

from the house on alternative postings (in Ireland and the USA), all joined the order in this house and spent most of their lives here. All worked as teachers in the local primary and secondary (high) schools and three of them taught me in secondary school and one taught me in primary school. The nuns from this convent were my earliest teachers and the convent is the site of my earliest memory. This memory is a half-dream to me and I sometimes think I may even have imagined it:

~

We are walking down the hill to the convent. To 'The Nuns'. Four girls ranging in age from 9 to 2 years old and their father. Perhaps some were being carried. Paul doesn't have to go because he's a boy.

'Where's Mammy?'

'I don't know,' my older sister answers.

'Where are we going?'

'I don't know.'

Seated at the long table in the convent on the backless stool, called a form, we eat bread and bananas. Daddy is gone. The nuns will look after us. The veiled nun brought the food and tea and then we are led up the unlit stairs to bed. My sister next up from me, probably three years old, is being carried by a small nun with glasses and is kicking and crying in protest all the way. We are taken to a huge, dimly lit room where there are two lines of single beds along opposite walls. The empty boarders' dormitory. It must have been holiday time.

The two younger ones refused to sleep alone in the single beds and so the nuns pushed two beds together and they slept there with their biggest sister in the middle. She remembers this part because we both weed on her. It's always warm at first so it's nice enough, but later it gets cold and smelly and sticks your pyjamas to you. And sticks in your mind too I suppose.

With the all the weeing, and crying, 'I want to go home', the nuns contacted Daddy the next day. There was no phone then in our house and not for years later. Still he got the message. He used to say that the nuns sent for him, like they'd had enough after one night and needed rescuing.

'Bring them back,' was his reply, he later recounted with magnanimous gesture. So the whole lot of us were packed up again. No use taking the peers and criers home and leaving the bigger ones who could be of some help to him, as he tried to look after five of us and run the shop at its busiest time just before Christmas. So back up the hill we climbed, with the nuns. At the turn of the top of the street we could look down and see our house and there was Daddy standing outside waiting for us.

'Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!'

He later told me that he put his arms out and we ran all the way home.

'Where's Mammy?'

My brother was born on the 21st of December. That made six.

~

It is the end of an era. I can see the new convent now being built, looming over the wall of St. Michael's garden, although at this time last year there was no sign of it, with only planning permission obtained then, and a quiet hope from the nuns I spoke to that moving to live there might never happen or be at some unknowable future date (*sure if I'm not gone before [then]*). For Grace this is still a future event with which one does not need to concern oneself in the present moment, *Well the thing is, I suppose, we haven't left yet.* But, sooner rather than later these nuns will move there, and I want to honour this quiet happening to which I feel somehow distantly connected. I want to notice this shift within in a town that perhaps doesn't notice, that is perhaps too busy growing housing estates along the five ancient roads that lead into it, revelling in the inflated prices afforded by the Celtic Tiger which ravenously consumes land and goods and attention. I want to hear their story of home and I feel with Noddings and Witherell that:

Telling and listening to stories can be a powerful sign of regard –
of caring – for one another. (1991, p. 280)

In talking with Grace about the impending move she equates it with another *little death* stating, *I always think that all the little partings along the way are little deaths.* She refers specifically to the deaths of her parents and friends. From her rational mind she states, *Sure look it, we have to leave everything sometime. That's what I feel. I mean when we die we have to leave it.* And from her faith identity, *We have not here a lasting city.* Therefore, she concludes, *it is best to try and accept it. Try and accept what...is being given to us.* Here Grace articulates her faith perspective and also 'a particular form of surrender ...heroic and public',

a sense of sacrifice which typifies the perspective of female religious (McKenna, 2006, p. 199) and which arouses my interest with regard to notions of agency and passivity and choice in respect of moving home in older age. I will even say that I was concerned that this move was being imposed from an anonymous provincial leadership who, Grace assured me, *will take care of the business end of things (and that's good for us)*. I understood from Grace too that nobody (apart from architects) had been to talk to them about the move, that is, to process the personal or emotional human impact of such a move late in life – something that I have been concerned with in relation to older people, grounded as I am in my own subjectivity: my training as a counsellor, and my ways of relating and learning. I wondered how the sisters were dealing with the experience and, in the sense articulated by Irigaray, I found myself in seeking knowledge and understanding (about them, about myself, my own troubling unsettledness) once again moving towards the Other and once again open to 'the perpetual newness of the self, the other, the world' (1993, pp.73-6, 82 cited in Game and Metcalfe, 1996, p. 173).

Nostalgia

When I sit down to analyse a story, there's the story, and there's me.

A. Bochner (2001), *Narrative's Virtues*, p. 135

In making this move towards the sisters, and having read about ways of bringing communities and their stories to light (Bolitho and Hutchinson, 1998), I had hoped not only to write about their experience for this text, but to create with them a record or trace of the convent before it would close – what I began to call a 'memory book' – which I thought could be a

very interesting cultural documentation of a life event and the lives that were living it. My motivation was one of creating mutuality, giving something back, a celebration of the place – the old convent. In ethnographical terms (MacDougall, 1998, pp.148, 151), it would also mean a sharing of authorship and would bring about the generation of two ‘texts of life’ – this written project and a more personal book that the nuns would help to create. My more ambitious (and naive) imaginings saw nuns painting pictures and doing rubbings with me and compiling photographs and a written record of the life and times within the convent using an adapted scrapbook technique (Bolitho and Hutchison, 1998, p. 58). Hence I picked flowers and took photographs of the garden and house. Perhaps I also thought that the making would be useful for them in processing the personal or emotional human impact of the move, the ‘place-bereavement’ that they might be experiencing (Read, 1996, p. 198). The idea of a memory book won a positive response from all who heard it, except, as it turned out, the sisters themselves, as later became clear.

Elsbeth Probyn in *Outside Belonging* acknowledges the risks of privileging her own perspective in her writing and theorising, of walking ‘a thin line that at any time may disappear into narcissism or endless auto-reflexivity’ (1996, p. 6). I am aware that in identifying so closely ‘my own troubling unsettledness’ to the situation I perceived at the convent, I too walked that line. Here I was indeed faced with another tangible unsettling experience (one of the many since undertaking this project) and I did not want to become mired in my own subjective response of lost be-longing. The sensation of longing was registering strongly in me so I did not want to be guilty of projecting my feelings onto the sisters. but rather I wanted to hear their experience. As a counsellor I am familiar with the need to bring my own process into awareness so as not to interfere with the therapeutic process, and as a researcher I had learned to bracket my

feelings when they became unhelpful (see Chapter 1). Now I felt confident that I would not cross the line Probyn refers to but could achieve a 'fusion of horizons' with the sisters where:

meaning is neither located in the subjective identifications of the author or participant nor produced by the interpretive methods and preconceptions of the researcher. Understanding occurs when the horizon of the researcher intersects with the horizon of the participant. (Walters, 1995, p. 1000)

For me throughout this project, establishing this horizon of understanding with my participants has been predicated upon identification and relationship and a reaching out from my self towards the other. I will borrow the idea and the phrase 'world travelling' from Maria Lugones (1992) who makes a connection between the failure of identification and a failure to love. She writes, 'by travelling to their "world" we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have travelled to each other's "worlds" are we fully subjects to each other' (p. 98). I think perhaps Grace and I were becoming more fully subjects to each other by the time this interaction took place between us:

Ina – *I'm thinking of joining up myself [lightheartedly but seriously seeing the value of the life]*

Grace – (laughs) *I don't think we could contain you, Ina.*

It was clear from talking to the sisters that they had a strong attachment to place:

You would be very attached to where you have been for 70 years, as I have been here for 70 years now, you know. (Grace)

I like the old convent. There was such freedom and companionship...there are big airy spaces...When you're used to a place it gets very homely for you. (Teresa)

This building is part of yourself. I feel sad about leaving it having been in it for all those years... I might like to finish my life here, you have a longing for your old places and happy memories. (Elisabeth)

Asked if there is anything she would miss, Bernadette simply stated, *Yes. We'll have very small rooms compared to what we have here* Space seemed to be an issue for others too. Grace was also concerned there would be less room to move around in, and Elizabeth mentioned losing some sense of space and privacy. Grace is very fond of the small chapel, admitting *I'd hate to lose it... I really love that little chapel, do you know* quickly adding, *but you can't bring it with you*. She is also conscious of *the kind of hallowed place you're living in with all those memories*. Grace was one of the few participants in the research who consented to make a drawing relating to our interview and one of her art pieces illustrates that

lost loved ones are in fact a tangible presence in her life still, and deeply connected to the home they shared:

I would represent those who have gone in this yellow that I like, because to me that's like heaven up there...and they're surrounded by love.

Taking charge of the creative process, she goes on:

Let's see, what I would represent all of us that are still alive...? I'd represent them as green, they're refreshing, they're different, they're encouraging, they're prayerful and they're companionable, and you feel that they are your family...there's a great spirit, thanks be to God...happiness and cordiality in the house...it's a family spirit.

Grace clearly articulates the two populations who inhabit the house, the group who are alive, and the group who are deceased. We go on to discuss the move to the new house and I ask her to consider what colour(s) she might use to depict the move. Formerly timid of the art-making process, Grace by now shows a fluency in the language of colour:

I think green moving on to yellow anticipating continued serenity above any little problems that might happen...to me that yellow speaks of serenity...and green too...because I think there's life and energy and hope.

This process brings something to the fore for Grace:

You won't have that feeling in the next house because they're not there in it, you see. This house is lived in by great people.

When I commented that without her drawing I wouldn't have known about this aspect of the house, she confirms:

The heavenly part of it

This was an aspect of the house that had not emerged in the verbal interview:

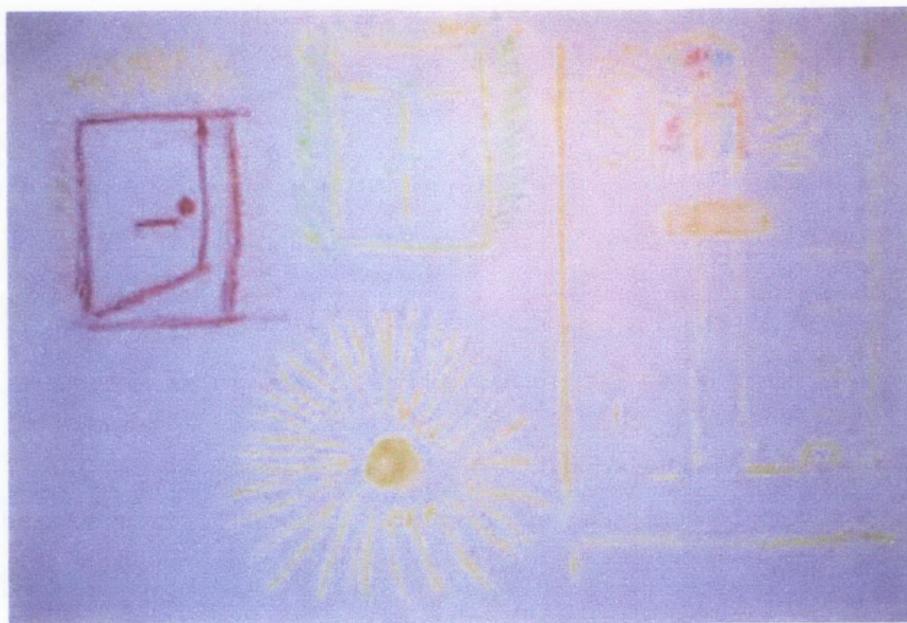


Figure 15 *Grace's Home*

When Grace mentioned that the house *is lived in by great people*, it was impossible to know if she meant those living there now or included those who had died also, for it seemed she made little distinction between these two groups. While for Margaret (another participant in this project) whose husband had died (see Chapter 3), memories were deeply upsetting because they reminded her of her loss, for Grace the opposite was true:

There's a great spirit in this house of happiness and cordiality...it's a family spirit...[which includes] the group who are alive and the group who are dead.

These memories spoke of healthful grieving which maintains 'continued symbolic bonds with the deceased' (Neimeyer, 1999, p. 66) and of an awareness of the personal and communal history of the place:

...Their names are down on the ... walls in the cemetery and the date they died and who they were and their names. And I pray for the 25 of them every night on my way to bed because I pass the window and I look out...And I just say, 'Five bleeding wounds nailed to a tree, Crucified Jesus have mercy on me.' And I pray for the 25 nuns that were buried there and ask God to take them to their resting places. And then I say, 'Don't forget the rest of the big crowd that is buried below in Colmcille's cemetery. (Elisabeth)

We're hoping to get access to the cemetery there, from this side here. That's one thing, hold on to that bit anyway...wouldn't let that go, no. This is consecrated ground here. (Brigid)

However, I noted a certain lack of concern about what was to be left behind:

I won't feel I have left anything behind here. Not a bit! (Brigid)

The only thing I'll bring is my bed. Not another thing. (Brigid)

We can't really take anything. I hope it's put to good use. (Grace)

We don't own anything as such. We have everything we want but I don't think we own anything (Grace)

Tuan (1977) writes, 'When people deliberately change their environment and feel they are in control of their destiny, they have little cause for nostalgia' (p. 195) and similarly, 'when a person feels that he himself is directing the change and in control of affairs of importance to him, then nostalgia has no place in his life: action rather than mementos of the past will support his identity' (p. 188). This positioning seems to me to ring

true but, of course, for the sisters the ‘sentimental longing for times past’ – as nostalgia is defined by Chambers dictionary – is not yet an issue. They have not yet left their home behind but are in the transition stage of anticipation and reflection. Still, I feel that they are grounded in a sense of continuity within community and a deeply felt acceptance of the life they entered and have lived for so many years, and that this is operating to sustain them in a time of change. It seemed to me that the sisters were less on their own than others I had interviewed, shielded somewhat from the struggle to establish an identity in the (post)modern world by their religious traditions and routines which still provide for them ‘transcendent sources of meaning’ (Polivka, & Longino, 2002). The consistent absence of any weight of melancholy which I noted in their responses, my own growing knowledge of these women and how they quietly express their being in the world, and their steadfast avoidance of partaking in the memory book idea, led me to abandon it as a joint project. Through time I came, in fact, to recognise my nostalgia – for the past of my childhood and the schooldays we one-time shared and, owning it, to avoid projecting it onto them:

Ina – I don’t think the memory book is working... People don’t seem to like to write...

Bernadette – Ah no, I don’t think. No...

Ina – I might just continue it myself, see how it goes...

Bernadette – Aye.

As for my own nostalgia, I could 'own' it but what could I make of it? I was already making and collecting images – as Probyn (1996, p. 116) says, the past is a reality that comes to us in images. I am easily able to recollect past images – of veiled nuns, of monuments, of houses in which I have lived, of aged faces, hospital beds and flower gardens. But the past is another reality that is hard to capture: another horizon-in-motion. My own sisters disagree on details of our overnight stay in the convent; the fierce nun in maths class does not match the kindly old lady who offers me tea and scones in the parlour today; recollections of parents are often accompanied by exclamations of, 'I don't remember that *ever* happening' from one of my siblings or other. And so I hear in Probyn's writing a caution:

Going back different, going back to people indifferent to your difference, the past indifferent to your present, your presence superfluous to the past, being haunted by past places...there is much pain there (1996, p. 112).

Here she is not referring to nostalgia as a pathology – eschewing as she does 'the systematic classification of human emotions on the model of botany' – but rather the impossibility of going back and the disorientation and dislocation that can result from trying to retrieve the past into the present (p. 114). Citing Deleuze (1989) and Bergson (1990), Probyn offers another way of thinking about nostalgia, one which does not look along a line from the present to fixed beginnings and a causal past since this, 'does not yield anything new in the present [but] merely reproduces the present as an effect of the past' (p. 117). Probyn (re)articulates the idea of there being two lines of memory: one that is oriented towards the past

(recollection-memory) and the second, which through a process of contraction, is oriented towards the future. Contraction-memory, Probyn explains, citing Deleuze, is about the contracting of ‘millions of vibrations or elementary shocks into a felt quality; it is the ‘tensing’ of things into a line of becoming’ (1996, p. 118).

This idea that the images and felt qualities from the past could somehow yield something new in the present and construct new possibilities into the future attracted me and gave me hope. I could see that the sisters, from their faith perspective, already had this hope (heaven) and that it enhanced their ease of being-in-the-world, even in radically changing times. But here perhaps was a way of thinking for the faithless. This line of thinking also reminded me of Simon Biggs’ articulation of an authentic (layered) identity embedded temporally in the past (1999, p. 218), as discussed in the previous chapter:

Memory and connection to the past form a grounding for the self in an uncertain world, a reservoir to draw on for future judgement and an alternative basis on which to make a stand (1999, p. 216).

The ‘layered identity’ facilitates vertical (depth) and horizontal (surface) expressions of the self, providing grounding in the past and present and a firm basis for forward movement. Now I felt myself wanting to extend the metaphor by drawing the vertical line upwards from the horizontal into the regions of becoming: the geometry it offers is more optimistic, more exciting! And here again I see an expression of an ontology (Grosz, 1999) and an epistemology (Somerville, 2007) of becoming: becoming-self and

becoming-other (than-one-was). An ontology and epistemology that rethinks temporality in a way that links ‘the past and present to a future that is uncontained by them and has the capacity to rewrite and transform them’ (Grosz, 1999, cited in Somerville, 2007, p. 237). Thus, in dealing with my nostalgia, if I could not avoid the pain altogether I could perhaps have what Somerville might term (p. 236), ‘a conversation of hope’! In narrative therapy terms (Parry & Doan, 1994; Parry, 1998) this might be seen as an opportunity for me to author a new self-story within which to live and grow. There was an optimism in this possibility that spoke to my own sense of loss, also the notion that for grieverers there might be choices:

of whether to focus their attention upon either the loss itself (doing the ‘grief work’ of sorting through the turbulent feelings triggered by [a] death) or the restoration of their lives (through the practical focus on adjustments needed to re-engage their occupational and social worlds). (Neimeyer, 1999. p. 68)

The notion of choices that Neimeyer articulates (1999; 2000, p. 350; 2006a) (drawing on the work of Strebe and Schut, 1999) embraces a ‘dual-process’ model that is both forward and backward looking, oscillating between reflective grief work and the work of adapting to the changes and reconstructing meaning from what has occurred. It fits easily with the geometry of the layered identity I have described above, and the oscillation movement informs my concerns about my experience of the fragility of a hope that seems to wax and wane. Perhaps hope is simply more present in the progressive ‘restoration orientated’ than the regressive ‘loss-orientated’ framework or (frame-of-mind): and perhaps I have been too much in the loss-oriented frame.

As for the sisters I was interviewing, in face of their impending loss of home I could see we were having conversations of hope. I witnessed a strong sense of agency and optimism amongst them and a forward-looking appreciation of the particular matters of importance to themselves, such as the familial bond that exists between them; the strong sense of belonging to an inclusive faith community; the companionship; the shared experiences and understanding that they enjoy, and the sense that they are moving forward together along the same trajectory. In terms of processing a loss, their focus was on finding personal and practical meaning in the experience, an orientation which is associated with positive adjustment to a changed situation – finding the benefit ('silver-lining') in situations of loss. (Neimeyer, 2006a; 1999).

The people you're living with...it really does make home, yes. Sure they're like sisters, you know. We're all one. And we have great fun. Great fun altogether. And our little jokes and everything. Sure you'd have to have a bit of fun. (Brigid)

Well of course the other sisters will be there too...and it will be just all of us gathering together...we have 14 rooms and I'm well sure they'll be filled. (Bernadette)

We'll have the old walks that we used to walk in, some of them will still be there...our main entrance will still be the same. (Grace)

Once you have the people that you live with all...if they weren't to come with you and you were left to go off by yourself, ah sure, that would be a different story. But we're all going in there together...If I was sent there by myself off in an isolated place I'd feel it very much. But I won't feel it because ...all my old companions are all around me...as long as your companions come with you we'll make it home again. (Brigid)

McKenna writes about the female religious she interviewed of whom she claims authoritatively, 'They claimed "ownership" of their vocation and they claimed the decision to enter as their own. In doing so, they laid claim to a subjectivity' (2006, p. 206). This is a subjectivity often denied in assumptions of passivity in relation to why women of their era entered religious life (McKenna, 2006; 2005a). Certainly they joined the convent during a time of depressed economy and within a conservative society (Ireland in the 1950s) which enshrined their disadvantaged status as women offering them few approved opportunities apart from motherhood and religious sisterhood – spinsters holding a stigmatised position in Irish society at the time (McKenna, 2006, p. 193). The women I spoke to were clearly living a life chosen by themselves for themselves. They saw the privations they experiences as training in the life that they had taken on and saw acceptance of the life as the appropriate response to God's 'calling':

My sister was called to Rome just a couple of years before and she seemed to be happy and maybe I thought I'd like to be like

her...I was never unhappy. Ah no, sure if I was I would have gone home. (Elisabeth)

I had always a longing from an early age and I remember being in the infant school being educated by nuns and seeing them...and even as a child I said, 'I'd love to be a nun.' And I was always putting on veils, dressing up and putting towels on my head (Brigid)

I remember when my grandmother died I had to go to Father Pat to get permission to go home and see her. You couldn't go home in those days. By the time I got there she had died. We accepted it as God's will, and it was you know. (Teresa)

Theirs were accounts that called from me an acknowledgement of the 'densely textured poetics' (Stewart, 1996, p. 137) that I sometimes perceived in their words. Stewart's description is congruent with my own perception, 'This is a poetics emergent in the daily practices of textualising [things] that happen in precise, mimetic detail that dramatises rhythms of life, artful turns of phrase, and palpable tensions and desires.' (p. 138). The poet Seamus Heaney sees poetry 'as a point of entry into the buried world of feelings or as a point of exit for it,' adding, 'words themselves are doors' (1980, p. 52). Called to honour the poetics of heart and narrative and my own responses, I wanted to play with the text, the words, and give back at least the form of poetry. These following accounts are full of the 'light gleams' mentioned in an earlier chapter, those little details that bring whole lives home to us (Lee, 2005, p. 2).

Words are Doors

*What web of words
as delicate as thought
can hold the fleeting forms
and pin them to the page*

Robert Neimeyer, 2007, *Feel the Space*

I always say,
'You never asked me. But I came'.
We were a lovely young group of us together,
you know,
Full of life and full of beans and energy
you know
absolutely brimming over with it
you know
They were all lovely, young, grand, brightly mums

(Grace)

My poor father brought me.

He was a very soft man

but any nun he'd meet

the tears would flow down his face.

Someone would bring him around

the convent

And according as he'd meet

the nuns

like

they'd stop to talk to him

and he'd be crying

the tears were rolling down

his face.

I never got home until my father was dying

(Brigid)

I left home at 8 o'clock

in the morning

I had only Mammy

It was hard

It was even harder for her

*All the rest of the family were going to school that morning
as I waited
for the bus
on the roadway
My mother's heart was breaking
she tried to be brave
and not let me see it
that morning she said goodbye to me
I cried to myself
in the bus*

(Bernadette)

The sisters I spoke to entered at a time when there were very strict guidelines governing religious life. McKenna writes, 'Religious life, in the pre-Vatican II period, was organised around a strict adherence to rules and regulations, set out in each congregation's Constitutional Guide and Rulebook. Known as "the rule", rulebooks outlined the internal structure of the congregation, the work it was set up to do, the habit that would distinguish its members from other religious congregations and – often in the greatest detail – how its members should behave, think and act.' (2003, p. 301). Vatican II was held 1962–1965 and most of the sisters I spoke to were glad of the freer apostolic post-Vatican II life that it brought about, yet there was acknowledgement that patterns of life had been disrupted

and one spoke of the trauma of change. For myself I was amazed that anyone could commit to a life without trying to determine exactly what they were getting in to!

Ina – *Did you read the rule book before you entered?*

Brigid – *No. We didn't get any rules. We didn't think of asking for it.*

Ina – *God, I would've.* (both laugh)

None of the sisters I interviewed had asked for or read the rule book before they entered. They choose a life to lead and accepted the rules of the life they had chosen as these were presented. As Bernadette stated, *I took it in a stride... Because this was the life I was going to lead* Here she was referring to the first morning waking up in the convent as a postulant when her shoulder-length, curled hair was cut off, *Ooh, that morning [makes a cutting motion with her fingers] I can feel the scissors yet, going around the back...*, the impact still evident on her face as we speak. As an 18-year-old she had arrived at the convent the night before with her aunt, had been interviewed at 9 o'clock that night and accepted as a suitable 'candidate' by the parish priest. The next morning her hair was cut and she donned the postulant's frock, which another aunt had made, a white collar and the cap with a white frill with a big black bow in front. She admits, *Sure I had never seen a postulant before...until I was one myself.* She tells her captivating and moving story with complete acceptance and a ready laughter:

Then the next morning

I came down in the postulant's frock.

My Aunty made two beautiful serge frocks

that was her gift to me.

She bought seven yards of material,

black of course,

and made beautiful ones!

They were gorgeous!

So I had one for everyday

and one for Sunday.

But then

the Sunday one was taken from me.

Oh yes.

You had to

you know.

You had to give up a lot as well,

you know.

But that's only the way of training.

It was training.

It was nobody's fault.

it just...

you know,

training.

(Bernadette)

For a lay person today, for myself at least, this level of acceptance was hard to imagine but that, as previously mentioned, was a time of great economic hardship in Ireland, strong Catholic faith, large families and poverty and hard times, which many of the sisters alluded to. Four of those I interviewed were the eldest of large families and some had been boarders and in these ways they were not unaccustomed to a regulated life. As Grace, the eldest of nine, tells it:

Life was structured, you know, for us as children...you did what you were told and all the rest of it. You came in here and you did what you were told and that was it you see...so in that it wasn't the biggest change.

Brigid also had some preparation for the life in previous experience:

The silence was terrible. If we met each other during the day we couldn't talk to each other. Especially the community nuns couldn't talk to the novices. Our training as boarders helped. It was good practice.

Yet this was a life which, as I see it, was in many ways designed to deliberately disrupt their belonging and subjectivity even in the micro world of their bedrooms, bodies and living place. The life discouraged attachment to possessions, people or places and indeed placed upon them monastic restrictions 'which governed every aspect of [their] lives from appearance and deportment to behaviour and thought' (McKenna, 2005a, p. 78). McKenna further explains:

As women were not born nuns, they had to 'become' them. The transformation from postulant to nun involved a rejection of the secular world and their secular self. Moving into the convent, wearing a habit, and replacing one's baptismal name with one given or chosen were all metaphorical symbols by which the secular self was put to death and the women were 'reborn' in religious life (2005a, p. 79).

To have an awareness and appreciation of the unique context in which the sisters live and lived lends insight into their particular contextualised idea of home, to their sense of belonging and continuity and to how they are now responding to the imminent move to the new house. Moving, for example, is not something new:

Moving never affected me because I moved, was moved, here and there in my lifetime. (Brigid)

Well we might be changed. Somebody else might come...They wouldn't leave you there all the time. They just change, I suppose

to give you a bit of variety, or not to give you too much time in one place. I don't know. (Elizabeth)

Brigid took me on a tour of the old convent and to the long corridor of mostly empty bedrooms:

We had different rooms. You'd be moved around. I was in different rooms. I'll show you another one I was in. I was in this one for a long time. Yes, I was in there. There were two beds in that. I was in that too. This is my furniture I bought! I went to the auctions and I bought that! Isn't that a lovely thing? Yes. They'll probably bring it [to the new house], I don't know will they.

Elisabeth's whole story has an organic feel, telling the rhythm of the life, the materiality of it. And here again I sense the 'densely textured poetics' that Stewart describes when she discusses the problem for the ethnographer in writing about place. Stewart writes:

The problem for ethnography of such a sense of place is how to track its densely textured poetics through its own tense diacritics of centre and margin, local and global, past and present, without reducing it to the 'gist' of things or to abstract schemes of distant 'cause' and encapsulating 'explanation' (1996, p. 138).

Apart from a re-ordering of some of the words Elisabeth's story is unaltered:

It must have been to this hall door that I came the first time - around 4 o'clock - and it was in here I came - and given the postulant's dress - and little cap - and My mother was with me that day - and then - you just got used to it then - But it was very lonely - when you'd wake up and you wouldn't see them again for - you didn't know when - you know - But it was nice - I was never unhappy

And it went on that way -
and sure you got used to it -
I was never anything but happy here -

You had your own bed - it was a nice bed with checked curtains around it - Everything was grand - it went on all that way - Sure everything was new in this house - but still you got used to it and we used to have good fun - and it was just the way things weed themselves out - so I never looked back - not I never wanted to leave - you know - It's extraordinary - the way things grow up

There is an acceptance, a hope and a determination evident in the words above that is translated into a proactive stance in relation to the move to the new house. It is not simply that the sisters are being moved over to the new house, they will take control of the premises. When they take up residence they will I think, following Wakely, 'make it the new centre of their world' (2003, p.3).

When it comes we have to take over, you know, when it's ready.
(Grace)

The same work will continue. Our life is settled as it is. We'll get used to it... I don't look at it as much of a change. Just take over and take things as they come and go. (Elisabeth)

And there are many benefits to look forward to:

It will be more compact, less waste. (Brigid)

It will be more modern. (Elisabeth)

It will be lovely and warm. There's heating in the floor
(Elisabeth)

Sure as long as we have that big garden out there, we'll have a
lovely big garden to go around. (Brigid)

I had them laughing one evening

'Now wouldn't it be great,'

I said,

'If we got a lovely

fly-over from here [top storey of the new building]

right over to the side door

of the church'.

They all laughed (Brigid)

These women were clearly forward-looking and it seemed to me that contraction-memory was already tensing for them into that 'line of becoming' (Probyn, 1996, p. 118). The memory book I had wanted to make seemed to face the opposite direction. It also seemed to run counter to their identity to make public, even if only within the convent setting, very private feelings, to voice emotions and concerns in a public way, to identify the self in this way. Perhaps this is typical of female religious.

McKenna similarly found with the religious sisters she interviewed, 'These women were reluctant to talk about their feelings and continually used language that emphasised a collective communal identity' (2005a, p. 86). Perhaps had I been more skilled at negotiating or introducing the idea, or had more time to develop the idea with them, it might have caught on. In any event, in this situation it appeared to constitute what Butler might term 'an unwanted address' (2005a, p. 91). Whatever the case, a backward-glancing nostalgia (which I must emphasise is not the purpose or outcome of the scrapbook technique – see Bolitho and Hutchison for a complete explanation of this very effective technique with different populations) seemed to have no real place in the stories of these women in relation to the old convent.

I had come to realise that it was I, not they, who had fallen into sentimentality and nostalgia, 'the pitfall of the un-rooted' (Kuhn, 2002, p. 122): it was I who was un-rooted, not they. Isabel Huggan in *Belonging* writes about homesickness, 'that strange and dangerous place where longing can blind you to everything else. And so you learn to live with *mal de pays* as with a chronic illness or disability, you salt your days with nostalgia' (2003, p.21). An expatriate herself, Huggan writes about 'emotional furnishings', the odds and ends she gathers around herself to create a sense of home, to stave off homesickness. Such things as baskets and stones and shells she describes as 'my comfort, my solace, my way of establishing *place* no matter where I happen to be living' (2003, p. 29). Even Grace eventually conceded on this point!

We'll bring some statues.

This was a strategy I too had adopted on my many return trips, bringing Celtic iconography from Ireland to Australia to remind me of the small hedge-enclosed green fields, the last glimpse of which from the air as I would leave tearing at my heart, the first glimpse on return joyfully anticipated. And now living in the reverse situation I act similarly; I display two small paintings made by a friend of the park which is opposite my Australian home; I play Archie Roach and Paul Kelly on CD and I pour tea from a *Proud Lemon* teapot hand thrown by a friend from Uralla NSW. In this way objects and personal possessions can 'image our being' and anchor time (Tuan, p. 187), and in them our past (at least) can find a home. Homesickness was an expression of nostalgia I had striven to (but could not fully) avoid, while living overseas. Nor can I fully avoid it now: in Ireland things Australian draw me. Now I think I may find the phrase *place of living* – used by Hal in Chapter 3 – more useful in locating (and re-locating) myself – in time and space and line of memory. More useful than the somewhat elusive word 'home' which contains so many meanings and possibilities of meaning, memories, emotions and contradictions, and continues to offer what I am sometimes inclined to see as an empty promise. Perhaps 'home' is even the ultimate liminal space – an 'interpretative zone': a space of 'unsettled locations' (Wasser and Bressler, p.13, cited in Gerstl-Pepin and Gunzenhauser, 2002).

'Place of living' on the other hand, has an active voice, a felt quality for me that is dynamic and can embrace past and present homes and hold the promise for constructing new possibilities of home into the future. These possibilities are not known to me yet: like the sisters, I am still in the space between. 'Place of living' can, I think, offer me a more dynamic way of being in place, of articulating my attachment to a(ny) place, which does not preclude attachment to other places, and which locates responsibility within the 'being' not so much within the 'place' thus freeing me from the

trap(pings) of and search for 'home'. 'Place of living' can sit in recollection-memory and contraction-memory and has the quality, not of something left behind, but of something that is coming about. And as a being-becoming myself (a being in the act of becoming other-than-I-am), it may be that I am always creating home.

I am reminded that one of my objectives on returning to Ireland was to take castings of the stone carvings (Fig. 16) on the ancient monuments, 'image their being'. In them, as in the convent and the town and the land, is anchored my time and my past and this is something I am touching into through this project. And right now I am newly excited that these acts of touching-in are not only the very acts of self-remembering that I had anticipated, but can be acts of self-creation too. These act(ion)s can take me in both directions along the bifurcated line of memory, transforming a somewhat sad nostalgia into 'a project of hope' (Probyn, 1996, p. 121). As Probyn writes:

The past is not there to explain the present; it is there to encourage forms of becoming ...for the past is and what I want *is not yet* (p. 121 & 122).



Figure 16 Stone Carving

Moving Home

Harken to the flute and listen to what it says

It complains of the pain of separation.

It says: Ever since I have been cut apart from my bamboo stem

My cry has set men and women weeping

Jalal al-Din Rumi, 1999 *Daylight*

Recalling where in Chapter 1 I stated, *once I find home I will want to spend the rest of my life there*, I am reminded that this text, begun in 2004, is surely a process of emergence and non-fixedness, bringing me along with it. To my-self. In the meantime, in relation to locational notions of home I will be wary of the error of regret for Probyn reminds us (me?) that one can never go home, or rather that, 'once returned, you realise the cliché that home is never what it was' (p. 114). I see the religious sisters as people with few or perhaps no regrets. They will make the changes along the future oriented line when the time comes and indeed there was mention from Grace, when I met her informally while interviewing the others, about a prayerful *departure ceremony... including a liturgy* that might be held to celebrate and mark the move. I asked the other sisters what they thought about having a departure ceremony and they hadn't heard of it but thought it sounded like a good idea. As Brigid stated:

I didn't hear anything about a departure ceremony. It's only right [to have one] ...Well if we walk out of the place there would

be an emptiness about it. There would have to be something to mark the occasion of moving out...the long time we spent here. It will be something that we'll remember and you can imagine that tears will be shed.

Brigid's intuition that *it's only right* finds direct echo in the literature on navigating transitions: 'When we are deprived of meaningful ritual we languish with a chronic sense of emptiness' (Williams 1995, p. 17). Williams further writes:

Rituals and ceremony are ways of using symbolic acts to make a connection or to break a connection. They provide ways of taking connections from the unconscious and impressing them vividly on the conscious mind. The enactment of a ritual, in turn sends a powerful message back to the unconscious, causing changes to take place at the deep levels where attitudes and values originate. They cut through words and substitute direct feeling experience. They involve bodies. Aesthetics, memories, senses and feelings. They transform theoretical ideas into social experience. This is why rituals often involve a physical act: what registers physically, also registers at the deep level of a person's narrative. (p.14)

A departure ceremony will be the sisters' appropriate contextualised response to the changes that they will be navigating. It is an idea that occurred to Grace *within the last few months*. She remembers another community who had an 'arrival ceremony' and thinks it could be

something like that. As I listen I wonder to myself if the conversations we have had together had stirred this memory or given the idea of it a welcome space to grow. (I ponder that I myself have always avoided 'going away parties', having had so many occasions for them they were neither cheerful nor appealing to me. An arrival party on the other hand sounds like fun!) I asked Grace if the planning of the ceremony has commenced and she characteristically tells me there is no need to worry about that yet, all in good time: *there's no point is there?... in a way you only have the present moment*. She reiterates, *the last minute I spoke to you is gone, time is precious, you only have the moment you're living*. The departure ceremony will be a personal and communal liturgical (spi)ritual to 'break and make connection'. And indeed I can imagine that tears will be shed.

While the leaving will bring pain just as it has for many who have moved home, unlike others reported in this study, this group of women will enjoy two advantages: first, as mentioned above, they will design and partake in a therapeutic ritual of transition before they move; second, this group of women is a community of individuals who will remain a community when they move, and that makes a big difference as Brigid reminds us:

If I was sent there by myself off in an isolated place I'd feel it very much...Once you have the people that you live with all...if they weren't to come with you and you were left to go off by yourself, ah sure, that would be a different story. But we're all going in there together...

Many of us at different times in our lives have to travel largely alone, whether it be a journey of return after long absence or the various place-movements of participants whose stories are told in this text. I think particularly of those who have moved into aged care: none of those whom I spoke to have either formally or informally engaged in a ritual of transition. For each of them the move to aged care was precipitated by illness, by the death of a loved one or by infirmity – that is, coinciding with situations of crisis and distress and for some, limited choice and planning. Such circumstances are not uncommon in relation to aged-care admissions and are found to adversely affect adjustment to the placement (Lee, Woo, & Mackenzie, 2001). It is a situation which can leave one homeless, stuck in the transitional or ‘liminal space’ (Turner, 1969), and vulnerable to isolation and insecurity. Of course we can be reminded that there is ‘a contradiction in wanting to be perfectly secure in a universe whose very nature is momentariness and fluidity’ (Watts, 1951, p.77), a desire which would in fact be contrary to life. Grace has a grasp of this Zen-inspired ‘wisdom of insecurity’ and it fits with her way of being in a world where change is the only constant and planning far into an unknown future is unnecessary:

We’re just in a transition period, you know. It’s hard to see, isn’t it? To see the future, you know...

However I see that ‘perfect security’ is not the antithesis of being stuck in the liminal – being engaged in the process of integration is. In terms of ‘rites of passage’ (Van Gennep, 1909, cited in Williams, 1995), therapeutic rituals involve a separation phase, a liminal phase and an integration phase:

In the separation phase, persons symbolically detach themselves from an earlier fixed point. During the liminal period, they enter a 'betwixt and between' realm (Turner, 1967; 1969) that has few of the attributes of the past state, or of the state to come. In the third phase, when the rite of passage is consummated, the ritual subject is stable once more. (Williams, 1995, p. 17)

In a stable community such as the religious sisters enjoy, their 'shared story' (Parry & Doan, 1994) and mutual understanding (horizon) provide them with reciprocal support in their individual processing of this time of change. As Murphy writes:

The memories of groups of peoples is the afterlife of their past action, as collective action. That memory lives on as the interpretative framework through which the group will act on the social world. (1990, p.86)

As a model of the way memory operates, Murphy is suggesting that it is not something of the past but of the present. Indeed it sounds to me very much like contraction-memory! Their communal frame of reference and structures, their memories and stories will support the sisters to facilitate an appropriate liturgical ceremony, to aid their transition and to support the flow of their tears. For other participants such as Margaret, Stephen, Joan, Lorna and Pearl, whose stories have been told above, this mutuality is not present in their lives. To paraphrase Parry and Doan, they are to some extent 'outside of a story' and there is not much safety for them there (1994, p. 45):

Well I might be days and I wouldn't see anyone. (Margaret)

As far as I'm concerned now I'm on my own. (Stephen)

I've got nobody. (Lorna)

While memory does support them too, as when Margaret states regarding her deceased husband, *Our life together is more or less what I'm living on...the memory of it*; when Stephen admits, *my mind's out there* [i.e. at home], and when Joan's fond recollections of home stand in stark contrast to her experience of having *been thrown into a collection of strangers*, there is little doubt that to some extent living 'back there' – a time of connection, is preferable to living 'here' – a time of separation. I am reminded of my early visits to a nursing home-hospital (discussed in Chapter 1) where I first perceived elderly dementia patients as living in the 'in-between' and, drawing on the work of Butler (2004), identified the role of story in bringing their lives, their faces back into public view (into connection) to be seen and heard. Butler writes,

Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us a symbols of evil, authorise us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed. (2004, p.xviii)

Amidst change, as Bochner writes, 'stories are the narrative frames within which we make our experience meaningful' (2002, p.73). The dementia patients in the hospital, the sisters and the other participants in this research project evidence their lives, their experience, voices and meaning systems through their stories; the story(line) being the guide for both teller and listener to follow to connection and shared understanding. There are two essential prerequisites for finding this (guide)line: that there be two subjectivities involved, a listener and a teller. As Miller stated, 'finding voices' is not a definitive event but rather a continuous and relational process' (1990, p. x-xi). Finding voices and seeing faces – noticing – is essential to the work of the qualitative researcher, the sociologist, the nurse, the aged-care worker and the counsellor: a relationship of presence (Parse, 1992; Pilkington, 2005b) and care (Donley, 1993; Witherell & Noddings, 1991), a 'being in relation' (Cixous, 1992, p.70) between two subjectivities where each can be with the other in true presence for a time.

The story of these sisters remains unfinished: like all stories, an ending is just another beginning in any case. The move to the new convent has been delayed due to weather conditions holding up building progress and, as of June 2007, remains incomplete. Bernadette is ready, *I've got my room picked and my curtains picked*. Two of the sisters have become increasingly frail and are battling illness. So that story goes on, and this text goes forward to its inevitable conclusion from which will flow other beginnings. In the following chapter I endeavour to draw together the stories, themes and concepts presented thus far in the writing.

*So we are caught stumbling
in between longing for home.*

...

*Only in fairy tales,
or given freakish luck, does the wind
rise suddenly and set you down where everything
is safe and loved and in its place. The mind
does not expect it. But the heart,
the heart –
the heart keeps looking for itself.
It knows and does not know
where it belongs*

Jan Zwicky, 1998, 'Transparence',
Songs for Relinquishing the Earth

CHAPTER 7

HOME, THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE IT

Body Parts

We are telling ourselves stories all the time,...tidier stories than the evidence warrants

Liam Hudson, 1980 *Times Literary Supplement*

Within this text I have placed myself amongst the storytellers, both as both a teller and a listener, a place where self-remembering and reflection is mutual and reciprocal: both a theme and a condition of the telling of our stories. In the transparent living and doing of the research I too have come up against 'the left over parts of a life' (Lee, 2005); I too have been caught up in the act of wounding and naming, and blessing; I too, following Vaillant (2002), have recovered lost loves:

Long ago, my mother had advised me that it's a good idea to buy a blanket every year of your marriage. Then you always had plenty for the winter and presumably, enough for the six children that that might come along as they did for her for her at irregular intervals. Her mother gave her that advice. I liked it and it fitted with my way in the world: having something put by in advance for a rainy day. I didn't follow the advice about blankets, however, because two years into my own marriage, on my husband's insistence and pleadings, we packed up and left for Australia, where everything would be better. In Queensland there

were quite a number of rainy days, but no need for blankets and, eventually, there was no home and no marriage.

Back in Ireland now after 18 years. My mother and father gone. I am setting up a home again. This time in a friend's house that I will rent until I decide where in the world I want to be. Right now I want to be here and I am delighted with my new abode, it suits my present needs, and I have planted flowers making my mark. Acutely conscious of the many meanings of the word 'home' I do feel 'at home' and yet mostly think of it as it my 'space'. My sister loaned me a quilt against the cold May nights and bath towels and gave me the stereo, an unwanted gift from her ex. I am the beneficiary of the wide-screen television that my father rejected because it made the actors look fat and my sister-in-law suddenly says, 'Do you need any blankets, Ina'? So I tell her what Mammy used to say and since I have no blankets for the spare bed I hope will be occupied by my many visitors, we go to the high upstairs wardrobe in my family home where my mother's blankets still lie stored in an uppermost corner undisturbed for years.

They are wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine, so typical of my post-war, post-depression mother's careful storage habits, and Theresa needs a chair to reach them. She hands down the first parcel, a beautiful unused pure wool blanket with cream satin trim, a reminder of childhood beds and marital advice. And there on the corner, in my mother's handwriting, is printed INA OLOHAN, my name. We looked and are amazed. Theresa,

another non-believer in coincidence, laughs and says, 'It was meant to be, you might as well have the other one'. And handed it down. Two wool blankets wrapped in brown paper. And there again in the corner, to our surprise, in block capitals is my name.

I'd like to think my mother knows I have received her gifts, and just at a time when I am not only needing blankets but wanting to feel at home, wanting to reconnect with my birthplace and my family. I had wondered where was my mother, feeling I had lost her twice, in death and in life memory, story memory, and here in a moment she has returned.

~

My purpose throughout the project has been to bring the stories (the participants', the myths and mine) into community and into dialogue, and to privilege these voices and this knowledge over professional and medical voices aiming, as previously cited (Chapter 2 p. 7), 'to assist marginalised people to reclaim their voices and value their stories alongside the dominant discourses' (Etherington, 2001, p. 121). There is something of an at-one-ment created by story, a space opened where we can speak rather than be spoken for, an opportunity to represent ourselves rather than just to be represented: this orientation on storytelling Arthur Frank see as a post-colonial refusal to be effaced. In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Frank writes, 'The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story *for the other*' (1995, p. 18). Thus when teller and listener each recognises and values the other this reciprocity implies an ethical relationship which supports the subjectivity of both.

This is a model of relational subjectivity as proposed by the philosopher Luce Irigaray (1996; Grosz, 1999; Somerville, 2007) which promotes attentiveness to the corporeal, the present sensibility in a concrete process of 'becoming' (in contrast to a static state of 'being'). Tamsin Lorraine's reading of this subjectivity sees it as, 'the fecund encounter of two embodied subjects, neither of whom displaces his or her embodiment or effaces the other' (1999, p. 98). While Irigaray privileges sexual difference, the theory can equally be applied to other populations which experience sociocultural inequities: one such population is older people. A sense of 'feminist theory for all' underpins the methodological approach of this research project which seeks, largely through story, to create symbolic support for a subjectivity of older age.

The at-one-ment or interactive subjectivity referred to above is not limited to the *act* of storytelling but is also evident in the *content* of the stories being told where common themes have emerged between participants, and between myself as a reflexive researcher and the participants. It was an unfolding heuristic process (Etherington, 2001; Moustakas, 1990) in which my conversations with the participants about home found an echo, for example, in my own life and concerns, my own sense of sometime isolation and insecurity and ongoing movement along a continuum of unsettled belonging towards a more stable integration: perhaps this work is my (w)rite of passage. In the overall process of inquiry I perceive these (our) stories not as 'landing points' but as 'springboards' (after West, 1993; Denning, 2000; Cixous, 1981) to connection, knowing and meaning-making, taking the reader-listener into the world of another's particular experience and inviting, if not provoking, new understanding to be taken out of that engagement and back into the world. There is the additional benefit of exposing the mutuality of the stories and it is this recognition of oneself participating in common life themes with the

participants that strips these themes of their strangeness or foreignness and therefore of any pathological aspect (Morely, 2000): there is no *them* and *us*, but *we*. Morley, citing Julia Kristeva (1991) writes:

Thus it is only by recognising the internal presence of foreignness that one can avoid projecting on to the foreigner all that we find dangerous and unpleasant in ourselves, and it is only with the knowledge that we are [in Kristeva's phrase, 1991] 'foreigners to ourselves' that we can attempt to live with others – so that, by recognising the 'foreigner' within us we are spared detesting him in himself'. As Kristeva puts it: 'living with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility...of being in his place...to imagine and make oneself other for oneself.' On this argument, community is only possible on the condition that all its members recognise their own foreignness. (p.222).

This theme of foreignness will be discussed below in a vignette which considers one participant's (Lorna) experience as part of this chapter's final consideration of the research topic, 'The lived experience of constructing home in older age'. Continuing to use the 'narrative frame' of my own life-story-writing and that of the participants' to bring together the emergent themes of home-belonging, other-foreigner and the dynamic of connection-separation, I endeavour to go on taking the reader into the world of another's experience as a springboard to understanding, learning and, ultimately, action in the world. Describing biography, Hermione Lee explains how 'telling the story of a life' reveals a living person, not a smoother-over figure... we keep catching sight of a real body, a physical

life' (2005, p.3). This is the quality I have been searching for within this research project; contact with the embodied materiality of the life-stories being told.

A Change of Address

Home makes possible the possession of the world.

Don McKay, 2001, *Bailer Twine*

Since commencing this work I have moved regularly between two countries and continents and lived in many houses, my present abode being the rented house of a friend, my present location being my homeland, Ireland. I am reminded that the architect Mark Wakely only required that it be 'chosen' to be home, but while he does not definitively explain what 'it' is, he is sure that, 'Although it might have one less letter, *home* is a much bigger word than *house*: 'It's more evocative, more politically charged and steeped in emotion. It is laden with connotations of family, ancestry and homeland' (2003, p. 3). Interestingly, these particular evocations of family, ancestry and homeland are not constituents of home for many, including, migrants, refugees, or indeed, some residents of aged-care facilities and in these cases the 'choosing' factor isn't always present either since many are pressured or constrained to move from home or homeland under such adverse circumstances as war, famine and aged frailty.

Richard Leplastrier (1999), the prominent Sydney architect, knows something about homes too: he talks about 'hous-ing' as an act, a verb.

For him 'abode' is not a fixed place but connotes a sense of wandering; 'dwelling' offers a layered sense of time and living; 'residence' denotes how things sit and 'house' is an object. So perhaps, more correctly, I might say in introducing this paragraph; 'My present house is rented from a friend': so, my present house is a substantial concrete (block) place that provides me with shelter, warmth, quiet and escape from the world. In doing so it is certainly acting upon, *housing*, me. Acting and being acted upon, I am here, but as has been clearly articulated by a number of participants in this research; '*here* is not necessarily the same thing as *home*'. 'Here', however, is somewhere on the bifurcated line of memory discussed in the previous chapter. And 'here' is where a certain tensing is taking place in which, in optimistic moments, hope blossoms.

Perhaps finding something wanting in the concrete still and being a person attracted to metaphors and dreams, I turn to consider the more philosophical (or perhaps abstract) perspective offered by a research participant James who articulates the notion of *being ultimately at home in the universe*. I like it too. It is not dependent on people or place; it is not going to be scuttled by the rising prices of the property market or broken relationships. Nor will it be fixed by 'squinting windows' and the traditional 'social rituals of placing people' (Stewart, 1996) through the focus on kith and kin and kind. The sentiment is echoed in the letter from my friend to me which read.

We belong to the earth and whether you are in Australia or Ireland, you are still at home.

Yet home is a 'moveable feast' created by the one who acts and is acted upon: 'At the end of a working day we *go home* we don't *go house*,' Wakely (2003) reminds us and adds that, 'houses become homes only when we take up residence in them, christen them with love and memories, make them the centre of our world' (p. 3). A creation of the interior and the exterior human world, 'home' is truly 'home-made'. Perhaps then home is also a fiction in the sense that it is 'something made' (Geertz 1973, p. 15) and yet it is still a 'fact' in terms of lived experience, emotion, ideas, time and contextualised or 'situated understandings' (Van Maanen, 1995). There is a focus, not only on the objective *what*, but on the subjective *how*: The question is not just, *what* is home? But *how* do we see home, now, in the past and into the future and how do we relate ourselves to home? This is the multi-varied lived experience of home as is articulated by the words of the participants, as opposed to any detached, objective notion of home. The definitions / descriptions of home, listed and articulated by the participants throughout this research project, are about place and space and even face, ultimately speaking about notions of who one is and of belonging. The spiritual, the numinous is also part of this conversation.

Of the 18 participants in this research, 16 have either left or are soon to leave their long-time home. Of those who have already left six have entered aged care while three have downsized into smaller dwellings living alone. (All but one of these nine are widowed or widowed.) Those facing the prospect of leaving their home in the near future are the five nuns from a religious community who are moving to a newly built convent house. Of the remaining participants, three are widow(er)ed and live in their own homes and one is married and living in her own home. Each individual participant articulates a particular understanding and experience of home as told through their life-story and no one story claims

a definitive answer to the question of what makes home or where home might be located. For example, in spite of the difficulties that living in aged care can bring, living in one's own residence is not the panacea for happiness or successful home-making in older age either. In fact, and perhaps ironically, the one participant (Doris) who is both married and still living in her own home of 30 years, told a particularly poignant story of 'outside (be)longing' (Probyn, 1996). Doris identifies the rural location of her home as *a mistake* from the start and experiences a longing to be elsewhere, *I found the longing to be in town didn't leave me...a longing to be with people, amongst people in the community, physically*. Here, in recognising her own *very deep need...just to feel I'm part of the human race, I'm part of the community*. Doris reminds me of a broader articulation of home termed *heimat* (Morley, 2000; Tuan, 1977), which I shall borrow from loosely to add to this discussion.

The German word *heimat* articulates metaphorically a wider sense of home than the privately owned domestic space (Morley, 2000, pp. 32–33). *Heimat* is understood as being essentially 'public' and 'collective', not belonging to us as individuals (Hobsbawm, 1991, p. 67 cited in Morley, 2000). While the word is sometimes used to conjure homeland and has been appropriated to fan nationalistic zeal to the exclusion of the non-national Other (Peck cited in Morley, 2000), it is the connotations of belonging and security I am attracted to here and the linking of people through common values, ideals, customs and location, and even the possibility of the creation of inclusive community: in fact the sense of movement *towards* the other. I am attracted to these concepts because I wish to espouse a passionate sociology (Game and Metcalfe, 1996) which 'celebrates an immersion in life, a compassionate involvement with the world and with others' (p. 5) that seeks to make a difference in real lives (Tierney, 2002; Butler, 2004; Lees, 2001; Etherington, 2001). I also wish

to embrace the transformative potential of knowledge ‘conducted in view of social goals and agendas’ (Stetsenko and Arievidtch, 2006, p.60) such as might be achieved by improved understanding of the lives of older persons and a consequent improvement in relating, treatment and services.

The participants in this research have shown themselves to be immersed in the materiality of life through their personal and group narratives of engagement, loving/grieving and appreciation. They demonstrate an understanding of home that spans the most private intimate meanings, to the broader, *being ultimately at home in the universe* and including all points in between. In common with Bachelard I might suggest:

All really inhabited space bears the notion of home. (1994, p.5)

I offer the words of the participants themselves to describe their inhabited spaces:

Home

Yes this is home:

a nice place to come back to when you've been out for a couple of days.

It's just the same as any home...brick and mortar...furniture...

It's a place that you can relax and get away from all things outside,

You can relax and just be.

You can do your own thing.

Familiar place.

After her death...it was no longer home...too many painful memories.

Home is where the heart is:

It's a sort of bosom thing. And it's love. It's belonging.

It's where you belong.

And this is where the heart is.

It's an empty nest.

Home is your roots, isn't it?

It's where you were born, where you were brought up:

The people that you live with and you're all there together.

I'd prefer to stay here, with the familiar;

The place where you are safe.

Childhood home.

My husband built my home...where we spent nearly 63 years.

Home was where my husband was. It didn't matter where.

The big home with the big capital H in my case is the next of kin:

He is part of my home. He is home for me.

The loved one who is the other part of me.

A comfort.

My home was always open for nieces and nephews

An open house.

I don't want to bring home here...too many memories.

My little house:

the memories of the others would be more there than they are here.

My son locked it up and I never looked back.

I'm still out there but I'm in here.

When you've got to be away from home you accept it:

I've got to stop here.

I would consider this to be my home because [the manager] said, 'This is your home.'

I've got a bedroom and a lounge room. And I never sit in the bedroom.

I always sit in my lounge room.

I can do my washing and ironing...watch television in my lounge room...

I get visitors.

That is what I feel 'home':

that you're not confined to one room.

Sure the people that you live with...once you have them.

All my old companions are all around me.

The people you're living with...

it really does make home, yes.

Sure they're like sisters.

It's the people who make a home;

certainly not the house.

It's the sort of person you are, and what you long for

and where you feel at home most.

With a friend.

When I'm with them and we're all together

and we're sharing ideas...and the dialogue is flowing and connecting.

When there's connection there, the heart is at home.

So there are lots of homes I suppose.

A place of living.

Within this project I have endeavoured to foreground the lived experience of constructing home in older age and ways of thinking and knowing about that experience. I have sought to expand the lexicon and discourses pertaining to older people within the flux of their lives and within the network of families, communities and society within which they live. It is a comprehensive and incomplete sense of home and *heimat* that I wish to bring to awareness to when I consider what 'home' might mean to any one

person at any one time and from thence what response / action (social, political, educational, communal and individual) might be called for.

The Final Frontier

Every person feels the gap between her factud home and her fictional home, between the wasteland of the familiar and the treasure of the 'promised land'

C. Kraft Alsop, 2002, *Home and Away*, p.4

For Lorna important aspects of home are the particular spaces she occupies. She is lucky, you might say: at 86 she has clear mental faculties and enjoys reading and conversing, liking nothing better than a surprise visitor to drop in. While physically frail due to her heart condition, she likes to take on the tasks of keeping her unit tidy and doing her own personal washing. A gregarious woman of style, Lorna is always perfectly turned out and took particular pride in her pristine freshly ironed white slacks when I last saw her. Lorna enjoys tuning into current affairs and has favourite programmes she likes to watch on the TV in the lounge room attached to her wing of the aged-care unit.

This lounge room is accessible by five other residents whose bedrooms radiate off the lounge, but these residents, through physical infirmity, dementia or lack of interest, usually do not use the facility and Lorna has it to herself. In recent times a new resident has arrived who also wants to use the lounge room. Being sight-impaired and suffering dementia, she appears to use the TV for noise distraction. Lorna presented as very

distressed and complained to the manager. It appears that her complaints are not taken seriously: *She laughed at me*, Lorna tells me later. Lorna admits that she does not know what the manager can really do about the situation and she has established for herself the uneasy compromise of using the TV in an adjoining activities room. A casual observer might think, 'Well that's OK, hasn't she got a TV to watch in peace?' But that would be, as Rudolph Arnheim points out in his book *Visual Thinking* (1969), to confuse what something (the lounge room) *is* with what it actually *stands for*. Neither Lorna nor I are confused and she struggles with her reality, and the feelings arising from it:

I just have to accept it. There's nothing you can do. It's not easy...I just have to forget about the feeling.

This is a story I find interesting because it speaks of a private, intimate reference to home. It might be easy to criticise Lorna who is so much more 'fortunate' than her companion in the lounge room and indeed than so many others of a younger age. It might be easy to talk about the merits of 'sharing' or the demerits attached to being 'difficult', if we were not mindful to avoid the mental laziness that come with easy labelling of others: if we were to forget that words and stories are full of complex meanings where truth is (only) sometimes found. I think that some conversation about and preparation for communal living and ways of problem-solving needs to take place in situations where people enter aged care and such avenues of address I would wish to support and recommend through this research. (In fact, no aged-care facility resident that I spoke to, either formally or informally, had experienced any orientation to this way of living.) However, in this current situation Lorna is greeted by

laughter in response to her distress. I am concerned because I think she is being dismissed and effaced: her distress is made no-thing. Lorna retains a strong sense of herself; *I have a fighting spirit and I have plenty of opportunity to use it*. But her voice is silenced. Her voice strained. Her alternating anger and depression are palpable. However, she remains stoical and has developed the habit of claspng her lips together, and when I see this I am reminded that sometimes, to paraphrase Nicole Krauss in *The History of Love*, 'The richness of silence [is] really the poverty of never being heard' (2005, p.115).

For Lorna the options offered by the 'emotional discourse' (Lutz, 1990) of the system within which she lives are to either *forget about the feeling* or to internalise (control) her own her emotional response to the situation in which she finds herself. This action is itself (to adopt narrative terminology) a 'performance of meaning' (Parry & Doan, 1994) which points to the inherent power relations being played out within Lorna's story of home, the socio-political implications and consequences of which are evident. How different the exchange might be if the reception Lorna experienced reflected a communication between two subjectivities where a silence was opened up so that real listening could occur, a 'space-time silence' which says:

I am listening to you not on the basis of what I know, I feel, I already am, nor in terms of what the world and language already are, thus in a formalistic manner, so to speak. I am listening to you rather as the revelation of truth yet to manifest itself – yours and that of the world revealed through and by you. (Irigaray, 1996, p.117)

When I had previously spoken to Lorna for this project about her understanding of 'home', she told me her truth, her world, revealed through and by her:

I've got a bedroom and a lounge room. And I never sit in the bedroom. I always sit in my lounge room. And that makes home for me. I can...watch television in my lounge room...I get visitors. I am really happy here as to be in my home. That is what I feel [is] 'home', that you're not confined to one room.

It is not difficult to hear that Lorna's private situated contextualised idea of home (the world as revealed through and by her) is very clearly articulated here and is situated in two rooms, the bedroom and the lounge room. These rooms have attained a level of abstractness for Lorna, pointing beyond themselves, they *stand for* home (Arnheim 1969, p. 156). Within these contexts she *feels* at home, an expression that tells me that home for her is both an interior and an exterior phenomenon: something she feels is translated into an intimate experience of two spaces. Her companion's presence in the lounge room is not simply an inconvenience: Lorna's distress is about losing her sense of home. To hear this message, to see this reality, this truth, this *under-story* (let us call it the inside of the outside), is to illustrate folded subjectivities 'an inside co-present with an outside, applicable to the outside' (Deleuze 1990, cited in Probyn 1993, p. 129; Symons, 2006). To hear this message invites a certain sense of 'wonder' in one's approach towards the other (Irigaray, 1993), an openness to hearing the other person's reality.

To hear this message requires a change of address from a hierarchical managerial style to a style that operates from the critical principles of equity and care, that is open to, as Game and Metcalfe might recommend, 'a compassionate involvement with the world and with others' (1996, p.5). Noddings and Witherell (1991) state it this way: 'an ethic of caring is often characterised in terms of responsibility and response' (p.6) and point out that, 'a caring relation requires dialogue' (p.7). Drawing from Irigaray's, work Lorraine writes,

In listening in order truly to communicate rather than simply waiting for a break in the conversation so one can transmit more information, the subject needs to listen to another as if the words of the other subject were irreducibly unique and as yet unknown. Instead of treating words as familiar objects of exchange, the listener should hear the words of the other as the manifestation of an intention that has implications for the human and spiritual development of the other. (1999, p.106)

The loss of her sense of home experienced by Lorna could be interpreted as displacement, exclusion, eviction; her removal to the activities room a kind of exile. Could it be that she is in an aged-care 'home' and yet she is made homeless? I worry a little: 'Am I drawing too long a bow?' Creating a mountain here? Still, what is at stake for Lorna is her home and her predicament, seen from this perspective, has shared qualities with the experience of the migrant, the refugee, the foreigner, the dispossessed, the homeless. Therefore this is a plot-line that I am concerned to follow for a while. To be a foreigner is, Kristeva writes:

... to be of no account to others. No one listens to you, you never have the floor, or else, when you have the courage to seize it, your speech is quickly erased by the more garrulous and fully relaxed talk of the community... You do not have enough status to make your speech useful... Your speech, fascinating as it might be on account of its very strangeness, will be of no consequence, will have no effect. (1991, p. 20)

This development in Lorna's world signals the important point that the process of adjustment to living in aged care is 'temporal and dynamic' in nature (Lee, Woo & Mackenzie, 2001, p. 25). There is neither a fixed sequence to the process of adjustment and changing circumstances can create unanticipated difficulties that will need ongoing and creative responses from residents, staff and management. In this case it may not be that Lorna's dilemma is greeted without any sympathy by the Manager of the facility and it is highly likely that the Manager does not possess the material resources to solve the dilemma. However, the deficiency of empathy evident in her response points to a co-responding lack of receptivity to Lorna's world view, an absence of the reciprocal listening that occurs in respectful communication between equals.

Fencing a personal landscape

It is by knowing where you stand that you are able to judge where you are

E. Welty, 1956, *Place in Fiction*, p. 67

Like Lorna above, Vincent Descomes (1995) understands that the place we call home or homeland is not just a physical entity. Home is also a virtual place:

a rhetorical territory...The (person or) character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric of the people with whom he shares life. The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others, without the need for long explanations. The rhetorical country of a character ends where his interlocutors no longer understand the reasons he gives for his actions, the criticisms he makes, or the enthusiasms he displays. A disturbance of rhetorical communication marks the crossing of a frontier, which should of course be envisaged as a border zone, a marchland, rather than a clearly drawn line. (cited in David Morley in his book *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* , 2000, p. 17)

This consideration of home(land) reverberates throughout the accounts given by the religious sisters in Chapter 6. There is no doubting their sense of ease in community, their patterns of continuity and reasoning, their shared understanding and enthusiasms: they know where they stand, as

has been pointed out in the previous chapter. It contrasts sharply however, with Lorna's experience above and with statements from other participants also living in aged care, also detailed in the previous Chapter.

It seems that Lorna has crossed to where there is dis-ease in the rhetoric, disturbance in the communication, absence of community. Since there is nowhere else for her to go (to which foreign territories could she travel?), could it be that her experience reflects what it is like living in the marchland: the border zone? In losing her lounge room is she not then a little like the foreigner Kristeva writes about?

...who survives with a tearful face turned towards the lost homeland. Melancholy lover of a vanished space, he cannot...get over his having abandoned a period of time. The lost paradise is a mirage of the past that he will never be able to recover. (1991, pp. 9-10)

Lorna seems to have found herself in 'the gap of not belonging' (Kraft Alsop, 2002, p. 4) and what I ask (myself) is 'Who will address the foreigner, the exile, the boundary dweller in such situations?' Will the question 'who are you?' that is essential to recognition be asked? The question that 'assumes that there is an Other before us whom we do not know and cannot fully apprehend' a person of 'uniqueness and non-substitutability' who is 'not fully known or knowable' (Butler, 2005, p. 31). Unlike the religious sisters, Lorna does not live within a long-term fully inclusive family-community chosen unreservedly at an early age. Her choice came much later in life and the range of choices was limited to

either a large complex of units for elderly people in the city far from her family where she said she could die and nobody would find her for a week (she said it had happened there already) or this aged-care 'home' close to family and an excellent facility in many respects. Her external circumstances are certainly improved with the move: she feels safe, she is warm in Winter and meals are provided. Her personal landscape is, however, under pressure in the present circumstances.

Throughout this writing I have been drawing heavily on 'imaginative and metaphorical ways of knowing' (Witherell, 1991) to aid understanding, to facilitate identification with the situations and persons discussed and to recreate experiences indirectly (Barone, 2001). As Miller writes, 'We cannot truly understand other peoples' lives, but through metaphors we can build a bridge between their experience and our own such that metaphors act as translators' (1987, p. 230). I am also, as has been discussed, using metaphors as a way of disrupting patterns and knowledges, unsettling the language used in a given discourse and to disturb conventional ways of thinking and talking about a subject.

Another means I have used to facilitate expression beyond the use of conventional language is art-making, coming from the understanding that looking in new ways creates new knowledge (McNiff, 1998). McNiff also supports what he calls 'the profound kinship amongst all of the imagination's faculties' (p. 16) and believing with him that all the 'expressive modalities' augment and support each other I have embraced the exploration of art-making, image, story, poetry and metaphor within this project. Eisner, in writing about *artistically crafted research*, describes 'a process of de-familiarisation [that]...recontextualises the

familiar so that it takes on new significance' (1995, p. 2). In the pause brought about by the disturbance, a space may be opened up to allow for a shift in consciousness and to create new possibilities for the way we think and speak and ultimately live out what we know.

Thus to consider the metaphor of *exile* in relation to Lorna's experience is to bring into conversation knowledges from that discourse, such as Edward Said's poignant description of the exile's experience in his 1984 paper *Reflections on Exile* where he speaks of 'the crippling sorrow of estrangement' (p.159). This is a description which might not otherwise arise in the literature on ageing and care for the older person, but can seem chillingly apt when the images it conjures, as informed by some of the participants' stories, are brought into awareness. To adopt the metaphor of *foreigner* gives rise to consideration of language usage and differences, ways of communicating, cultural values and activities, issues of connection and separation, relationship and marginalisation: the creation of a 'them' and an 'us'. To consider the metaphor of *border* and *edgeland* brings to mind the concept of 'transitional zones' where in the neither here nor there of liminality there is both uncertainty and possibility (Turner, 1969). The metaphor of *diaspora* conjures a scattering of people 'who have nowhere to go back to' (Hobsbawn, 1991, p. 68), similar to the way that Pearl, Stephen, Lorna, Joan, Margaret, Paddy – all residents in aged-care facilities whose stories are told within this text, have nowhere to go back to. Said writes:

Just beyond the frontiers between 'us' and the 'outsiders' is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era

immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons. (1984, p. 162)

Maria Lugones provides insight from another angle. A black woman in the USA, she describes the way white women look at black women as one of 'arrogant perception' (after Frye, 1983, p. 75), writing, 'they ignore us, ostracise us, render us invisible, stereotype us, leave us completely alone...All of this while we are in their midst' (Lugones, 1992, p.89). Describing a situation where she is, to borrow a phrase from Christiane Kraft Alsop (2002, p.4) an 'outsider at home', Lugones admits to having looked at her own mother in this way when she was young and interprets the perception as 'a failure of identification [leading to] a failure to love' (p. 85), which leaves the one person 'independent' (p. 89) from the other. This is a harmful independence that puts the other person out of our field of vision and indicates and facilitates a lack of concern. Lugones' way of looking at the racial situation she faces may be helpful to us in looking at how older people in society are viewed. Noddings describes the ethical self as 'rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness' (1984, p.2 cited in Witherell and Noddings 1991, p. 90) and this is in direct contrast to the harmful kind of 'independence' Lugones describes. In the context of aged care, Chaudhury (2002) noted positive outcomes for staff in becoming more knowledgeable about the personal life histories of residents, with increased connectedness leading to increased levels of tolerance, understanding and empathy towards them. There was also a positive effect on staff attitudes with regard to programme and activities planning, and on their job satisfaction. In fact, there is an important protective influence to be gained too, as Deikman writes, 'the task of harming another human being cannot be done in a state of psychological connection' (2000, p.314). Noddings and Lugones both suggest a similar orientation to fostering relatedness and caring (loving), Noddings, in terms

of 'receptivity – 'The other is received, his reality apprehended as possibility for oneself' (1984, p. 4, cited in Witherell, and Noddings 1991), while Lugones explains it in terms of 'world travelling':

Loving my mother...required that I see her with her eyes, that I go into my mother's world, that I witness her own sense of herself from within her world. Only through this travelling to her 'world' could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her. Only then could I see her as a subject even if one subjected and only then could I see at all how meaning could arise fully between us. (p. 90)...by travelling to their world we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. (1992, p.98)

The use of metaphor, stories, and images to foreground the 'worlds' of older people, their lived experiences, will, I hope, bring them closer to us (family, carers, professionals), bring them into our field of vision, make us more truly present to each other. As Lugones writes, 'Without knowing the other's world, one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one' (1992, p.98). Barone, in explicating arts-based research methods, similarly writes of using these forms to recreate 'the lived worlds of protagonists' and seeks to 'encourage readers to live momentarily in those worlds' (2001. p. 25). In narrative social-constructionist terms McLeod writes:

It is through the telling of stories that the client allows himself or herself to be known, and it is through participating in the performance of these stories that the counsellor is able to enter the world of the client. (1999, p. 378)

Believing with Todres and Wheeler (2001) that ‘the life-world is always more complex than anything we can say about it: the lived is greater than the known’ (p.3), it is my own hope that, as a result of embracing the various forms used in this project to collect and re-present data, something of the complexity of the life-world of the participants will be more than dimly present to the readers of this text – ‘a complexity that is not easy to capture and name in language [alone]’ (p.3). It is to be hoped that that knowledge will act against a tendency towards ‘arrogant perception’ and bring increased understanding and a willingness and enthusiasm to get to know and enter the worlds of the older people in the readers’ own homes, communities and work spaces.

Metaphors, stories and images thus are a vital part of the language and vocabulary of this project through which I would like to broaden the conversation, the discourse on ageing, to inform it, and shock it if necessary into new awareness: awaken stakeholders from stock responses. It is hoped that these stories, images and metaphors provide an opportunity to (re)view the life world of the older person and confront the issues of ageing from new vantage points. As Barone points out regarding arts-based research methods in general, ‘They may transgress against the reader’s comfortable, previously unquestioned ways of viewing and acting within the world’ (2001, p.25). Such transgression and discomfort are both

the purpose and outcome of their use. Barone writes that qualitative arts-based researchers do not seek to reassure, rather:

They aim to disturb, to interrogate personal and cultural assumptions that have come to be taken for granted. To do so, they employ elements that are appropriate for their intent. These elements...are...selected for their usefulness in recasting the contents of experience into a form with the potential for challenging (sometimes deeply held) beliefs and values. (2001, p.26)

Highlighting Lorna's experience is about 'bearing witness' to it and, as Bartlett *et al* point out, this approach is about more than caring for one older woman; it is caring about the lives of older women and older people in general (1993, p. 413). In *The Wounded Storyteller* Frank tells us that the ethic of these post-modern times is 'an ethic of voice, affording each the right to speak her own truth, in her own words' (1995, p.xiii). Frank writes:

In stories, the teller not only recovers her voice; she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voices. When any person recovers his voice, many people begin to speak through that story. (p. xiii)

In this way, stories that 'haunt us' (Rashotte, 2005), such as Lorna's story, or Grace's story, or Paddy's story, or any of the stories appearing within

this text, speak to us in a real and moving way. They are the kind of story that Hermione Lee might describe as ‘quiet and provincial [but which] opens out through its small frame to our most troubling and essential questions’ (2002, p.3). Such stories highlight ethical imperatives through their function of testimony and witnessing (Lather, 1997; Frank, 1995), which can help us to be ‘clearer and simpler in our perceptions’ (Rashotte, 2005, p. 38), and more aware and knowledgeable in building a meaningful moral structure and authentic practice of caring for the older person in our society.

The Craft of Art

It is dangerous for a writer to become too self-conscious about his own processes: to name them too definitively may have the effect of confining them to what is named.

Seamus Heaney, 1980, *Preoccupations* p.52

Of the arts employed throughout this project, the visual play an important part, although image-works were made only by a few, including myself, and portray a very personal inflection of voice. A personal imaged space is resonant with the tenuousness of experience explained, the smallness of proportions that tell a life, a tale, a self, and this is also their great strength. Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space* that, ‘Images that are too clear...become generalities, and for that reason block the imagination’ (1994, p. 121). Since I am not concerned with generalities but with personal lived experience, I have settled easily for the tenuous and insubstantial, not to say vague or unconvincing, nature of truth and knowledge and the ‘invitational spaces’ provided by image and story

which give a direct material path into abstract notions of 'home' and 'older age'. I have every reason to seek to unblock imagination, since imagination is necessary to enter into the space of the Other, bridging our experience and theirs.

I was encouraged by St. Pierre's entreaty to her readers (1997b, following Deleuze and Parnet, 1977 / 1987, p. 125) to follow their own 'lines of flight' in thinking about the signifier 'data' and to question the notion that data 'must be translated into words' or that 'the narrative of knowledge production in research methodology' must be linear (p. 179). My 'line of flight' was inspired by both my own interest in visual images and art-making as ways of expressing self and in my understanding of the power of the image (symbol) to hold and convey information beyond (and before) words, as evidenced by the efficacy of their use in the therapeutic context (Wadeson, 1980; Kalff, 1980; Weiss, 1984) and in the research context (McNiff, 1998; Barone, 1995; Bochner and Ellis, 2003; Diamond and Mullen, 1999; Mitchell, 2005). I found it useful to think in terms of St. Pierre's (1997 b) umbrella term 'transgressive data' which include:

emotional data, dream data, sensual data and response data – that are out-of-category and not usually accounted in qualitative research methodology. (p.175)

Madeline (Chapter 3) was one of the participants who agreed to make a drawing at the end of the interview period.



Figure 17 *Madeline's Peaceful Scene*

She made a scenic picture of the beach depicting sky, water and flowers, images which she loves. She placed herself in a car on the beach and concluded *Oh it feels good...It's a peaceful scene*. There were rocks there too, but she did not comment on these. Instead she had a sudden memory of a dream:

I'll tell you another thing. I have this dream,...repeats itself over and over again in my mind, or in my dreams...

Of houses falling, masonry coming down and I escaping. Whatever it is now, I haven't had that dream for a good while now. But any time I dream it's usually in a building that's going to fall. And I'm telling people 'Get out, get out, this building is going to collapse.'

And I wake up in a panic...my heart might be going a little bit faster. That has repeated itself a lot... You're scared, 'Get out, get out, get out!'

And I can see the building absolutely collapsing. And I wake up in a panic.

I've got out. I always got out in time. I'm telling other people to get out because I can see the whole thing collapsing.

And I never think of anybody in it. Never.

I never have the feeling that anybody is crushed

The next thing I see is the whole thing cracking. The same as you'd see on a film. And just going into rubble. The whole place.

I remarked to her that the two scenes she described were in stark contrast with each other. In 2004 at the time of the interview Madeline had pulled herself out of 'depression' mainly through her own efforts: *You can't [give in]. It's too easy to die. It's harder to live.* Madeline admitted that although the dream was vivid in her memory still, she hadn't had it for some time. She seemed surprised that it came up at all:

I don't know why I told you about it, I don't know...Well, I was trying to think while I was drawing...was there anything else I could tell you, do you know, and then it just came into my mind.

For Madeline body/place art-making brought up the scene of her own hard-won serenity which she continues to ‘shore up’ to this day with her activities and daily meditation practice. The process also brought to the fore the dream of the collapsing building, an image that might be seen as a metaphor for the onset of older age. This train of thought is consistent with the belief that arts-based representation has the potential to break through the limitations of conscious understanding and to speak even beyond their makers, means (Diamond and Mullen, 1999; Lather, 1997; Weiss, 1984). Weiss writes, ‘Through the art process the individual encounters and becomes aware of conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, conflicts and passions’ (p. xviii). Perhaps it is that Madeline’s dream has been replaced by the more peaceful vision due to the transition she had accomplished through the depressed period and the acceptance of older age:

When you’re old you have to take it slowly...but if you can get it into your head ‘it’s fun’ or ‘it’s worth doing’...get that way of thinking, you still go on.

Weiss above was writing about using art as a modality of therapy and here I am suggesting, of course, that the use of art can similarly be a valuable tool for the purposes of interview and data generation and providing a way to communicate that data through other modalities and from other knowings than overtly conscious thought and verbal interaction, and other ways of knowing beyond the logical-empirical paradigm (Bruner, 1985; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). For example, just as when Grace ‘found’ the ‘body’ of dead sisterhood (*the lovely old saintly nuns*) still present in her home by literally drawing them in (Fig. 15), through the art-making

process Madeline revealed her current serene place (Fig. 17), which stands in contrast to the dream that had previously troubled her. Madeline then placed the dream firmly behind her:

I often wondered about it because I had it so often. But not recently. I haven't had that dream now for years...[I had] nearly forgotten about it.

Articulating that the dream image belongs in the past, I get a sense here that this is for Madeline 'new knowledge emerging rather than old knowledge being told' (Somerville, 2005, p.10); that Madeline realises things are different now than then. As a strategy for accessing knowing, making-artwork and working with images 'denies linearity and causation' and as such fits comfortably within the post-modern paradigms embraced within this project. Somerville would seem to agree:

An epistemology of post-modern emergence then, requires a new theory of representation. This theory of representation embraces multiple modes of expression, such as stories, song, dance, and paintings, as well as interviews, academic prose and so on.' (2005, p.10).

Pearl's drawings too emerged in an unplanned way. She began by explaining from her faith perspective that our real self is spiritual and created by the one divine mind, although we are here in the material

world. I placed the art materials close to her and she drew a central light (*the source*) from which radiated many strands:

This is the light and we are all coming from the light and we have all to go back to the light... every ray is linked to an individual person and every ray has a pattern, you know, the pattern that life brings.

Happy times are denoted by orange and the *dreadful times* depicted in blue. She then tracked her own life from when she was young where there were many happy times followed by some unhappy times in the middle and ending in happy times. Green indicates *nice friends*. In this way Pearl spontaneously created a mandala, a circular pattern which held the story her own life in colour and symbol, *Life comes like it is and what you make of it. I suppose every life is like this. There is always up and down.* Pearl begins to talk the language of colours:

I think life is always like that, that you don't have everything blue or everything orange...and it's what you make of it.

I asked Pearl about the blue, the low times, and she told me that they indicate such times as during World War II when she suffered hardship, different relationships she had had, and emigration to Australia. She then recalled the happy times, and in this way the circle or mandala represented her life-line with each point of colour affording the focus for another story. The title of the picture is *Cycle of My Life* (Fig. 18).



Figure 18 *Cycle of my Life*

The emergent methodology embraced within this project and reflected in the collection and use of art, images, metaphor and story (transgressive) data is indicative of research that chooses a predisposition towards inquiry over a pre-disposition towards certainty (Barone, 2001). This theoretical framework makes overt the process of inquiry throughout that inquiry, striking ‘an epistemological paradox of knowing through not knowing’ (Lather, 1997, p. 286) and an ontological perspective of ‘becoming’ as opposed to ‘being’ (Grosz, 2006; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Somerville, 2007). This approach Lather describes in terms of a ‘less bounded space where we do what we can while leaving a place for what we cannot envision to emerge’ (p. 299). It is a standpoint which of course troubles the traditional ‘ruthlessly linear nature of the narrative of knowledge production in research methodology (St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 179). For Somerville it is plainly (and simply?) an ontology and epistemology of emergence (2005, p.5, 2007).

Chambers dictionary provides the following designations: *Emergent*: Arising unexpectedly, emerging; *Emersion*: The reappearance of a heavenly body after eclipse or occultation. Listening to the Irish poet Seamus Heaney discussing his new book *District and Circle* on RTÉ Radio (2006) it strikes me that poets (maybe all artists) ‘get’ this emergence quality, a quality that looks back and forward and captures what Heaney calls a sense of something – a place, a time, an experience. I think the key is that phrase ‘a sense of’. This is where the image is held, in the senses, in the materiality, the embodiment. Without naming it too definitively, as Heaney advises of any artistic endeavour, in my personal experience the process of emergent research often unfolded as a kind of teasing dance:

~

I feel the tingling on the edges of my brain again.

The dance is starting again: my affair with my work. Its seduction of me.

I am not reading through the heaped articles and books, just skimming, looking at the margin notes I made... glancing, touching, circling...

not settling anywhere, excitement imperceptible.

Like an anxious girl waiting for her date to arrive or to phone, or her beau to pass the way that she might look out accidentally of course and strike up conversation in the hope of recognition, relationship.

This place between chapters when something has surely ended and something else must begin is the most frightening. The most empty.

I am not sure I will find the way ahead or conversely that the way will find me, as it has done until now,

Until I sometimes feel it is writing me.

~

Journal note made while thinking about how to start Chapter 6, August 6,
2006

For some this method is termed 'unscientific' as the text sometimes may appear messy, complex and multilayered and seems to play with language, and these are indeed all strengths of the approach for, as Irigaray writes:

If we continue to speak the same language to each other, we will reproduce the same story. Begin the same stories all over again (1980, p.69).

It has already been noted that for Grace there was an unexpected emergence of knowing when she commenced her art work the – *reappearance of a heavenly body*. She *discovered (uncovered?)* literally and linguistically what she already knew at a higher level of abstraction when she drew into the present (tense) the deceased nuns as part of her

current home, *This house is lived in by great people*. It is also worth noting again that she demonstrated an increased sense of her own knowing as she grew in courage with the art materials and this was expressed in the growing use of the first person singular in making statements and expressing choices and opinion.

For Michael too something transgressive seemed to unfold when he began to draw his home. A man for whom life's disappointments were relayed with black good humour and not a little cynicism, the idea of home held little appeal at first, *I don't worry about home. I don't even think about bloody home*. He enumerated a number of places where he had lived but eventually identified the only home he ever enjoyed as the house where he had his six children and lived in for a 12-year period. Only when he takes the art materials in hand does he begin to 'draw out' this picture of home (Fig. 5).

Ah it was home like you know...you'd come home there and the kids'd meet you there and...I had an auld truck...put them all in the back of the truck...and away you'd go! It was just...just happy there, you know. Happy, happy, happy.

While for Michael it is sometimes difficult to find words for what he wants to describe, *That's the only really, house I really, you know...* Conversely his picture is not lacking in detail and, bringing it into the present (tense), he recovers his 'lost love' of home in the art-making of it:

Yeah, it is a special place. Yeah, the only place. You ask any of my kids, any of them, they'll tell ya...'You should never have sold that place, Daddy'. We were happy there, you know: tree houses, a creek, there was bandicoots, possums. All sorts of stuff. Rabbits.

A Personal Reflection

'You are miming the real thing until one day the chain draws unexpectedly tight and you have dipped into waters that continue to entice you back. You'll have broken the skin on the pool of yourself.'

Seamus Heaney, (1980). *Preoccupations* p. 47

In commencing this project I had embraced the principles of immersion and reflexivity, touching into a journey of self-discovery for myself while looking at the experiences and journeying of the participants. My intention was to engage in art / image-making myself in response to my own lived experience during the period of the research project. This body/place (art)work, resulting in the two batiks, drawings and pastel works reflect how deeply I was drawn into own my personal exploration of home images and iconography through the research process. One batik (*Ina's homes*, Fig. 2) represents my once-upon-a-time privately owned domestic spaces, while (*The Tree of Life*, Fig. 1), ink drawing (*The Market Cross*, Fig. 3) and the carvings on the monuments (Fig. 15) evoke a sense of heimat the 'public' and 'collective' signs of homeland. However, more was needed. I see now that these images all had to do with the *external* aspects of home: houses, places, landscape, cultural artefacts. They were mine in a broad sense, but they were not *me*. In the way of 'mutual

arising' that I have learned sometimes happens in this world, as a need arose, so did the answer to that need, and it sent me searching for my own roots.

Just after completing the major part of data collection at the convent in 2006 I attended a five-day 'Freeing the Artist Within' workshop. Aware that my artist within had long been confined by my academic without (without what?) I knew the time was right for a 'prison break'. I had identified my own need to find a form of expression for my deeply felt responses to the issues I was working on and to the experience of the research journey. I needed to be freer with my art work if I was to access the internal spaces of deep knowing of my self, and knew I needed some help with this. I was lucky. My teacher (Valerie) was a person of integrity who has a strong belief in the existence of the creative spirit in everyone. She didn't 'teach' art but ran a live-in group workshop at Avondale House, County Wicklow, Ireland, which facilitated a freeing-up of body and mind through meditation, music and movement, and out of which she called on us to respond, choosing from the wide variety of art materials she had placed at our disposal.

The first meditation on Day 1 called on us to empty the mind and clear a space for a new way of thinking. At the end of the meditation I unexpectedly experienced a very clear vision where my mind took on the characteristics of a porcelain wash basin in which colours were being washed away. As I watched with the inner eye the dregs of colours became the demarcation lines of petals and the wash basin transformed into a large white daisy-like flower, the long green stem becoming a chute down which my mind drained deep into the earth. Tears came to my eyes.

The painting I created afterwards did not do justice to the image I saw, but the experience was seminal and a harbinger of what was to come. My own mind, not for the first time, surprising me.

~

As the workshop continued, the images of earth continued to emerge as I delved there in my search. I created 'earth music' pictures playing with different mediums and 'going with' the rich browns of the earth. There was an upward reaching movement in the high notes of the earth music. This was also visible in the second vision-dream-reverie from meditation when I found myself looking into the deep brown earth at the base of a hill, content enough, and immediately surprised when bright orange flowers sprang up so suddenly I gasped. The hill, I noted then, lightened to yellows and blues as it reached upwards. At some stage during this work I remembered that my star sign is Capricorn, an earth sign, and I felt that I had instinctively contacted my earth energies and that this was absolutely right. 'Of course!' I thought. I had been looking in the wrong places for my artist, looking in the air, when all the time it was to be found under my feet.

Following a dance with my imaginary inner artist (who was a remarkably fine fellow that day!), I created a colour memory of fine lines with chalk pastels. Later the words 'DISPLAY ANGER' from a night dream called forth a more vibrant use of colour

which appeared on the page as 'ring of fire'. This strength of colour called for more usage after a particularly poignant piece of music where my inner eye visited the participants of this research each in their own place of living. I was suffused with a sadness which spoke of isolation and aloneness and solitude and the pictures that came were all of shadows, shadow people. But the richness of the stories I had gathered, the wonder at the people I admired, needed more, and soon each dark shape cast a vibrant shadow of colour in a direct inverse relation of the usual perception of person to shadow (Fig. 19). Here was a canvas on which person and shadow were impossible to separate. These images came without thought, they were pre-thought and a 'pre-text' (Kuhn, 128) for this writing. The later cognitive integration showed the meanings to be clear – I had had a sense that the participants are somehow shadows in the world, liminal people but knew the richness of their lives, of the shadows they cast, in their stories. These traces are all colour.

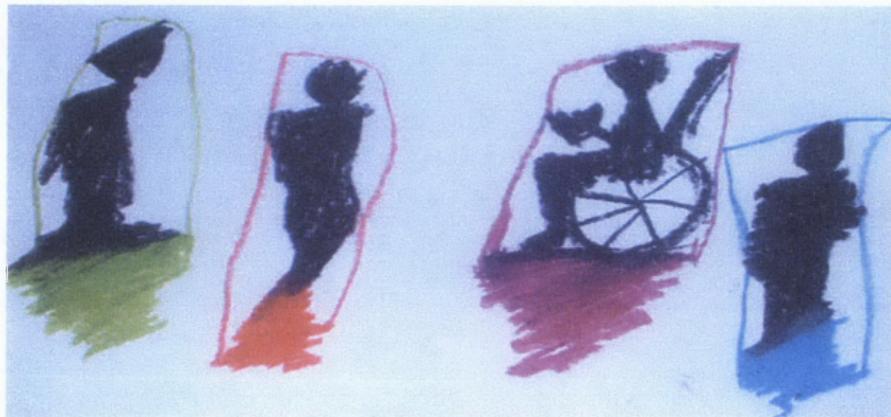


Figure 19 Shadows

These pictures enlivened me. However, the voice of my inner critic could be heard in my articulation of not doing 'good' or even 'good enough' art. The voice had my father's tone and cadence and the little girl within me, my own shadow self, was feeling lost and alone and undermined. Valerie suggested I meet with this child and get to know her.

I used white paint poured straight from the bottle to achieve a strength of line I didn't feel inside. The picture is of a little girl, a bit lopsided – the paint flow being difficult to control. She is wearing a spotted skirt, as in the batik. She is standing surprisingly solidly with two feet on the ground. The paint ran afterwards, giving her a rakish tomboyish grin which I thought on reflection would stand her in good stead. She became The Mucky Kid (Fig. 20). I liked her and I knew she'd be OK.



Figure 20 *The Mucky Kid*

Day four brought the fruits of the 'clearing' and in response to the moving meditation again emerged a hill. This time in a clear vision of brightness of colour and lightness of line. Rising upwards towards the trees the hill brightened to achieve an otherworldly halo of light and sky drawing the eye upwards. Again soft tears of surprise arose in me. From that point there was only one thing to do and that was to return to the larches, those stately queens of the forest I had seen on the first day in this beautiful place and hardly dared to imagine I could render through art. I sat amongst them with oil pastel, for how could I leave here without engaging with them, throwing myself at their mercy? I took their leafy hands and spoke to them then sat on the grass at their feet. I addressed them. The address had none of the violence of forced art, art done for the wrong reason, for money or glory, to appropriate for 'unclean reasons', as Valerie termed it. The resultant painting 'Larches' holds an integrity within it.

A while later a move to an upper window brought from me a painting of the larches from above. It was acceptable but spotting the error in the view from the air Valerie sent me to find roots. I was following the teachings of the earth now, searching for rootedness metaphorically, literally and artistically, and I recognised that I was experiencing what Mandy Thomas termed, the often profound desire of those who have left a homeland to be 'in place', to be connected and rooted in a landscape. (1997, pp. 95/6). Packing up my drawing board and pastels, I headed off in trust through the forest park towards the river and here I sat

amongst the roots of the larches and felt at home. Here is where the life came from, 'roots'.

~



Figure 21 *Roots*

The four paintings of that day marked a turning point for the artist in me and a turning point in my address to the religious sisters whose story is told in Chapter 6 above. Having an authentic artist-experience changed the way I saw things in the natural world. Suddenly light and shadow held a new energy and I knew what I wanted to paint for the first time. This also changed the way I saw to collect data with the religious sisters and it coincided with my decision to put aside the memory book that I had planned we would all make and the pretty pictures of St. Michael's garden that I had struggled to paint, but which continually eluded me. They constituted

what Valerie would describe as 'forced images', painted for 'unclean' reasons. They had no relevance to the nuns I was talking to. They represented mementos of the past, nostalgia of the worst kind in me, irrelevant to people who already know that the world does not belong to them. I could let them go. I could see that the departure ceremony Grace had described would be the appropriate response to the move of the sisters from the old to the new convent, because it is their response to their experience executed through their agency. My ideas, if pursued, would have been well-intentioned interference. I experienced a sense of release and, as my artist sighed with relief, my academic understood too.

Here was the second transformation in my see-ing ability to have occurred within this research project. The first was when I began to see as a qualitative researcher, self-aware but open and able to interact with and respond to the patients in the nursing hospital, without sinking into the quicksand of my own needs and fears (Chapter1). Now I was seeing as an artist storyteller and able to respond in an unforced way to the visual stimuli that called from me a conversation in paint to express my own being-becoming (or going-on-being, as previously cited in Winnicott, 1963, p. 86). The artist and researcher were one: the inside of the outside. My task was to search for my own rootedness and departure process in preparation for the inevitable 'lettings go' I would face.

In this learning I experienced a 'little death' of my own. And with it a rebirth. Death and birth take courage, I find. Some lopsided standing around, some fixedness in earth, a rakish-takish grin always helps, willingness to trawl through the muck and find strength of line. Someone like that would be OK.

The final image I created at the workshop is integrative of inner pre-reflective, and outer experience and emerged again from music and movement in an unconscious way. This one similarly appeared in my mind whole, but is different from the others too: In it I am an observer of the scene of emergence resurrection and also the participant rising from the earth. I am earth and sky, the earth is my dress, my clothing, my foundation from which I reach out to the rest of the world.

Someone like that would certainly be ok [Fig. 20].

Journal entry, 03.09.2006

Mapping a Way [Home]

The true adventurer goes forth aimless and uncalculating to meet and greet unknown fate. A fine example was the Prodigal Son - when he started home.

O. Henry, 1906, *The Green Door*.

It seems that present day Western society attempts to erase or deny age and ageing through the glorification of youth, the air-brushing of embodied lines and wrinkles, the proliferation of cosmetics and cosmetic surgery. This development might well be described by Frank as another example of a medical 'restitution narrative' which seeks to maintain the 'pretense of control' (1995, p. 100), this time over the inevitable ageing body. Yet the image of deterioration and dependence in old age is relatively new, becoming firmly established with the emergence of

geriatrics as a branch of medicine at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Liz Schwaiger writes:

The medicalisation of old age in Western societies and its association with disease and decline underpins the association of ageing with decline, a decline to be warded off in a culture that privileges optimal bodily competence. (2006, p. 12)

Despite this 'cultural story' (after Miller and Glassner, 1997) and an environment of ageing and aged care that is becoming increasingly medicalised, technologised and privatised, the older people I talked to throughout this project, living both in their own homes and within aged-care facilities, overwhelmingly attributed constructive personal meanings to their lives and their pursuits. Their individual and collective stories challenge many of the widely held contemporary stereotypes of older people by ascribing positive meanings to the experiences of being older and living through that stage of life. They provide us with a language of agency and vitality and with new stories (and pictures) of their subjectivity as expressed in the varied tone, depth, perspective and quality of feeling they articulate. The stories call upon us to imagine, a capacity, according to bell hooks, in which is rooted our ability to be empathic (cited in Probyn, 1993).

The failure to imagine, I have come to believe, is predicated upon what Tasmin Lorraine (after Irigaray) describes as 'a masculine economy of subjectivity which promotes delusions of self-sufficient wholeness' (1999 p. 103). The failure to imagine, I believe, inhibits one's ability to embrace

the other as part of the same human family as oneself: to see that face as potentially one's own face, that life as one's own. If in Western society a kind of denial of the face of older age is being achieved, further denial relegates the older person to marginal spaces and in this category I include the segregated colonies of aged persons, particularly those living with disease and infirmity, often on the edges of towns. These are places where 'we' can visit and to which services are allocated and professional staff appointed. These institutions are called 'home' by some, but usually – as we have seen from the participants in this project – not by those living there. They are in fact 'contracted environments' designed more often than not with health management in mind than with the individual diversity of residents. The services and professional staff are necessary but minimal, with public facilities citing budget constraints and privately run institutions run as businesses where the resident represents an occupied bed, a unit of profit, a commodity. There is an increase in the employment of part-time and untrained or minimally trained staff with a corresponding decrease in professional staffing.

There is also a growing concern about the incidence of poor quality of care of elderly people in residential centres (Glendenning, 1997; Wood and Stephens, 2003; Biggs, 2004; Weatherall, 2001; Meddaugh, 1993), and experiences of abuse which is going 'under-recognised and under-reported' (Garner and Evans, 2002, p.164). Abuse in elder care facilities is reported to range from overt active mistreatment to unintentional (covert) actions arising from poor relational and care practices. As was pointed out above (Chapter 5) in physical settings and within discourses where inequities are endemic, we need to remember that we are 'vulnerable to the worlds we enter' (Mitchell & Charmaz, 1996, p.159).

The *colonisation* (both literal and metaphorical) of the older person is a term I wish to put forward in this work in order to challenge the prevailing trends in regard to privatising residential aged care; part of ‘the marketisation of welfare and its accompanying consumerist rhetoric’ (Phillipson and Biggs, 2004, p. 20). Minichiello *et al* (2005) point out that there are frail elderly people who are in need of daily social (and medical) support and that such institutionalised support is not necessarily equivalent to social banishment. However, I have a concern that a kind of social banishment does occur and the marginalisation of their experience can lead to a *de facto* erasure of these people, these voices and faces, this aspect of the multiplicity of society, of life – and death. Their presence becomes absent in the mainstream community. On the threshold their vulnerability is increased.

The colonisation of the older person through appropriation by an increasingly profit-making aged-care industry is of major concern, yet it is a development which our society *permits*. I intend that this thought might evoke a felt emotional resonance – ‘a “tensing” of things into a line of becoming’ (Probyn, 1996, p. 118). It is certainly intended to provoke a re-think of the direction our society is (we are) going in relation to our perception and care of the older person. It is also an articulation that continues to open the vocabulary of the discourses in age and ageing, jars with the sensibilities perhaps, and ultimately invites us to generate new choices, directions and practices in the continuous creation of an ethical social order in relation to older people. Luce Irigaray invites us to think about these issues:

Civil society, in our time, requires public relationships to be places of reciprocity between individuals. It is not satisfactory that the only civil mediator should be money. It is not satisfactory that relations between persons should be incessantly conflictual and made hierarchical by powers associated with property ownership rather than people's qualities and experience. (1994, p. 86)

Responsibility for the society we create and tolerate belongs to us all. It would be too easy to lay it at the door of the medical fraternity, the business community, the care industry, politicians. As Linda McQuaig points out in her book *All you can Eat: Greed, Lust and the new Capitalism* (2001), 'The simple character in economics is *homo economicus*, the human prototype, who is pretty much a walking set of insatiable material desires. He uses his rational abilities to ensure the satisfaction of all his wants which are the key to his motivation...He represents traits basic to all of us.' Foucault analysed power by following the particular points through which it passed (Deleuze, 1988, p.27). I wish to emphasise that *it passes through all of us*.

Homo economocus ('us') is a powerful force in the current social field and this project seeks to participate in mapping this field in order to open up new ways of thinking about and talking to older people, different ways of representing their worlds that challenge the dominant discourses of illness and decline, and the damaging actions of marginalisation and effacement. The map analogy, as conceptualised by Deleuze and Parnet, has two qualities that are important in relation to this research project: it is 'entirely orientated towards an experimentation in contact with the real'

and, in addition, it 'does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious' (1987, p.13). Using a methodological approach that embraces participatory communication about lived experience, contact with the 'real' (people and stories) is assured. This, in turn, as I have sought to demonstrate in this project, produces a testimony that disrupts conscious thought and has the consequent potential for planting new seeds of expectation and awareness into the conscious and unconscious mind of the listener / reader / actor. Old ways of thinking and operating can be destabilised and new ways of being can be developed; new futures can be created in the way we choose to relate to and provide care for older people in our community. Lorraine writes:

A personal story, then, could be like a diagram or a personal map with points of destabilisation and creative resistance always pointing toward an open future. Such personal maps when put into the context of larger diagrams of the social field could indicate directions for constructive social change. (1999, p. 237/8)

Within this project I have given you many stories, mythological stories, word stories, picture stories, under-stories, fragile, tentative and powerful stories: always personal stories.

Take one. It's yours...

And don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently, if only you had heard this story...

You've heard it now.*

* Adapted from by Thomas King (2004). *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Lecture Series, broadcast on Away, ABC Radio National, Australia.

*And I don't know why
we are together, dear ghosts, or why
we have to part. Only that it is precious
and that I love
this run-down subject.*

Tess Gallagher, 'Dear Ghosts', *Dear Ghosts*, 2007.

CHAPTER 8 EPILOGUE

Memories and Histories

Before you start writing, neither the story nor the reader even exists, and the only thing you have to trust is yourself.

Ursula Le Guin, 2004, *The Wave in the Mind*

I began this project for a number of reasons that at first appeared unrelated. The need of the university where I worked for all lecturers to hold a PhD was an early motivator, as was the encouragement from friends and colleagues on the counselling teaching team there, who had the confidence in me that I could actually do it. The challenge offered to me by my Head of School to deliver two lectures in Hong Kong to postgraduate students, who were concurrently professional clinicians (nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists), brought an awareness that the communication skills I took for granted as a counsellor were not widely understood or used by other caring professionals. These clinicians were treating older patients in acute hospitals and were concerned at the low compliance with therapy amongst their patients. Feedback from the students throughout the semester demonstrated that a major factor in the poor level of compliance was the difficulty they were having relating to patients as people, as opposed to 'cases'. To cite an example, following the lectures on counselling skills and a period of implementation, one student / professional occupational therapist reported that an older female patient became more co-operative with therapy after she had made distinct efforts to address the patient by name, enquire about the patient's well-being and allowed the patient time to express her opinions and feelings regarding her injury and her therapy programme. The student recognised that this way of relating brought positive results in regards to therapy

compliance. For both student and patient this development reflected a relational experience, whereby the patient was treated as a partner in the therapy and not a passive recipient to be acted upon.

This experience with the students led me to a growing interest in reading on the subject of working with and counselling older people, and the kinds of health and personal challenges that might be unique to their stage of life. Visits to aged-care institutions and contact with older people within the community (including my own parents and relatives) confirmed on a more personal level the issues they were facing. Older people are, for example, more likely than the general population to be confronted with multiple losses, including loss of friends and family, role and status, and the loss of optimal physical and cognitive functioning. Loss of home is also a common occurrence as older people downsize to more manageable living quarters, move in with adult family or enter aged-care facilities. In addition there may be ageism and negative stereotyping to be coped with, and the human and emotional consequences of this and the other challenges and transitions create further impact on the individual.

Nevertheless, the older people I met during this project were for me an inspiration and a joy. Although all of them were confronted with at least some of the challenges mentioned above, their response to their situation was from a spirit of good humour, resilience and warmth. I was less happy with the response of socio-cultural institutions and particular personnel to the human and emotional needs and concerns of older people, and I have sought to highlight this issue. It is important to assert that these are needs and concerns which are in the main common to the rest of the population, such as to be treated with respect, to be heard, to exercise choice, to

develop their potential selves and to live meaningful and productive lives (Harris *et al*). Thus, older people can benefit from professional counselling services for the same reasons as others, ‘including depression, anxiety, self-understanding, and problems with friends, family and lovers’ (Knight, 1996, p.129). These are the concerns I saw at all levels of the community while practicing as a counsellor in schools, in disability services, in employment services and in private practice. These are concerns we share as human beings and they can emerge in whatever context we find ourselves – facing illness or death, transition or exile, childhood, adolescence, mid-life crisis or older age. Knight confirms:

Work with older adults facing a specific problem should draw on available knowledge about helping all adults with similar problems. Therapy with older adults should not become so specialised that techniques and concepts developed for other clients are not readily generalizable to older adults and that techniques and concepts developed in gerontological counselling are not tried with younger adults as appropriate. (p. 18)

The common factor of our humanness became a guiding principle for me in my work on this project.

A further more personal level of experience impelled this work, the one constant throughout and the thread that links all the elements: my (becoming) self and story of home. Beginning with an academic interest, my own life-in-transition, my place-story, became indelibly written into the lives told and into the telling of the stories of others. I grappled with

the egocentricity of this reflexive positioning, the ethics of life-writing and the integrity of qualitative researching. Ultimately I found that the only barrier between my self and the Other was the illusion of (my)self: ageing, exile, joy, health, illness, love and death are there for us all. Nothing separates me and you: we are face-to-face. I choose to write in 'white ink' – a free-flowing sometimes discontinuous style that is open and changing, fluid and destabilising (Cixous, 1981), because the medium embraces every colour and hue and is better suited to portraying story, illusion, under-stories, hauntings and light-gleams, than is the black ink of the scientific method. And because this is the way the writing flowed from me: it was my response-ability to my own experiences and to the participants of this research project who gifted me with their stories, their lives. Like the writer Ursula le Guin, I felt that:

to smooth it all down into a proper essay seemed to be bad faith towards its subject. (1992, p. 179)

In Connemara, in the west of Ireland, the phrase used to describe popularity and admiration is, *tá aghaidh an phobail ort* (*the face of the people is towards you*) (O'Donohue, 1997, p.62). We see this truth reflected in our everyday lives and in the media where we look at / up / to / for those we admire and respect (or envy); we look away from those who offend. The method and methodology I have used in this project has been to do with listening and looking and with conjuring 'face', that is, telling the stories in such a way that the reader sees the person whose story is being told and experiences connective empathy towards that person. I emphasised this approach not only to promote positive interaction and receptiveness towards older people but to counter deep ambivalences in

society that lead directly to disrespect and abuse. Minichiello *et al* (2005) warn that frail elderly people remind us of our own mortality and impotence and that such reminders can generate fear and even hatred in us and an 'inferior ascribed spoiled identity' (p.31) for them. This is a description of the process of 'othering', an act of distancing which places the older person in a situation of vulnerability where, recalling Butler (2004), their lives are made precarious. Deikman confirms:

The task of harming another human being cannot be done in a state of psychological connection. Barriers must be raised, the Other must be established as different from oneself, inferior, bad – connection must be abolished. (2000, p.314).

And so my aims in this research project were to present the issues of home, older age, belonging and home-making as experienced by older people, and to do this through re-presenting the human face of the participants. My intention was to shape these faces through story and image such that they are drawn on the reader's mind and the reader is drawn to them. I wanted to portray humanness, people, not 'cases' 'patients' or 'clients', or any other classification that can serve to distance 'them' from 'us'. If some of the stories or the tellings are unsettling for the reader, then this is an important experience too because, as one of my supervisors Margaret observed (in private correspondence with me, 23.04.2007), 'How can you know something about "the other" without becoming profoundly unsettled in the self?' I wanted you, the reader, to travel to their worlds, to look through their eyes and see your self; I wanted you to cry and laugh and feel uplifted and sad and hopeful. And most of all I wanted you to feel. My hope is that from feelings come

thoughts and actions and transformations and that is why I invited you to take the stories into your self, you who are nurses, care staff in aged-care facilities, sons, daughters, doctors, care managers, counsellors, neighbours – all of us. As Heather Gibb writes, how we treat older people says something about all of us:

The means by which elders are cared for reflects the moral integrity of a society – and is an expression of the quality of our humanity. Service to old people embodies ideas and values about old age which ultimately define how old age is experienced. (cited in Nay & Garratt, 1999, p.x).

Emphasising the ethical and relational dynamics of stories, Bochner writes that what is needed is, ‘an active and reflexive reader who wants to enter into dialogue with the writer and the story. Ideally, the reader is not expected to be distant, to judge the story objectively, but rather to be subjectively and emotionally present to participate as an engaged, dialogical partner’ (Bochner, 2001, p.148). Bochner here is referring to co-constructed meanings (p. 149) and the pedagogical function of story, and here, I think, is where we are left at the end of it all: as an active and reflexive reader – what you have made of it. What you make of it, that is, what has made an impression on you is what you will take away to impact on the world. Bochner continues:

We think with a story from the framework of our own lives. We ask what kind of person we are becoming when we take the story in and consider how we can use it for our own purposes, what

ethical directions it points us towards, and what moral commitments it calls out in us. (p. 436)

And that is your response-ability.

This Rundown Subject

To write is to struggle and resist; to write is to become; to write is to draw a map: 'I am a cartographer'.

Michel Foucault, 1988, *Foucault*

In describing the lived experience and meaning [of making] 'home' in older age I have discovered that home in older age is many things. It is a place and a state of mind: a particular house or a concept such as 'where the heart is'. It may exist in a place where the person does not live but which they carry in their head and the place where they live may be very definitely not-home. The lived experience of home is embedded in the 'layered identity' (Biggs, 1999) – both the vertical memory and the narrative horizon – and the ability to hold these two vertices in a good enough balance. I suggest that this ability is dependent on both the individual's internal resources and on the supports available from society and the community, ranging from family to health professionals, and that when this balance is not achieved, well-being – both mental and physical – is threatened.

I had intended to explore the role of personal possessions in 'making home' and making meaning in older age, but it soon became clear that their significance was different to what I had anticipated. For example, I had thought that the need to cull possessions in older age due to moving into aged care or downsizing might have loomed larger on older people's minds, causing a lot of distress. Yet I found that while the participants seemed to place importance in a certain few personal objects, they seemed surprisingly at ease with letting go of most possessions accumulated over a lifetime. Most seemed to take Gerald's *green jug* approach of not needing to hang onto a lot of things (Chapter 3). Hal valued the few hand tools he had kept for himself to use (his extensive tool collection given to his nephew) and two pictures painted by his sister; James valued his aunt's furniture (having kept only a few pieces for himself, most he had given to family); John had his spoon collection; Pearl the map of her homeland; Gerald had his maths books; Margaret and Lorna had their wedding and family photographs; Ted had photographs of pupils; Greg had his wife's hair rollers; Joan had a painting of her marital home; Stephen, the inveterate farmer at 97, had his framed prayer (Fig. 13) and a photograph of a tractor; Michael, an Irish immigrant in Australia, had a collection of Irish songs and displayed his hurley stick. I noted that the things of significance were mainly from the vertical dimension of identity – memory and embeddedness in a personal, social and cultural past. Those things of importance from the horizontal dimension in the here and now were, for many, their gardens (Ted, Pearl, James, Margaret) and their friends (Madeline, Grace, Hal, Doris, Ted, James, Greg). Greg also had a very potent framed image of an old gnarled tree that he saw as a reflection of his present narrative, and Joan had her books.

I identified a number of different physical contexts which carry the designation 'home', including aged-care facilities, the family or marital

home and a convent, and discussed the ways that these environments impacted on the people who lived there and on the ageing identity. Clearly there were differences evident in the experiences of those living in nursing homes and aged-care facilities, and those living in their own homes. There was a clear indication that people who were living in their own homes had a stronger sense of home 'ownership' to those living in aged care who, although seeing the benefits accruing from living in a secure environment with care staff available on-site, nevertheless talked of compromise and adaptation to institutional, staff and other residents' needs. They also indicated a disquieting hidden experience and *under-story* of unequal power relations, discrimination and abuse. Life in the two types of institutions looked at, the convent and aged care, differed markedly from each other. In terms of community living, the convent inhabitants comprised of a cohesive group that enjoyed long-term relationship and continuity. The contrast with the aged-care environment is strongly made in the words of one aged-care resident (Joan) when she describes where she lives as a place where one is, *thrown into a collection of strangers... strangers [are] lumped in together.*

The other context explored was the post-modern context in which we live historically and which is impacting politically, socially and economically on older people. In the positive sense the post-modern world offers a more open approach to roles and ways of living, thus disempowering some of the ageist stereotyping that has prevailed. People can create their own 'narrative' identity to suit their lifestyle (Biggs, 1999; 2005). However, the post-modern world is also a place of uncertainty where not only roles but ethics and values are up for negotiation. It is a place where the consumerist society flourishes and where the privatisation and commodification of ageing and aged care creates further marginalisation,

particularly for the poor old. I have highlighted this development as one of concern for all citizens.

In exploring notions of 'self', 'the body' and 'other' in relation to older age, I have draw on the work of Simon Biggs and his colleagues (1999; 2004) and his theorising of a 'layered identity', a narrative (horizontal) self which creates a coherent story to suit the circumstances of the here and now and the vertical dimension of self which accesses depth, memory and embededness in a personal, social and cultural past. The narrative, a here-and-now self-story, and the masquerade, adopting a social mask to keep deeper concerns or feelings hidden, are strategies, Biggs would say, for expressing and protecting the self in an uncertain world. The issue of the Other and otherness is explored using the work of Butler, Foucault and the French feminists Cixous and Kristeva, which provide insight into the risks of old age becoming a marginalising experience of unequal relations and discriminatory discourses. These would include political discourses of domination which can render bodies ungrieveworthy (Butler, 2004); 'disease' (Laungani, 2002) and 'restitution' (Frank, 1997) medical discourses that want to control and subdue the body through medication and cosmetic surgery (Powell & Longino, 2001; Biggs, 1999); and post-modern discourses which promote an ageless body, thus blurring the legitimate aged identity (Biggs 2004; Powell and Longino, 2001). All of these discourses threaten identity by devaluing the corporality of being old and ignoring the fact that being and becoming old are both natural and embodied (social) processes.

Looking Forward – Recommendations

Don't you see that everything that happens becomes a beginning again and again?

Ranier Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 1874–1926

I have made a particular point within this project to challenge the notion that talking to residents in aged care about their lives and experience of living is upsetting to them, and therefore to be avoided. I have spoken to many such residents while carrying out two roles, those of visitor and researcher. In a personal capacity I have been visiting and continue to visit people within aged-care settings where, in a relationship of trust, genuine conversation often turns to personal issues and concerns. Sometimes people do express loneliness and distress in such situations and I stand for their right to express this emotional experience of themselves and to have an empathic listener to hear and reflect their story. These visits I have are unhurried and there is time to hear about all aspects of life, both positive and negative, to laugh and cry, to perhaps do a little problem-solving and importantly, to share a cup of tea. These visits continue and are mutually satisfying.

In Chapter 2, I reported the unequivocal positive response from the project participants, both those living within aged care and within their own homes, who enjoyed our conversations (interviews), which likewise ranged over all aspects of their lives. And in further chapters I reported evidence from the literature (Vaillant, 1993; Biggs, 1999; 2005) and from the participants themselves, which supports the suggestion that there is often insufficient staff provision within aged-care facilities to meet the human and emotional needs of residents: there isn't even time to talk. An upset 'patient' or resident takes up time in these days of fiscal restraint in

the health services and for this reason alone it may be preferred that they remain quiet, compliant and present an undemanding exterior: that the emotional performance of self is tranquilised. I question the medical model which favours pharmacological interventions to deal with emotional and psychological presentations and behaviours. When such concerns are broadly conceptualised as deficiencies (Estes, 1979) or are viewed as irrational (Lutz, 1990; Laungani, 2002), the risk of misdiagnosis and over-medication are evident (Harris *et al*, 2005; Nay, 1995).

There are other forms of suppression too, such as the self-censorship that participants engaged in and the reluctance even among professionals to engage in and refer older people for, psychological counselling, where such services do exist (Knight, 1996; Wells, 2005), as Knight writes:

There may be a tendency to avoid probing for emotional expression that is specific to older clients. Making older people cry may be difficult for everyone, perhaps especially for those who like older adults enough to specialise in working with them (1996, p.127).

In addition Knight observed that many people, including family and friends, discourage older people from expressing feelings and considering future options if they themselves are uncomfortable with the kinds of emotions expressed, and also out of 'the mistaken idea that the old do not have anything to look forward to' (p. 119). In contrast to this uncomfortable and sometimes repressive response to the performance of old age, I am calling for a definite move beyond the biomedical model

which privileges assessment, measurement, control and medication for the relief of symptoms as a response to the experiences of older age. There is no cure for older age: it is not an illness, even if dominant prejudices from the post-modern world might advocate a cosmetic surgical war on the body in pursuit of a 'restitution' narrative (Frank, 1997) and a pathologising status quo favours an illness perspective. As Parry and Doan remind us:

When mental health professionals fall prey to that story, they run the risk of unwittingly supporting problem definitions that render their clients powerless rather than powerful (1994, p. 53).

Instead I am looking for ways to support and foster holistic health care which will facilitate an authentic ageing experience. Systemic issues include the need to increase staffing levels within aged-care facilities to include suitably trained dedicated staff to provide care for human and emotional needs. This will, in the first place, open a dialogic space for older people to tell stories of their life past and present, to express emotions, to experience empathy, acceptance and encouragement. It can also help to shift perspective to a future-potential focus, if appropriate, to help people make response-able decisions about the remainder of their lives. To take a perspective from narrative psychology, this is an approach which 'sees problems as problems rather than people as problems', which is in direct contrast with the dominant mental health story (Parry & Doan, 1994, p. 52). It is a process of providing people with opportunities to voice their stories and to deconstruct these stories in ways that lead to deeper understandings of the plot, shape and characters which have had impact on their life, with understanding bringing the potential for developing new

perspectives that are more empowering for the person. A full and detailed discussion of this narrative approach can be found in Parry & Doan's *Story Re-visions: Narrative Therapy in the Post-modern World* (1994). Jules Weiss (1984) provides another excellent resource for those wishing to work therapeutically with older people using the expressive arts modalities.

One form of support widely reviewed is the exploration of memory and reminiscence through the structured life-review process (Haight, 1989; 1992; Knight, 1992). This is once again about providing people opportunities for expressing current thoughts and emotions, validating the remembered self, accommodating life events, and expressing or restoring identity. In terms of the 'layered identity' articulated by Biggs, through the process of life-review the helping professional can emphasise and advocate for the importance of 'social and personal continuity' [recognising] 'the past as an anchor [and] source of embeddedness for authentic identity' (1999, p. 218). This can be particularly helpful for older people experiencing transition and relocation. The use of representative photographs, such as Photolanguage Australia (used in this project for research purposes), or the person's own are an ideal resource for reminiscence and life-review with older clients (Gladding, 1998). Many older people will manage the processes of ageing, transition and revision for themselves – like Hal (Chapter 3) who consciously decided to become more sociable when, due to failing eyesight, he could no longer engage in his life-time solitary pursuits. Or Greg and James who have wide-ranging interests which they plan to continue and develop, and whose resilience and attitude can be summed up in Greg's words, *The longer I live the more I love living* (Chapter 3). Others, however, will need support with such transitions.

In relation to transition to aged-care, pre-placement processes can influence how the older person perceives the placement and his/her subsequent adjustment to the placement (Lee, Woo, Mackenzie, 2001; Nay, 1995). In this regard secular, religious or appropriate cultural rituals of departure and arrival (welcome) can be created which honour transitions and journeys. This is particularly important since relocation is so often made in the midst of other distressing experiences such as illness, death of spouse and infirmity and, whether planned or unplanned, the relocation may be experienced as an only option. A ritual of welcome / transition might offer a means to help provide orientation for new aged-care residents, to ease adjustment to communal ways of living and as such help construct a new story of belonging to the new location. As circumstances change in this dynamic living space, further adjustment may be called for, such as is highlighted through Lorna's story of personal meanings in Chapter 7 where constructive input, empathic communication, mediation and problem-solving by a skilled professional who has insight into the very real demands of group living and into Lorna's subjective world-view, might have benefited all parties. As Lee *et al* recognise, 'adjustment to residential care is more than just a discrete event' (p. 25) that occurs at the time of the placement. There is a clear need for development of pre- and post-placement strategies to assist older people to prepare for and to adjust in an ongoing way to the many discontinuities that arise in the aged-care setting.

Grief and loss are important issues to be considered in relation to older people. Grief, for the human being, is a normal response to loss, and if support is called for it is best addressed in ways that facilitate the expression of emotion and mourning and which assist the person to adjust to the absence of the deceased and achieve emotional healing. This is not a process to be hurried or underestimated, but is a journey that benefits from

relationship, supportive companionship, active listening and an ability and willingness to share in stories and tears, placing emphasis on 'the client's voice and the liberation of this voice' (Parry & Doan, 1994, p. 120). The skilled listener will also be in a position to discover, highlight and maximise the person's usual coping strategies which have served them in previous situations. This is a way of working therapeutically from a 'strengths' perspective which emphasises 'capabilities, assets, and positive attributes' (Langer, 2004, p.614) rather than dependency and deficits, to help bridge emotional gaps and to 'scaffold' (Vygotsky, 1962) the building of a new story of living. It is a person-centered response to the individual lived experience of the particular 'I-who-am' who is addressed.

It will take suitably trained care staff to perform support functions such as those described above and different levels of expertise are indicated. I wish to advocate for the provision of easily accessible professional psychological counselling services for older people, and particularly that such services should be made available to people within aged-care facilities (Cadby, 1996). I see this role as one of leadership as well as of partnership with the professionals and non-professionals who are currently working in the field, bringing a wellness perspective and a therapeutic skills set of benefit to all parties. I also recognise that therapeutic functions can be carried out by para-professional care staff, through visitors programmes and through family community outreach programmes. Such approaches promote relationships and social connectedness, and that their inclusion within a care programme would be indicative of the kind of culture of care I have been advocating throughout this project. I make mention of a number of therapeutic ideas from the counselling field which will act as springboards for the interested reader to follow up on a particular author's work.

Finally, it is essential to recommend appropriate training for counsellors and care professionals working with older people in order to counter the misconceptions and negative stereotyping which result in the lack of provision of and referral to counselling support, and to promote the development of appropriate skill sets and responses. Ongoing education and training is especially important in institutional settings where there is an increase in part-time and non-professional staff, a development that can affect quality and continuity of care. There is a need to be aware of the actual power imbalance that exists between residents and staff and to promote ethical democratic management styles which see older people as partners in their care plan. The regulation and supervision of aged care to ensure that economic considerations are not placed above residents' needs is a basic requirement. While I provide here certain recommendations, these are not meant to be fixed or finite but rather to point to and invite further response-ability: I see them as part of the way forward through a 'conversation of hope' (Somerville, 2005, p.8).

Choices

You have to choose your combination carefully.

The right choice will enhance your quilt.

The wrong choices will dull the colors, hide their original beauty.

There are no rules you can follow, you have to go by instinct, and you have to be brave.

Otto Whitney, 1995, *How to Make an American Quilt*

This text is intended to be ‘a complex, dense, reflective, collage like creation’ – a bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 29; Derrida, 1974) and, as such, while there is now inspiration and modelling available from gifted qualitative researchers, there are really no hard and fast rules to follow. As with the crafting of any text, choices must be made, and I have made these with guidance from my supervisors, but also with instinct – and I hope I have been brave. As a result, therefore, there may be topics mentioned and issues raised that have not had adequate attention, there are stories left untold: ‘lines of flight’ that have not been followed. This is the price of my ‘story of stories’.

Some lines I have not followed include the potential therapeutic effect on participants of conducting qualitative research (Koch, 1998). I have reported that gathering stories was a mutually satisfying activity within this project and I have a sense that older people might even find a therapeutic value in the process of engaging with an interested researcher in the generation of knowledge / data. Those I spoke to confirmed that they enjoyed the conversations, were delighted to help me in my work and welcomed opportunities for engagement with life in all its aspects.

However, more targeted studies aimed at reporting on therapeutic effect in the research event and over time would be useful.

Another line that I would wish to follow in future work would be a more thorough use of visual arts-based research methods to generate data. Most non-artist adults are just as reluctant to 'do' art as bad spellers are to write: they see only evidence of flaws and failures on the page before them. Only a small number of participants in this project engaged in the art-making, and as I have explained in Chapter 7, these were people with whom I had a prior or stronger relationship. I believe I would have had a greater participation rate had I, for example, conducted some art workshops with participants to expose them to a variety of art materials and given them an opportunity to 'play' with different mediums and modalities for self-expression. Within this project, time constraints and the fact that participants lived in many different locations meant that I could not provide such opportunities.

A development within the project was an increasing focus on the concerns of participants within aged care rather than on those who were living in their own homes. In future work it would be beneficial to talk with older people who live within the community, looking at their particular issues and at what supports are available to them, particularly in relation to psychological/emotional supports. A feature of qualitative research is that its results are not generalisable, and that is so with this project where each person was approached (addressed) face to face and, although group narratives were articulated and themes and trends were identified, its strength lies firstly in the stories of individuals. Notwithstanding this, if what the reader takes away is not something that can be applied

universally my hope is that there is something that can be applied *particularly*, and perhaps that is after all a more fruitful way to seek to act in (on) the world.

About the process of life review in therapy, Knight writes that the completion of the review indicates that, 'This part of the client's life has now come to a conclusion and can be summarised. The summary can lead naturally to deciding what to do with the remainder of the client's life (1992, p. 123).' I believe this may be true for the researcher also at the completion of a project. For myself, there were times when I felt I had left my past so far behind me that all I wanted to do was catch up with it: or have it catch up with me. Naturally – in keeping with the process and products of the rest of this project – it is an open-ended completion, signalling new beginnings, some as yet unknown. So, I will take my lead from a teller of stories once again who writes, 'If it's time to end and you're not sure you've made your point, don't try to explain, just tell another story' (Frank, 1995, p.23).

~

The Brendan Voyage*

Brendan was looking out from under the brim of a lobsidedly placed soft hat when I met him. The white hat sat well with his white powdered clothing and hands, and his lobsided grin.

'Do you want to see it?' he asked.

I was in a small exhibition space in a Donegal craft centre where on the walls hung enlarged photographs of stone carvings depicting biblical scenes. Only they looked different to the ones I was used to

from the ancient worn carvings on the high crosses in Kells, my home town. They looked new. And was there a carver pictured there too? It slowly dawned, as I walked around the room peering at each photograph in turn, that some pictured a man seemingly engaged in the ancient art of sculpting a monastic high cross.

'Is he carving that?'

'Who is that?'

'Is this real?' I questioned aloud to myself, incredulously.

That was when Brendan entered. A young man enthusiastic for his craft and glad to find people interested in his work, Brendan explained that he had indeed carved a full sized Celtic cross. 'That size.' He indicated the towering styro-foam model standing in the center of the room, which I had failed to notice since my eyes had been riveted to the photographs. He explained that it was one of the high crosses of Clonmacnoise and this was the life-sized model he had made in preparation for carving a copy of the real thing: a Brendan voyage which had taken three years to span the centuries.

Brendan locked the room behind us and unlocked a gate to a nearby courtyard which housed his studio. Here on work-benches lay the shaft and the head of his newly carved cross. The sandstone was fresh and bright, the illustrations clear. My fingers touched the stone, traced the carvings: read the language of stone.

'This will really blow you away!'

And with my friend's assistance Brendan raised a wooden crate covering and there on a pallet stood the base of the cross. On the

first panel were four Roman soldiers driving horses and carriages (Fig. 16) as clear as an illustration from a book.

I was blown away.

~

Journal entry, July 2007

* Brendan McGloin is a stone artist working in the Donegal Craft Village, Co. Donegal, Ireland

As for the future; that is not carved in stone. The shifting ground on which I walk offers me uncertainties, but also choices and possibilities, and the exciting challenge of what is up ahead. Many of the people storied in this text – parents, friends and participants – do not have these possibilities anymore and while I owe to them a debt of gratitude for walking my path awhile and for their gift of themselves, I owe it to myself to walk (with a somewhat tentative assurance) onwards. An important outcome of this project has been my own political education on the social constructions of power and the inequities that older people in particular experience. I have been aware that Pearl's question to me, a counsellor, in relation to her dilemma arising from communal living (*What can I do?*, Chapter 3) has remained unanswered. I had no answer for her. I have also pondered the response Lorna received from the Manager of the aged-care facility when she presented her problem of feeling displaced (Chapter 7). For myself I have come to see these problems in a cultural political light which places people within a system that silences their voice. As Zimmerman writes:

One does not replace cultural specifications with therapeutic truths and solutions. To usurp systems of expert power (cultural, therapeutic), one begins to work in systems of personal power (1992 cited in Parry & Doan, 1994, p. 54).

I have learned that the performance of self takes many forms, including the social, the emotional, the embodied and the political and, while 'all the world's a stage', for my next performance I have chosen to read from a political script which I have authored. This will be to address the annual conference of an Irish national political party in order to put forward a motion cautioning against the medicalisation and privatisation of older age and to advocate for appropriate services within the community and within aged-care facilities to provide for the expression and support of the human and emotional needs of older people. The years and the experience of writing this text will be for me an under-story of continuity that will strengthen my voice: the story I will tell the delegates at the conference will echo with many voices. This is a departure for me from the individual counsellor role and the private self. But then again recalling the metaphor of the 'fold' reminds me that the two stories are not separate; they are co-creating and operating on each other.

*Ar deireadh tháinig mé in áit éigin, chun na háite ina raibh mé ag taisteal.
Tháinig mé anuas ar mo chosa. Tháinig mo chompánach fireann go luath
slán freisin.*

Is mise an aislingach ar an droichead. Táim athbeirthe.

*At last I arrive, somewhere, at the place to which I was travelling, an
unknown place. I land on my feet. My companion also lands safely.*

I am the dreamer on the bridge. I am reborn.

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Figure 22 *Tea Cosy Home*

APPENDIX A INFORMATION SHEET

The lived experience of constructing 'home' in older age

My name is **Ina Olohan** and I am undertaking a PhD with the University of New England in the area of health studies. I am interested in finding out about how people see and think about the place they call 'home' in older age. This might involve discussion on what makes a place into home; what they enjoy/dislike about living in their present home; concerns they may have, the changes / transitions they are experiencing and what they think helpers (neighbours, counsellors, nurses, attendants, etc.) might need to know about older people.

The interviews will be conducted in an informal conversational style at a location of your choice. I will ask questions like:

I'd like to hear about your home

Can you tell me how you made home in this place / here?

What do you like about living here?

Did you bring things / possessions (artifacts) with you when you came here?

What's the most important thing about what you brought with you?

What has changed for you since coming here?

I'd like to hear about your hopes for in the future, your plans..

How was it for you talking with me about all this?

Who do you talk to about this 'stuff' / Have you talked about these things / your concerns to others?

If there was someone (else) you would like to talk to, who would that be?

If there was something you would like more of what would that be?

Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

Structure of the project:

1. There will be an initial approx. 1-hour confidential interview with Ina in a private room at a location of your choice.
2. If you are in agreement, a follow-up interview may be sought to clarify or expand on your story.
3. The confidential interview will be tape-recorded. The tape recordings will be transcribed and I will invite you to comment on the transcriptions if you wish.
4. You will be invited to provide verbal responses as well as written, pictorial or photographic responses if you wish.
5. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

The tape-recorded interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office and destroyed once the research project and any follow-up work is completed. All names will remain confidential. You will be advised when the research is complete and a report will be made available to you if you wish.

If anything distresses you during the research or any issue(s) arise that you wish to discuss with a professional counsellor or support service, you can access such services at:

Armidale Community Health Services – Australia

Cnr Rusden & Butler Streets

Armidale

Phone: 67769500

Dowdstown House Counselling Service – Ireland

Navan

Co. Meath

Phone: 04690 21407

If you have any questions my contact details are as follows:

Ina Olohan

No. 2 Thunderbolt's Way

Uralla

NSW 2358

Australia

Phone: 02 67785168

Email: colohan3@pobox.une.edu.au

4 Gardenrath Road Lower Phone: 04692 49806

Kells,

Co. Meath

Ireland

Principal Supervisor:

Dr. Annmaree Wilson

University of New England

Armidale New South Wales Australia

Secondary Supervisor:

Prof. Margaret Somerville
Monash University
Victoria
Australia

Email: msomervi@pobox.une.edu.au

*This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee
of the University of New England*

(Approval No., HE05 / 182 Valid to 27.09.2006)

*Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this
research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics officer at the
following address:*

*University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351.*

Telephone: (02) 67733449 Facsimile: (02) 67733543

APPENDIX B CONSENT FORM/INTERVIEWS

The lived experience of constructing 'home' in older age

I have read the Information Sheet about the project entitled 'The lived experience of constructing 'home' in older age' and I understand what the project is about.

I agree to be interviewed by Ina Olohan for about one hour about how I think and feel about the process of making that I am experiencing. There may be a follow-up interview if we mutually agree.

I agree that the interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed.
The tape and transcription will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.
My name and identifying features will be kept confidential.
I understand that I can stop the interview at any time.
I can request a copy of my tape and transcript if I wish.
If I have any concerns I can contact:

Ina Olohan
School of Health
University of New England, Armidale, 2350
Ph: 02 67783127
Email: colohan2@pobox.une.edu.au

Name of Participant: _____

Signed : _____

Date: _____

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No., Valid to

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics officer at the following address:

*University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351.
Telephone: (02) 67733449 Facsimile: (02) 67733543*

APPENDIX C ETHICS

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW ENGLAND

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FORM

This form may be downloaded from the web at
http://rs-nt-10.une.edu.au/Home/V_2_1/ecforms.html

This application form MUST be completed in conjunction with the HREC guidelines. The number of the question corresponds to the numbering in the guideline for easy reference.

Responses to all questions MUST be typed and expressed in non-specialist language. The language used must be simple and easily understood by people not associated with your discipline. Any discipline-specific/technical terms must be explained.

In response to yes/no questions please delete whichever does not apply.

Proposed Research Project

1. Title of Project: *(Brief and self-explanatory)*

The lived experience of constructing 'home' in older age

2. Aims of Project: *(Describe briefly)*

- ? To describe the lived experience and meaning of making 'home' in older age
- ? To explore the role of personal possessions in 'making home' and making meaning in older age
- ? To explore the contexts surrounding these meanings of home
- ? To demonstrate the way images / symbolology, story and rituals act as avenues for making-meaning and making 'home'

- ? To explore notions of self, the body and other in relation to older age
- ? To explore and explode the myth that talking to residents in aged care about their issues is upsetting and therefore to be avoided
- ? To re-state the role of the professional counsellor in aged-care services
- ? To explore the role of qualitative research interviewing in relation for the participants

3. Justification: *(Explain in approximately one paragraph how your research will contribute to knowledge or education and will be of human benefit)*

A population study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2002) shows a significant change in the structure of the population from 1997 – 2041 indicating that the numbers living to age 80 and over will double in the next two decades and triple over the next fifty years. It is projected that by 2051 2.3 million people in Australia will be aged 80 and over and 38,000 people will be aged 100 and over. Longer life expectancy also means that more people will be accessing aged-related support services as the population bubble of ‘baby boomers’ gradually ages, and funding to these area will be of increasing budgetary importance to governments. While there is a large body of research on caring for the ageing that has been conducted from the medical/nursing perspective (Nay, 1993; Nay & Garrett, 1999; Gaskins & Forte, 1995), there appears to be an under-representation of the role of the counsellor both in the literature and ‘on the ground’ within aged-care facilities and services. This research has the potential of being informative and helpful to a large number of older citizens, as well as to their carers, service providers, support workers and their trainers, and to the aged services funding bodies, as well as to the counselling profession.

4. Person(s) responsible/Supervisors:

Name: Dr.Margaret Somerville

Position: Assoc. Professor

School : Professional Development & Leadership

UNE Extension:3362

E-mail: msomervi@metz.une.edu.au

Name: Dr. Annmaree Wilson

Position: Lecturer

School:Health

UNE Extension(s):

E-mail: annmaree4@yahoo.com

5. **Associates: Ina Olohan**
6. **Are there specific skills required to conduct this research e.g. taking blood samples, administering psychological tests etc. Please indicate relevant qualifications and skills of each researcher to undertake this research.**

Sensitive interviewing skills will be required in the undertaking of this research. I hold a Masters of Ed. St. Majoring in Guidance and Counselling and have 10 years of counselling experience. I have excellent counselling and communication skills and, having worked with people with diverse needs, ages and backgrounds for many years, I am sensitive to differing needs and preferred ways of communicating. I have taught counselling skills and processes at a tertiary level and still work as a practising counsellor. I wish to emphasise that the interviewees will be research participants, not counselling clients.

In response to yes/no questions please delete whichever does not apply.

7. (a) **Has this protocol been funded?** YES, a UNERA Scholarship
- (b) **Will this application be the subject of a funding proposal?** NO
- (c) **If the response to either (a) or (b) is YES, please state name of organisation:** UNE
8. **Proposed date of commencement of data collection:** 01.10.2005
9. **Duration and estimated finishing date of data collection:**
12mts Finishing date 01.10.2006

- 10. Approximate intended number of participants: 20**
- 11. Is the state of physical or emotional health of participants relevant to your research? If so, please explain. (See Guideline 11)** No
- 12. (a) How will you identify participants?**
 Purposive sampling through personal and professional contacts will be used to identify and select participants. They will be persons aged 80 years and older, who do not suffer dementia and who were willing to share their experiences with me.
- (b) If you identify participants from records not accessible from the public domain, e.g. student database, hospitals, schools, have you attached evidence of approval from the relevant organisation? (See Guideline 21)**
 N/A
- (c) How will you approach participants?**
 Initial contact will be made by face to face visit or telephone, whichever is most appropriate.
- d) How will you recruit participants?**
 As above, I will identify possible participants through personal and professional contacts and then use face to face or telephone contact to explain the project and invite participation.
- I will provide interested persons with information to further explain the project and answer any questions they may have. I will provide printed information sheets and consent forms to anyone who is interested in joining the project and ask them to return these within a set time frame. This is also a time to explain how data will be handled and confidentiality maintained, and to communicate to participants their rights, making it clear that participation will be voluntary and that they can drop out at any stage.

13. (a) Explain in approximately one paragraph the data collection methods and procedures to be used. (See Guideline 13)

This will be a qualitative study using an open ended data collection method involving semi-structured in-depth interviewing and storytelling,

using photographs, memorabilia and visual forms. My approach will be within the hermeneutic and phenomenological paradigms and illuminated by other methodologies where they facilitate understanding (eg. art based inquiry). This approach will allow the themes to emerge through analysis of data and reflexive self inquiry, 'full immersion into the phenomenon and spontaneous observation of and dialogue with persons who are experiencing the phenomenon' (Moustakas, 1990; Lees, 2001; Diamond,1999). The purpose will be to explicate the lived experience of participants

(b) Have you attached copies of all relevant documents? YES

Information sheet

Consent form

14. Does this research involve invasive procedures such as taking blood samples, administering substances or measuring physiological or biochemical function?

NO

If NO, go to Question 16

If YES, please provide details

If YES, go to Question 14

15. Will any of the following be used?

Chemical compounds NO

Drugs NO

Ionising or non-ionising radiation NO

Other biological agents NO

Special diets or modified foods NO

If YES to any of above, give details.

16. Where relevant, attach a statement indicating responsibility for the procedures in 15. by a medical or paramedical practitioner with indemnity insurance.

Is a statement attached? NO

- 17. Please describe any foreseeable risk of physical or emotional harm to the participants. Outline precautions to be taken. (See Guideline 17)**

As the interview(s) may raise issues for the participants that require counselling support, each participant will be provided with the contact details of independent psychological counselling services through local community mental health services in their locality. Information about the supports available will be set out in the Information Sheet.

- 18. (a) Does this research involve subject matter of a socially or culturally sensitive nature? (e.g issues deemed particularly sensitive by the cultural community of which the participants are members; participants' knowledge of, or participation in, illegal issues; etc.) (See Guideline 18) NO**

(b) If YES, provide details.

- 19. (a) Does this work focus on Indigenous Australians? NO**

(b) If YES:

- (i) What steps have been taken to ensure that appropriate community support has been obtained? Justify the relevance of this source of support.**

N/A

- (ii) Have community members had an opportunity to influence the:**

(a) design

(b) process and

(c) outcomes (e.g. publishing, how research findings will be returned to the community)

of this research project? If yes, please explain.

- (iii) In what ways will the community benefit from this research? (e.g. this may include employment and/or training, retention of data and appropriate dissemination of research findings).**

20. (a) **Will your participants receive any financial reward or other compensation for their time and inconvenience? (See Guideline 20)**

N

O

- (b) **If yes, give details; how much will be offered and why (e.g. travelling expenses).**

21. (a) **How will you ensure that participants have given free and informed consent to take part in the research?**

An Information sheet for participants will be provided outlining the aims of the project prior to recruitment for formal interviewing.

Each participant will be asked to sign a Consent form.

Each participant will be told that they can terminate the interview at any time.

- (b) **Where appropriate, have you attached a copy of the Information Sheet for Participants and Consent Form (See Guideline 21)**

YES

22. (a) **Does this research involve any impediments to obtaining the full understanding and free agreement of participants to take part in the project? See Guideline 22 (eg Will some or all participants be minors or people of limited competence to consent?)** NO

- (b) **If so, give details of how you will negotiate an agreement for the participation of these persons through a family member, carer, legal guardian or other person.**

N/A

23. (a) **Are potential participants in this research in dependent relationships with the researchers and their agents, which may limit their belief that they are free to refuse participation? Examples include University Teacher/Student, Staff Member /Supervisor, Counsellor/Client, Carer/Client, School Teacher/Student, Parent/Child. (See Guideline 23)**

NO

- (b) **If YES, please specify the nature of the dependency and give details of the steps you will take to preserve their right to refuse participation.**

N/A

24. (a) **Does the project require the withholding of relevant information about the aims and conduct of the research?**
NO

- (b) **If YES, explain why.**

N/A

25. (a) **Does this research require that participants be deceived about a relevant aspect of the aims or nature of the research or their participation?**
NO

- (b) **If YES, explain why deception is required and how the interests of the participants will be protected, including what they will be told about the research and their participation.**

N/A

26. **How will participants be informed that they are free at any time to discontinue participation?**

The Information Sheet for Participants will contain this information and it will be verbally reinforced.

27. Who will have access to the information you collect? (See Guideline 27)

Associate Professor Margaret Somerville
Dr. Annmaree Wilson
Ina Olohan (Associate)

28. How will the confidentiality of records be maintained:

(a) **during the study** They will be held in a locked filing cabinet

(b) **for at least 5 years** The audio tapes will be destroyed after 5 years

(c) **beyond 5 years:**

Will records be destroyed?

YES

Will records be retained?

NO

(You need to justify keeping records in the longer term)

29. Ethical Issues

If you answer YES to any of the following, what steps will you take in response to these issues? Outline any safety precautions that you will be taking.

Please answer YES or NO to each of the following questions.

Are there any other ethical issues involved in this research: NO

(a) **Does the data collection process involve access to confidential participant data without their prior consent?**
No

(b) **Are there issues related to ownership of data that may be pertinent to Indigenous Australians, cultural, or ethnic groups? NO**

(c) **Will participants be photographed by camera or video? NO**

(d) **Will participants be tape recorded? YES, Participants will be given coded titles on audio tape labels and will not be identified in the project write up. This information will be held by the researcher only. Participants will be given pseudonyms in the write up of the research. All transcriptions of audio taped interviews will be done by the researcher.**

(e) **Will participants be asked to commit any acts that might diminish self respect or cause them to experience shame, embarrassment or regret? NO**

- (f) Does the research involve any stimuli, tasks, investigations or procedures that may be experienced by the subjects as stressful, noxious, aversive or unpleasant? NO
- (g) In this study are there any procedures known (or thought) to be beneficial or harmful to one group of participants (EXPERIMENTAL) being withheld from another group of participants (CONTROL)? NO
- (h) Are any of the subjects minors (i.e. under the age of 18 years)?
- (i) Are there any other issues? NO

If YES, please explain.

30. If your research involves minors (i.e. under the age of 18 years), or persons with a mental or intellectual impairment, what special steps have you taken to comply with the HREC Policy on Research Involving Minors and Persons with a Mental or Intellectual Impairment? (See Guideline 22 and 30)

- (a) Accreditation from an appropriate organisation? NO
If YES, please attach documentation.
- (b) Criminal Records Check NO
If YES, please attach documentation.
- (c) Other measures NO
If YES, please provide details.

If the answer to any of these items is YES, remember to indicate in your Information Sheet for the parents/guardians of participants, which of the steps has been taken.

31. (a) Is anything in the conduct of the research project likely to be subject to legal constraint? NO

(b) If YES, what steps will you take in response?

N/A

32. How will the results of your research be presented initially and how will they be disseminated subsequently (e.g. thesis, conference paper, journal article, book)?

Thesis
Journal articles
Conference papers

33. Conformation to accepted guidelines for research involving humans.

Your signature below confirms that your protocol conforms with the:

NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) as appropriate and that you have read the UNE HREC Guidelines.

Does your protocol also conform to other principles of ethical conduct?

(Please specify)

NA

If this protocol involves working with Indigenous Australians, which additional guidelines have been used? NA

(Please specify)

34. Signatures of responsible investigator(s) and associate(s):

I/We certify:

(i) that I/We have read the UNE HREC Guidelines;

(ii) that the proposed protocol conforms to these guidelines; and

(iii) That I/We will notify the Committee of anything that might affect ethical acceptance of this protocol, such as adverse reactions of participants, proposed changes in the protocol, and any other unforeseen events.

Person responsible: Associate Professor Margaret Somerville:

_____ Date: _____

Dr. Annmaree Wilson

_____ Date: _____

Associates: Ina Olohan

_____ Date: _____

Declaration by Head of School:

I have read this application and the accompanying Information Sheet(s) for Participants and Consent Form(s) and am satisfied that the applicant(s) have fulfilled the UNE Human Research Ethics Committee's requirements. The research is justifiable on the basis of merit and it satisfies the guidelines imposed by the HREC Policy on Research Involving Children or Persons with a Mental or Intellectual Impairment, if relevant to this application. I am satisfied that this research complies with Occupational Health & Safety requirements relating to staff and students.

Head of School _____

Date _____

FP

Date: